

HumanCapital

REALISING BUSINESS STRATEGY THROUGH PEOPLE

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COVER STORY

Becoming Future-Fit Today

Debjani Roy

HR: The New Architect On The Block!

Kenneth W Wheeler

Workplace Of The Future With Digitisation

Rachna Mukherjee

INTERVIEW

The Skill Of The Future

Nir Eyal

PERSONA

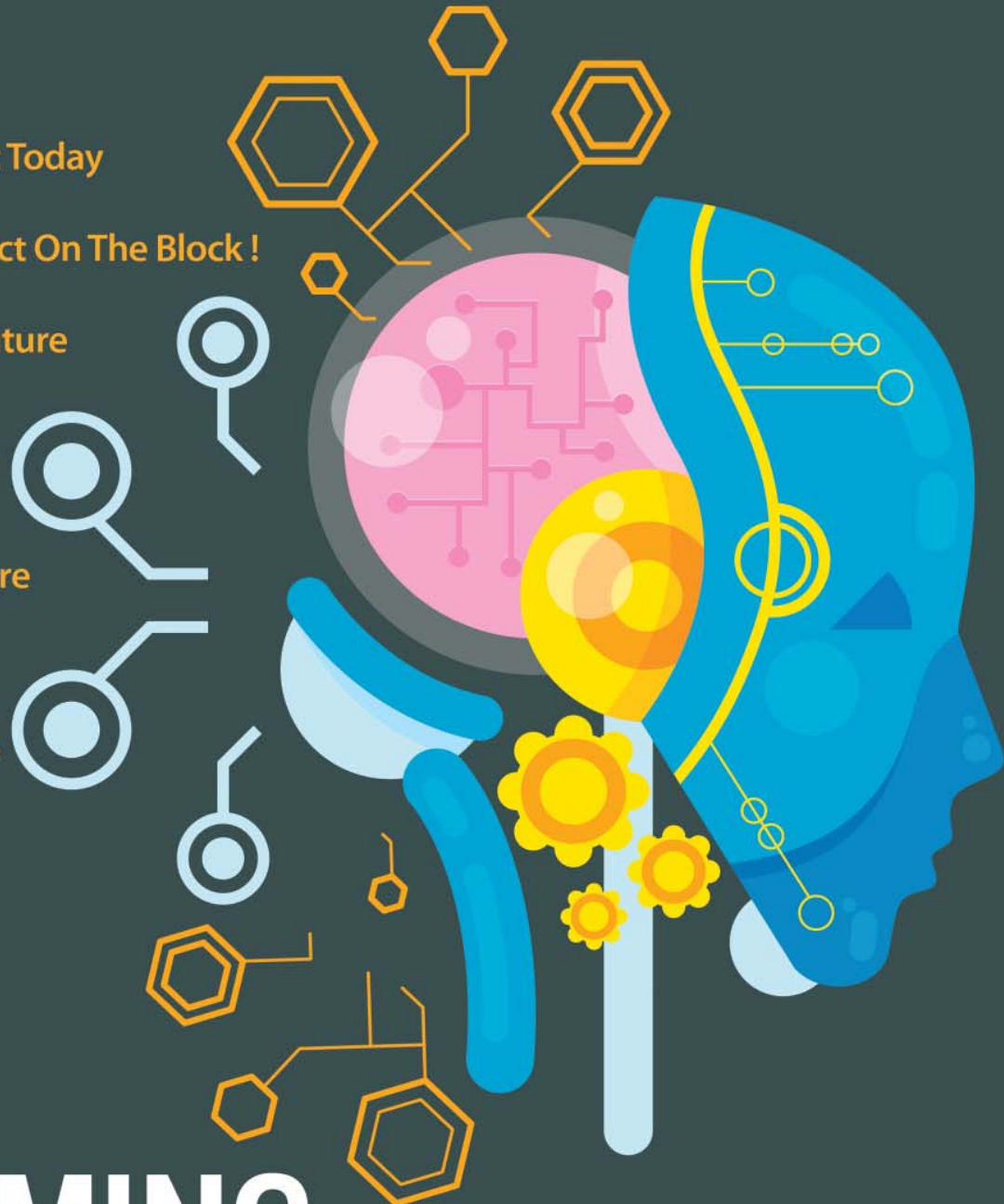
Trailblazing The Way Forward

Arjun Mohan

CASE STUDY

To Be Or Not To Be

Dr. Shameem S



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From The Publisher's Desk



It would only be quixotic if one does not come to terms with the future of work in the wake of the catastrophic COVID-19 pandemic. In the September edition, Human Capital explores the myriads that lie ahead for HR, weighing in the fallout of the pandemic in an equal measure. Despite the far-reaching impact on businesses, the pandemic has indeed accelerated certain outcomes that would otherwise have seen the light of the day only after a few years. Some of these significant outcomes are greater reliance on the contingent workforce, extended remote working and increased focus on health and wellness.

Carrying the topic forward, Debjani Roy writes about the paradigm shift in

employee experience and how organisations need to reimagine work culture giving her expert insights on how workplaces can become future-fit. Kenneth W Wheeler builds a case around why it is time for HR managers to step into the driver's seat in this "new world" and how to steer the organisation forward. Further, Rachna Mukherjee, CHRO, Schneider Electric, highlights three key areas for organisations in order to remain competitive in the future focusing on the digitisation of the workplace.

The interview section features Nir Eyal, a former Stanford lecturer and behavioural designer, who counters the popular belief that technology is the culprit behind personal and workplace distractions. In the Performance Management section, Rohan Lele writes that most organisations often miss out on creating a culture where a two-way candid and constructive performance dialogue occurs between the Leader and his team.

Case Study features the contentious aspect of performance appraisal which has gained greater significance in the wake of the pandemic with several businesses being forced to opt for cost-cutting measures.

Persona features Arjun Mohan, CEO — India, upGrad, who, after a career as a teacher, went on to lead a successful company in the field of academia with sheer grit and passion. Arjun speaks about the gradual assimilation of online education into the mainstream and how upGrad is changing the game of the Indian Edtech ecosystem.

Carpe Diem!

NEHA JAIN

Contents

A POINT OF VIEW

- 6 Letting Go With Care
Gautam Brahma

INTERVIEW

- 18 The Skill Of The Future
Nir Eyal
Former Stanford lecturer and
behavioural designer

A PRACTITIONER'S VIEW

- 24 Can We Build Our Future
Without A Foundation?
Swarna Sudha Selvaraj

LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

- 26 Design For Impact
Dipankar Das

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

- 28 Feedback:
The Cornerstone
Of Performance
Rohan Lele



COVER STORY

BECOMING FUTURE-FIT TODAY

Debjani Roy
Kenneth W Wheeler
Rachna Mukherjee

8

WORK CULTURE

- 30 Journey Mapping and
Personas
Amol Gupta

WORKPLACE 2.0

- 33 City, Citizens And the
Corporate Culture
Keshav Sridhar

CASE STUDY

- 36 To Be Or Not To Be!
Dr. Shameem S

LEADERSHIP

- 42 Leadership & Critical
Thinking-A Philosophical
Perspective
Joy George



Contents

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

- 48 Equity: The Democratising Pillar In The D-E-I Framework
Vikas Dua

THE CHANGE CULTURE

- 50 The Rise Of Cognitive Platforms
Kalpana Bansal

EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

- 55 A Tide Of Opportunities
Swadesh Behera

THE H IN HR

- 62 5 Myths About AI In HR
Harjeet Khanduja

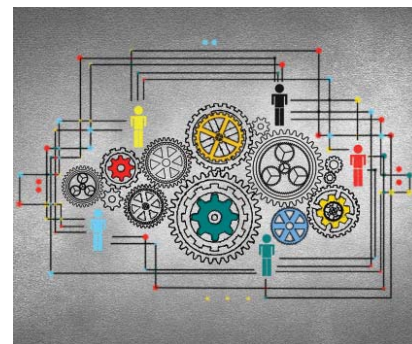
PERSONA

- 68 Trailblazing The Way Forward
Arjun Mohan

EXPERT TALK

- 45 Embrace The Art Of Change
Suresh Datla

- 65 Culture: The Marathon Runner
Ashish Pradhan



REGULARS

- 3 Editorial
- 17 Industry Bytes
- 23 Industry Bytes
- 41 Industry Bytes
- 58 Law at Work
- 75 Appointments

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This issue of **HUMAN CAPITAL** contains 76 pages including cover



Letting Go With Care

The biggest reason for which managers hate firing people is that it is extremely unpleasant. Unfortunately, because they find it unpleasant, managers do a bad job when they are required to actually do it.

BY GAUTAM BRAHMA

Recently, Barcelona's new coach came under fire on social media for sacking Luis Suarez, one of the team's key players, over a brief phone call. Even more recently, many of us would have received a petition on change.org from the wife of an airline pilot, who was sacked through an email. Clearly, in both cases, there are complex reasons both for and against the separation. The one point on which most people seem to agree is the manner of separation. It was seen as disrespectful.

No manager likes to fire people. It is such a waste considering all the effort that goes into the selection, hiring, and training people to come about as good in their work. It also damages the culture of the organisation which is built around the way people treat each other at work. However, the biggest reason for which managers hate firing people is that it is extremely unpleasant. Unfortunately, because they find it unpleasant, managers do a bad job when they are required to actually do it.

Managers' distaste of firing is so well known that it was the central theme of a popular Hollywood movie ten years ago. In *'Up In The Air'*, George Clooney's character, Ryan, makes a living by flying to different places and firing people after face-to-face meetings, on behalf of the Management of those organisations. While this is definitely not pleasant, he has learnt to do it with some amount of finesse. When a new colleague pushes for firing people over video calls to save on

travel costs, he opposes her but is unable to prevent her from doing it. Eventually, one person fired over a video call at first threatens to kill herself, and then goes ahead and does it. This tragedy vindicates Ryan; separation is fraught with possibilities and best handled across the table with dignity by an experienced person with prior preparation.

Not many managers can outsource firing to a professional like Ryan. They have to learn to do it well themselves. Every little detail counts in this process. Here are some key issues:

1. Preparation: Needless to say, the manager must have an answer to the common questions expected, as well as an FAQ resource and a human contact that can be shared with the employee for future logistics queries. A standard resignation letter alongside a cheque with settlement payment, if kept ready, helps a great deal in closing the proceedings.

2. Location: The manager cannot be expected to walk into an open office and fire people. She must arrange a location where the employee is not worried about being overheard or even seen, in case emotions are displayed.

3. Timing: Contrary to what some managers think, it is not a good idea to sack someone before the weekend when all she can do is soak in misery. It may be better to do it at the start of the week so that she can start reaching out to potential employers right away.

4. Script: Managers are not necessarily good actors and they are certainly unlikely to be actors who can improvise according to the situation. It is best to follow a standard script with a few standard variations to deliver the message. The message itself should deliver the bad news right away upfront, followed by the business reasons, which do not reflect on the employee's worth, ending with logistical details about the next steps like surrendering assets, filling forms and collecting payment. Managers should not expect to be understood completely or appreciated in any manner. There is no way separation can be packaged as pleasant news ever.

5. Demeanour: The manager should expect incredulity, hostility or dejection or even all three. She has to try to be calm and patient. This is not a time for answering every emotionally charged question. These should be heard patiently before returning to the script. I was once asked by an employee how on earth his salary (he mentioned the exact amount) made a difference to Company profits (he mentioned the exact amount again). It obviously represented a very tiny fraction.

On another occasion, an employee reminded me about the upcoming wedding of his daughter, to which I had been invited. Such an interaction can be emotionally wrenching and cannot be managed without a script and without practised calm. Many managers know that just as they are letting go one or several members in their

team, they may themselves be on a list of people to be let go later. This anxiety can make it even harder to carry out the separation discussion. This is where preparation and a script help the most.

6. Witness: To protect against future legal action, hinging on who said what, it may be a good idea to have another manager present. This could be an HR rep or the manager's own supervisor. This has become even more important during the pandemic when separation happens in a WFH setting and the discussion could be recorded by the employee.

7. Follow-up: Some companies rely on third parties for asset and form collection. In the WFH setting, this could be a good option because the employee may query or crib with company employees who may not all give the correct response.

Lots of jobs have evaporated over the last few months because of the slowdown in the economy. The pandemic shows no sign of easing and we can expect to see more jobs go. More and more managers will be called upon to let some or all of their people go. It is not going to be easy, but it has to be done. Anything which just has to be done needs to be done well. Luckily, this is an area where lots of advice, based on experience, is available for all managers, especially from sources in the US, where business organisations have prided themselves on rapid firing. To be fair, they are also equally

known for rapid hiring when things get better.

In a piece in HBR last month, Rebecca Knight has laid out advice on managing separation in these trying times, and ends with a health advisory for the manager. Separation takes its toll not just on the employee being let go, which is well-known, but also on the manager carrying out the separation. This is under-appreciated. Practised calm does not come overnight and depends on rest, nutrition, exercise and meditative practices.

Luckily, while WFH makes it harder to inject dignity into the separation dialogue, it also makes it easier for the manager to follow her script and thereby do a better job of being compassionate while on-message. The separation experience has also been somewhat eased by some half-way house options that have emerged. Some companies put employees on furlough where they do not get their salary, but the company continues to fund long-term benefits. Some companies have chosen to fund employee insurance long past their exit taking the financial year as the time frame of applicability.

Some companies notionally keep the employee name on record for a period so that the position can be cited while applying for future jobs. Resume preparation and job search counselling has not become a common practice but can be expected to become

so, as in some US companies, as time passes. Many companies are placing separated employees on a roster to be contacted for rehiring in case business picks up. This helps create initial comfort for the employee.

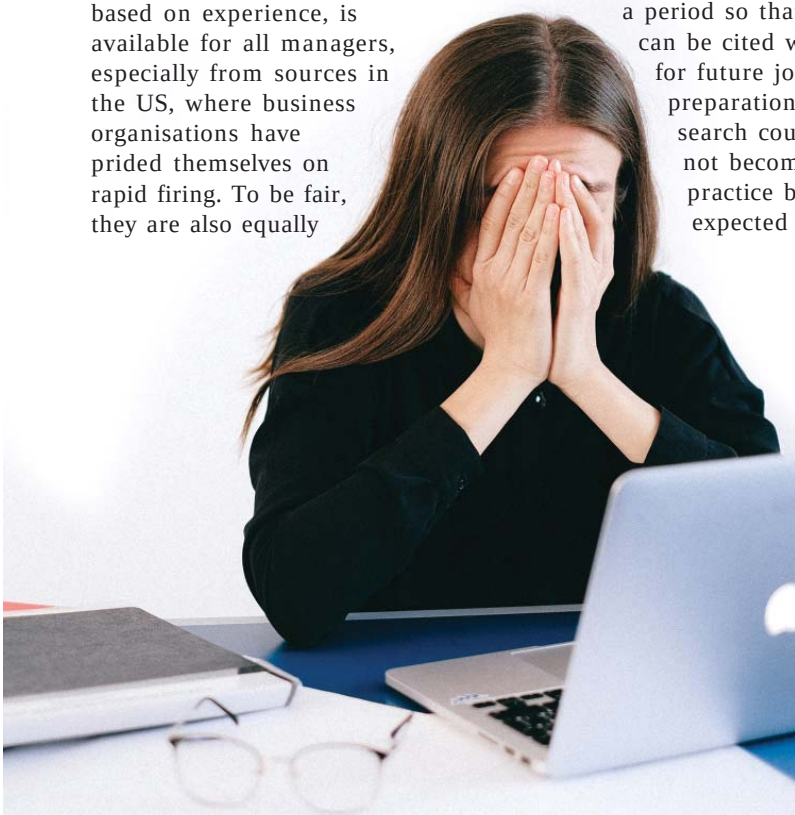
There are some organisational practices that make the manager's job even harder. When a part of the team has to be let go, the manager can reassure the others that the worst is over. When these separations are announced in instalments, the manager has a tough time communicating assurance. When the company releases information to external stakeholders before releasing it to people within, the managers lose credibility. When the separation of old employees runs in parallel with the induction of new employees hired on lower salaries, the manager's position becomes completely unenviable. One can only wish that this did not happen, but business needs drive decisions in a way that individual managers cannot control. What they can control is the degree of dignity they can retain for the employee being let go, and hope that this will be remembered. That is the only redemption for the professional manager. 

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"How To Manage Coronavirus Layoffs With Compassion"; Rebecca Knight; HBR; April 2020

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.



BECOMING FUTURE-FIT TODAY

Corporates need to unleash their brilliance, inside-out. This regeneration churned out from within would be key for organisations to overcome the miseries of today and start excelling in their respective journeys tomorrow.

BY DEBJANI ROY

My memories went back to the wet months of August-September last year – when life and its innumerable activities were pacing themselves in ways that seemed like a fairy tale as compared to where we are today. Like any other small city - news featuring in single columns in the International section of the regular news dailies in the country - the mention of a new virus suddenly gaining ground in a city named Wuhan was hardly noticed. Since then, it only took four months for this news snippet to emerge as the largest and the most unprecedented reality of modern times, sweeping the entire world in its fold. It was almost as if somebody had his/her life by the neck-hold - performed a surgery to remove some critical bones in a particular way – and gave a new twist and angle to it altogether.

And seven months later, COVID-19 has undoubtedly come about as the mainstay in 2020. As a word, 'Pandemic' has assumed a larger than life meaning with multiple generations being held in its grip. The fate of every animate and inanimate object and being, a part of the current eco-system on Earth seems altered, and in most cases, there is no clarity as to where and how.

I have been a Corporate animal for the most part of my life – and such unexpected and unprecedented circumstances continue to enthrall and bother me at the same time. Like everything else, the Corporate has been impacted like never before - not in one or two ways, but on multiple fronts. Products and services that seemed to take 3–5 years to come within our grasp, were suddenly available at the doorstep. Newer ways of commerce were at work, with a completely different set of work priorities and a new

language to speak! - changes that seemed to be knocking on the doors, asking to be examined ranged from Structures, the Workforce, Policies and frameworks, People skills and behaviours, Employee experiences, Welfare and Wellness etc. To say that this was mind boggling would be a mere understatement, and there was no way that this could be ignored.

The new-look Workforce deployment

The Pandemic has changed the very fabric of Workforce deployment and management across Corporates today. With social distancing becoming the new normal, and concerns related to health and hygiene on top of everyone's minds, remote working has come forth as the most preferred model of workforce deployment today. Besides this, 'GIG' workers and 'Digital Nomads' – juggling multiple projects across numerous timelines and boundaries all at the same time - are also deployed in today's workplaces. Such workforce elements are no longer expected to demonstrate the capabilities of employees of the pre-Pandemic era, but new skills and competencies to enable them to cope and succeed is the reality of the day.

Knowledge alone would have to be replaced with resilience, apart from continuity/longevity and adaptability. The hunger for learning will replace singleskill excellence and multi-skill orientation would come about as the order of the day. Above all, competencies like agility and critical thinking must be mastered in order to fit into a highly digitalised environment henceforth, apart from those that are rapidly innovating. This is likely to emerge as the next biggest change in the Corporate space.



The nimble, agile and innovative Organisation structures

As has been the case over several years in the past, Corporates have come to rally mostly around organic and traditional structures of hierarchy. Over a period of time, straight line hierarchies have gone ahead to innovate themselves into slightly different models like Matrix reportings, evolving span of controls, comparable org. charts etc.

The Pandemic and the sudden changes that have subsequently derived are now threatening age-old organisational structures, and are even forcing them down different paths - that of decentralised structures, dressing down of infrastructure per se, the move to more agile working etc. The reason behind all this is to encourage a high degree of autonomy for people at the fringes to make decisions, innovate, and get things done. It could also result in a high degree of alignment across groups to facilitate proper working all along.

The above is being particularly affected since organisations that are traditionally structured are suddenly finding the current environment – that of flux, chaos and new norms - increasingly challenging. Business functioning is under tremendous stress, with people getting stretched in different directions, resulting in the collapse of authority structures. The future, therefore, would belong to new-look structures that would be nimble, agile and quick to better respond to external as well as internal developments. Hence, we are witnessing structures, and terms like the 'Helix', 'Warrooms', 'Nerve-rooms' are being inter-changeably used while describing new Org. structures coming in place all of a sudden. Crack teams from amongst the current workforce would be deployed through these new formations to provide rapid and realtime responses on a continuous basis in the face of the fast-changing business landscape. What will, however, be the test of time is in seeing how well traditional organisations can overcome their earlier structural inertia and adapt to newer ways of doing work.

One would therefore not be wrong to say that the future will see most Corporates functioning differently. They will be seen moving away from the old-fashioned top down linear structure or teams functioning around departmental hierarchies, towards more modular units created around different skill-sets, coming together to complete a project, and then being disbanded. This would allow grouping, dispersing and re-grouping faster, and thereby enable quick decision-making. Faster decisionmaking will, in turn, allow the Corporate to take advantage of fast-changing landscapes and opportunities in a seamless manner.

**DR. SURENDER JEET RAJ**

Senior Vice President - HR
Operations, Newgen Software

“With remote working becoming the norm, the need for technology is more than ever. The workforce equipped with knowledge of cutting-edge technologies, including artificial intelligence, machine learning, and data analytics, is likely to witness an increase in employment opportunities. In terms of behavioural skills, organisations will encourage empathy and emotional quotient in their employees. While hiring the best suitable talent, organisations will have to ensure that they are current and future-ready with the new-age technologies for seamless operations and remote collaboration.”

“With social distancing coming about as the new normal, and concerns related to health and hygiene on top of everyone's minds, remote working has come forth as the most preferred model of workforce deployment today”

A paradigm shift in Employee Experience

The physicality associated with the workforce of yesteryears is a thing of the past today. It will not only be a ‘pun’ to say that the Pandemic has dealt a body-blow to the same. Hence, the rules of the game for creating an enabling environment for employees at the workplace are

drastically challenged, posing sleepless nights to Managers and HR alike. After all, a solid physical property – the workforce – does not always vanish overnight!

This shift, therefore, has to be understood from two point of views that are almost diametrically opposite – both, however, being today's realities for the employees. On the one hand, there is insecurity and anguish that has been brought along by the pandemic, forcing people to shift from age-old habits and comfort zones. Whatever the odds, the office is looked upon as a great ‘equal’, a strong socialising influence on multiple people – who get together regularly sharing a common identity (that of the company) and spend a fair amount of quality time together. Work was always welcome, and more so, the money one received for it at the end of the month. All of a sudden, this has changed. Many stopped coming to offices overnight, and some were also told not to work from home since they had been laid-off. This was owing to the turmoil in the economy and the Company being unable to cope with it immediately. For those losing their jobs, it was no less than a catastrophe that had suddenly fallen.

On the other hand, many were working from home, but a sudden alienation and disarray had no less struck them because of the changing norms of work that needed getting used to. To make matters worse, traditional styles of leading the Teams by the Managers/Leaders in a completely altered reality were not making things any easier. Working hours often got extended beyond normal, the fine line between home and office continued to get blurred, the home environment comprehensively got affected for the worse (with children being the biggest sufferers), mental well-being was challenged, and the overall balance was lost.

This was primarily a fall-out of the inability of managers and leaders to upskill themselves in sync with the Pandemic to understand

the sensitivities of how to extract work from a workforce that was already shaken under extra-ordinary circumstances. A supportive learning environment was needed to be in place to prepare supervisors with the required skills to take on the new reality that has been severely compromised. Even today, the learning is slow, and the challenges of sustaining the right levels of efficiencies and productivity from a remote workforce are bothering Corporates to no end.

A new language for a new-kind of work-place

Becoming future-fit today - in light of all that has been described above – will need much more than just incremental improvements in certain areas. It would be nothing less than attempting a ‘restructuring effort’, applying principles of design thinking, agile management, focussed

**SAJITHA PILLAI**

Head-HR, SBM Bank India

“I believe in the current situation, the fundamentals of engaging with employees remain the same. We as organisations ensure a smooth transition to digital ways of working that least affect the employees' experience and morale. We've been moving to an online world, a gig economy, toward remote workgroups. Technology is breaking all stereotypes and is creating different enablers to work in this new environment. Even as technology will enable virtual interactions with customers, but is also important not to lose the human touch. The next 20 or 30 years, this work environment is going to change a lot. Of course, people are going to come back us and ask ‘who were the key stakeholders that made the difference?’”

and reinforced learning, employee wellbeing, and longterm sustainability. Underlying all the above would be the need to unlearn, learn and re-create a platform that will have renewed skilling, developing managerial competence, getting the work-life balance right and employing empathy as its pillars. Only then can new systems and processes be designed for the new-look workplaces that would see them through such difficult times and build sustainability where required.

It is uncertain as to when the Pandemic will recede and where will things be pointing while moving towards the erstwhile normal, and how would tomorrow's workplace look like. Would it be an absolute case of remote working or would it be back to the office for most? It seems reasonably certain that most organisations have found benefits in having their back-end services personnel work from home. While this has raised the efficiency levels, it has also resulted in cost savings. And for employees – saving travel time, avoiding extreme physical exhaustion, reasonable cost savings, and more time at home have been some of the positive payoffs. Despite this, it appears as reasonably certain that there will no going back to the original ways of working of the pre-COVID times. Nor are we envisaging doing away with office spaces completely. A hybrid version is probably what looks most probable, and that is what would need to become future-fit today.

Some key initiatives to be future-fit would include:

- **Lending a greater vision to the current workforce:** To help reinstate their feelings of trust and faith in the Corporate. This is crucial especially when the going gets tough and there is a sense of disarray all around. The morale of the employee plays tricks upon him and that is when the rejuvenation must be done. It needs to be treated almost like a rehab centre – cleansing and reinforcing both at the same time.



SUSHIL BAVEJA

Executive Director - Human Resources, DCM Shriram Ltd

“Future of work has remained a contemporary theme for Organisations and HR for the last few years. The VUCA world triggered it and the Pandemic has accelerated it. We have seen Organisations in the last few years undertake transformation journeys to be future ready. There is no escaping from the fact that a revisit of everything is needed for Organisations to prepare for and face discontinuity, disruption and derailment. Everything would include skillsets, behaviours, competencies, workplace culture, practices, processes & systems, technology or digital readiness. All this, however, needs a diligent, thoughtful and mature engagement. Unlearning is the starting point, Inclusiveness is a key determinant, People are the enablers, Re-imagining is the new temperament but let us not undermine calibration, blend and balance to make change sustainable.”

- **Create an enabling environment for employees:** Future-fit organisations will have to strike a steady balance between productivity and employee wellness. Work under new conditions would present challenges - not experienced earlier which could lead to higher degrees of stress and pain – that which have been mentioned earlier. Hence, this would undoubtedly be a crucial factor in becoming future-fit. Also, employee wellness from here onwards would be a business prerogative (no less), and would therefore be the responsibility of all stakeholders.
- **Upskilling and Reskilling across the Organisation:** This would become a mandate from here onwards and new competencies

would have to be mastered. ‘Continuous Learning’ of different kinds would become a critical success factor for Corporates in their journey ahead from here. And both push and pull would be at work to create the right knowledge and skill groups.

- **New ways of Leadership:**

New ways of managing and new ways of supervision would come into play. Leading remote teams and forging performance synergies between the remote and the ones working in offices would present new opportunities as well as new challenges. Leaders would have to learn how to lead in the new normal, while efficiencies and productivity are not compromised. Performance Metrics would have to be redefined, while the output would be key, rather than presence/physicality.

- **Putting in place open & live communication channels for all:**

To create a transparent and real-time workplace. This could very well play the role of a catalyst in treating insecurities borne out of the new normal workplace and stresses contained therein.

As is apparent now, Corporates need to unleash their brilliance, inside-out. This regeneration, churned out from within would be key for Organisations to overcome the miseries of today and start excelling in their respective journeys tomorrow. **HC**

About the Author

Debjani Roy is an industry stalwart and domain expert in the field of Human Resource with over 25 years of functional experience across companies such as Bharti, HCL, Bentley Systems, Kuoni, and SRL Diagnostics. Till March 2019, Debjani was with SRL Diagnostics as CHRO. Currently, besides being the Chief HR Advisor to Mind Your Fleet (a software start-up), she is a visiting professor to a number of reputed B-Schools. Debjani is also a sought-after speaker, an author, an education-activist, as well as coach and mentor to students in the academic space.



KENNETH W WHEELER

HR: The New Architect On The Block!

HR is no longer seated at the back seat of a Ferrari or as a passenger in a Lamborghini. It is in a position to assume control on the driver's seat.

Human Resources professionals, in this new world of work with disruptions galore, find themselves as the new architect on the block - determined to reset, reinvent and restructure the future of work and organisations across the globe. The idiom 'the new kid on the block' is more than apt for the situation in which HR is in today. Similarly, the HR fraternity has the privilege to operate at their influential best and showcase their greatest value-add on the business table. HR is no longer seated at the back seat of a Ferrari or as a passenger in a Lamborghini. It is in a position to assume control on the driver's seat. HR is in that sweet spot to determine which lever to apply and when, the speed of travel and the turns to be taken to get to the desired destination. It is a new world of work driven by the new architect on the block – The Human Resources!

Below mentioned are the core foundations that shall define HR's pillars of success.

Re-defining the Skills of Leadership

The extended phase of work from home has further blurred the lines between work and personal life, and it has all but merged. As a result, we observe an increased burnout, physical fatigue, anxiety, emotional

and mental well-being, insomnia and even fear. In these times of uncertainty, the need to zoom in on the softer aspects of leadership skills is evident. HR must facilitate developing abilities cantered around: -



VINAY KAUSHIK

Chief Human Resources Officer,
Nuberg EPC

“New problems teach different learning and if it is crisis of century, we witness challenges and innovation taking new Avatar. This is an opportunity to reimagine impossible and developing technology enabled collaborative culture in a workplace will be crucial; the shift in the working culture requires more receptive approach and willing to go beyond. This uncertainty is likely to aggravate, equip the members to achieve these by empowering them and delegation must percolate down to every level with leadership play a functional role and not merely a title. Challenge the crisis to create opportunities. Winners too belong to same planet.”

• **Emotional Intelligence:**

Working with an inside out approach. Leadership teams must be equipped to understand and manage their own emotions first and then learn to make themselves aware of the emotions of their team members

• **Shifting from empathy to compassion:** Investing in distilling values of compassion wherein leaders, besides viewing things from the other person's point of view (empathy) are driven by compassion, and feel encouraged to support and take meaningful actions to help employees overcome their challenges

• **Being mindful of our reactions:** Uplifting or destroying the employees' morale depends on how leaders react to different situations. In a virtual environment, leaders need to be more patient, be flexible, understanding and operate on a higher trust level

• **The Coach Hat:** Leaders must operate with a coach's hat to act more from providing guidance and direction, while giving liberty to employees to work how they want to

An Influential Change Leader

HR has always been a torchbearer of change. The impact of the current pandemic has only multiplied the need for change across businesses.

Change today, however, needs to be managed with speed and agility. A statement by Justine Trudeau, the Prime Minister of Canada, a couple of years ago, is remarkably astonishing, *“The pace of change has never been this fast, yet it will never be this slow again.”*

In this context, we observe the following changes growing with accelerated momentum: -

- Businesses are transitioning to a digital mode of functioning like never before
- Organisations are looking inward to rethink and redesign their HR policies, processes and practices
- Employee wellness and well-being has emerged at its strongest ever
- Leadership units of organisations are upskilling themselves on aspects of soft skills
- The Gig economy is converting into a substantial reality

To combat such a change tsunami, business leaders are leaning to Human Resources to play the leading role. They are proactively reaching out to HR to make it all happen and happen seamlessly!

“The most basic and powerful way to connect with another person is to listen. A listening culture is all about supporting and being supportive. HR is the strongest contender to build that strong support system.”

Create a Listening Culture

The prime value of a listening culture is that it fosters an environment of trust amongst employees and management alike. When organisations focus on listening skills, it allows for a higher level of collaboration and team synergy and employees and leaders become



AMIT SHARMA

Chief Human Resources Officer,
Volvo Group India

“To become Future-Fit Today, organisations need to discard/relook traditional models, accelerate the digital journey, and build new set of competencies, among leaders as well as employees. Leaders will have to be adept at effectively managing remote teams and align their focus towards the employees' wellbeing, performance and address concerns. Increased flexibility would be essential for leading in unprecedented situations and leveraging collective intelligence of the team to arrive at the way forward. For employees to stay relevant and current in the fast-changing times, some of the key competencies shall be Resilience, Flexibility & Adaptability, Cross-functional skill set, Frugal Mindset and Innovative Thinking.”

more open to embrace everyone's point of view. The Listening culture must flow from the top as employees who are listened to will always be encouraged to listen to others.

Few pointers to consider in this direction are:

- Inculcate the value of listen to understand and not to respond
- Ask and encourage employee feedback. As Eric Schmidt, the former CEO of Google had said, ‘We run this company on questions, not answers.’
- Encourage and reward those who challenge your ideas, question the status quo and debate your thoughts
- Include employees in your decision-making – be more democratic in your approach

The most basic and powerful way to connect with another person is to listen. A listening culture is all

about supporting and being supportive. HR is the strongest contender to build that strong support system.

Technology Journey from Adaption to Addiction

HR needs to strongly message the mindset to befriend technology as a significant enabler and fuel for the organisation's success. Collaboration with the IT team is essential to understand how organisations can shift focus from adoption to addiction. We love platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp because we find ourselves addicted to these tools. However, addiction is impossible until the technology you adopt creates a particular user experience. To achieve that objective, one must consider the following elements:

- HR must ask the critical question - what experience will this tool create for employees? Is it to drive engagement or strengthen a process? If one fails to get an answer to this, technology addiction will not happen, and even adoption would be a struggle
- The second critical element is to ensure that technology tools are not operating in siloes, but are well-integrated with other key platforms to provide a wholistic user experience
- The third dimension is to facilitate organisations to build an adaptive mindset towards technology as a ‘must have’ and not a ‘good to have’ component
- The fourth essential for HR is to look towards the recruitment strategy. HR needs to make conscious efforts to hire a greater percentage of talent that are naturally tech-savvy

A Rich Experience for The Distributed Workforce

As we progressively move towards a distributed workforce, HR needs

to go all guns blazing to reimagine and redesign the experience for this new workforce model. It is critical to focus on the different dynamics which when combined will establish the framework and create an employee experience par excellence.

- Re-working on HR policies that reflect a progressive mindset approach
- Turning to the power of digitalisation as a wherever, whenever and however model
- Focusing on Employees Psychological safety and facilitate a risk-friendly environment
- Building a Robust Employee Wellness and Well-being Framework
- Investing in blending elements of unique cultures from across the globe
- Creating a communication system that is based on an asynchronous model. Employees should feel connected real-time regardless of their location
- Considering to keep virtual meetings to the minimum. Overloading employees with meetings only take them away from work in order to talk about doing work
- Letting employees to handle their own priorities on their own timeline. It only strengthens productivity

“It was said that Technology, Automation and robotics will eventually lead to the death of HR. However, they have been proven otherwise beyond any doubt.”

Investing Heavily on Future Proofing

Through the influx of new cutting-edge technology and newly defined work models, we are already



LIA LYNN MARCOS

Vice President for Human Relations-APAC Sykes

“Three things make an organisation future-Smart: having a strong foundation, robust and sound support infrastructure, and the agility to adapt in any situation. Each employee focused organisation should have the priorities of investing to nurture the growth of leaders, provide a work environment that stimulates learning, enables employees to succeed, fosters collaborative work, and compliments company culture to become a future ready organisation. To become future-fit, the organisation should be digitally ahead to increase productivity and efficiency and support its employees, client partners, and the company's growth. While the changes brought by the pandemic tested each organisation, it made each one of us, more innovative in ensuring that our priorities are executed across all 3 business models, brick and mortar set up, work at home environment and HYBRID model.”

witnessing a reduction in the shelf life of skills. At the same time, competencies are ever-evolving. The World Economic Forum also states that in the near future we will have 133 million new roles created. HR must actively devote time for an ongoing skilling and re-skilling agenda under the L&D umbrella.

Talent must find themselves equipped to function smoothly and adapt to the new demands quickly.

It is important to consider the below-mentioned factors: -

- The digital world will shift focus on skills such as critical thinking, complex problem solving, creativity, adaptability and

agility. Keywords like patience, compassion, listening, kindness, etc. will gain more prominence

- Facilitate a learning culture with an approach to being committed for lifelong learning. L&D must be designed in a way that is accessible and engaging
- Be alert to evaluate the additional skills, trainings and certifications needed keeping in mind the competency required to fill in the future as individuals grow in their role and career path

In the recent years, we have observed many professionals/experts advocating the doom of HR. Statements such as ‘the perish of HR or becoming obsolete’ have been very vocal. It was said that Technology, Automation and robotics will eventually lead to the death of HR. However, they have been proven otherwise beyond any doubt. HR will continue to thrive and evolve to remain ahead of the curve. HR's global success in efficiently managing the pandemic strongly validates this perspective. It is only wise to put your weight behind this new architect on the block, and it is certain that the world of work, as has been always known and experienced, will never be the same again! 

About the Author

Kenneth W Wheeler is Director of Talent & Culture at True Fit Corporation. Prior to this, he was associated with LogiNext as VP Human Resources (L&D). He comes with 16 plus years of rich learning experience spread across industries. Awarded as 101 Top HR Minds (India) 2019 and a certified NLP coach, Kenneth is a well-rounded expert in Envisioning, Strategizing and Leading a robust gamut of HR and L&D framework, contributing to both MNC (Wipro) and the Start-up ecosystem (Ola, LogiNext).



RACHNA MUKHERJEE

Workplace Of The Future with Digitisation

Digital transformation has huge implications on talent management. We need talent that can drive this change, be able to use it and deliver services after this transformation.

The world, as we know it, is changing. This dynamism is also being reflected in the workplace, both at the employee level and also that of the organisation. There has been a major shift in motion in the last few years, and this has been further accelerated by the recent developments, reemphasising the criticality of this change.

Research proves that 80% of the companies that focus on a culture of innovation and digital evolution, sustain strong or breakthrough performance. Today, Digital Disruption is setting the narrative by redefining the workplace of the future which is agile, dispersed and contactless.

3 focus areas for competitiveness

With business dynamics evolving and changing, there are 3 areas of focus for organisations to remain competitive in the future:

- Digital transformation
- Workforce redesign and Gig workforce
- Remote management and flexibility

The future of HR is both digital and human. On the one hand, it is required to be adept in driving processes based on Artificial Intelligence, Augmented Reality,

Machine Learning, while on the other, being focused on strategic areas that require more personal, human and intuitive interventions.

Digital transformation also has huge implications on talent

SONALI DUTTA
HR Head, Bry-Air

“Organisations as well as people need to be resilient and continuously reinvent and implement changes quickly to be future fit. It is important to constantly innovate while investing profits back into research and development. Organisations also need to be less financially stressed, since even successful businesses cannot guarantee its survival, if it is not prepared for any and every eventuality. A favourable environment for innovation coupled with digital skills, resources to be developed to be innovative, resilient, multifaceted and quickly adapt to change. Today, IT plays a big role and at every level a digital transformation is needed to ensure people can work productively from anywhere.”

management. We need talent that can drive this change, be able to use it and deliver services after this transformation. Now is the time to look for an evolved set of skills in talent, with digital skills playing a bigger role than ever before. We are seeing an increased demand for skills such as learnability, adaptability, empathy, support, and communication.

Gig workforce is here to stay

Today, digital transformation is being effectively applied to workforce redesign, with the integration of on-site and remote workforce, full-time and gig workforce. The gig workforce is here to stay. It throws great opportunities and challenges for business organisations and allows optimum work to be done by a set of skilled professionals. The advantages of Gig working are flexibility and control over time. However, the readiness among organisations to accept this workforce is yet to evolve. Organisations will have to work to develop a more inclusive approach towards different workforces and create the right internal ecosystem.

Technology: a part of diversity

Today, organisations are visualising a future workforce that is prepared

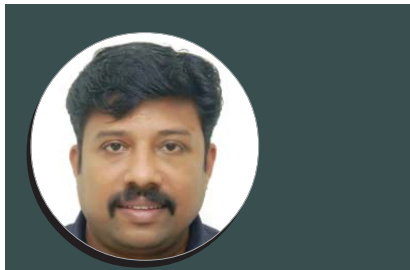
to embrace diversity in its approach, as with humans, bots and robots playing an important part in it. Today, Bots are not just a part of the hiring process, but also play a major role in learning and development, employee well-being and support etc.

Organisations of the future are becoming dynamic and agile. They are designing structures, people policies and processes, governance mechanisms, aligned with the workforce of the future, flexible and remote working approaches and digital evolution in people practices space.

Organisations are focused on evolving its people strategy in tandem with digital innovation efforts with the intent of encouraging the best contributions from talent, and support businesses seamlessly in the digital journey. According to Randstad, 86% of workers are intending to upskill or reskill this year to remain competitive.

“Organisations are focused on evolving their people strategy in tandem with digital innovation efforts with the intent of encouraging the best contributions from talent, and support businesses seamlessly in the digital journey.”

With automation changing the way we work; the World Economic Forum has also shared the top skills that organisations need to thrive in the Fourth Industrial Revolution. The focus has shifted towards prioritising complex problem solving, critical thinking and creativity as the top three skills along with adding emotional intelligence to the list. While robots can complete many tasks faster than humans,



SURESH KUMAR C,
Director of People Team, Vuram

“An HR's role in a pandemic-altered workplace will no longer be the same. As companies increasingly depend on virtual teams, HR personnel must make headway in dealing with a non-traditional workforce and improving employee engagement. Organisations can start adapting by revamping the hiring process: right from conducting remote interviews-including campus interviews-to virtual onboarding and training, and leverage technologies to provide a seamless digital experience. HR teams should prioritise taking care of the employees' mental well-being and empathise with them so that they are happy and productive even while working from home. Conducting activities such as learning sessions, employee pulse checks, fitness sessions, sessions that involve family members, virtual contests and celebrations can instil a positive remote work culture among employees.”

machines still lack creativity and emotional skills.

As technology revolutionises traditional business practices, with automation decreasing workload, the most in-demand employees will be those who possess the skills that cannot be automated.

Today's decisions will become the litmus test for established policies tomorrow. Remote work, work from home, part-time work arrangements etc. will not only support agile and digital business approaches, but also align organisations with the new normal. Work from anywhere and hybrid work approach is being adopted as

a permanent work arrangement as paradigms get challenged.

HR teams across industries will need to immensely focus on employee well-being and safety aligned to the new workplace. Insights driven people practices will have to be integrated to ensure employees feel connected and cared for. The focus must be on robust usage of their internal digital communication systems, to enable engagements with employees, help groups, counsellors, leaders without any in-person connects.

Digital learning now becomes an important pillar to enhance employees upskilling. A holistic approach in digital skills enhancement will need to be established. The processes for identifying as well as developing digital talent would be needed.

Organisations will have to encourage the internal mobility of their employees by digitally connecting them to scout for different cross-functional opportunities across geographies, to retain talent by offering vast professional exposure. The focus will have to be around empowered learning on multi-geography cross-functional projects, facilitated by technology.

The world of work is changing! Artificial intelligence, machine learning, augmented reality, automation, robotics and diverse work arrangement is swiftly changing the paradigm of workforces and workplaces. **HC**

About the Author

Rachna Mukherjee is Chief Human Resources Officer, India and South Asia, Schneider Electric. She carries a diverse experience of over 25 years and has worked in leading organisations such as Microsoft, IBM, Escotel, NIC and Blue Star - Hewlett Packard and Aircel. Rachna is a recipient of the Businessworld Woman HR Leader of the Year Award, 2016 and the HR Leadership Award, 2010.

Axis Bank Launches "GIG-A-Opportunities"

BY ANUSHRUTI SINGH

Axis Bank has launched "GIG-A opportunities", a platform for alternate work models to encourage more flexibility, diversity and inclusivity.

"'GIG-A-Opportunities' is the answer to the challenge of having an integrated work model and solution that addresses the varied skill requirements of a large corporate, while meeting the need of flexibility and ease for a growing pool of untapped talent," the bank said in a statement.



The platform will open up large prospects in digital banking, technology, risk modeling, virtual sales, audit and credit policy.

GIG-A opportunities will attract talent through two work

models - 100 percent virtual roles and flexible, project based short term contracts. **HC**

Airbnb Extends Work From Home Until The End Of August 2021

BY ANUSHRUTI SINGH

Airbnb has extended remote work option for employees until the end of August 2021.

In addition to this, employees have been offered \$300 stipend for home office equipment and \$200 to cover ergonomic equipment.

"At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, Airbnb closed offices to protect the health and safety of our employees around the world. Now, we are extending the option for our employees to work remotely through the end of August 2021, even if their home office has reopened", the Company wrote in a blog post.

"Employee safety remains our focus, and while we don't know when the pandemic will end, we want to provide our employees with flexibility and choice to make decisions about the next year."

Employees also have the option to temporarily relocate to states and countries where Airbnb has a set up. **HC**



Air India Issues New Dress Code For Employees

BY ANUSHRUTI SINGH

Air India has prescribed a strict dress code for employees and warned against casual attire such as t-shirt and jeans.

The employees have been asked to be properly groomed and to wear formal clothes irrespective of their grades whether permanent, temporary, contractual, apprentices, full time, part time, casuals, interns, etc .

"Employees must at all times look well groomed, professional and should not wear casual clothes like shorts, T shirts, polos, jeans, slippers, sandals, ripped jeans, flip flops, too tight, too flowy, short, low cut or transparent clothes", Air India said in a circular.

"Management reserves the right to take action for violations, if any. We are confident that each



employee will use their best judgement when maintaining proper attire and appearance," the circular asserted.

As per the norms, men should wear proper formal trousers and shirts and for women employees it is formal Indian or Western attire.

The national carrier stated every employee is a brand ambassador and his or her appearance has an impact on its image. **HC**

The Skill Of The Future

*Technology and social media usage has significantly increased as a result of the pandemic, and constant distractions and interruptions have become the "new normal." Hence, it is especially imperative to master what **Nir Eyal**, a former Stanford lecturer and behavioural designer, calls the "skill of the century," i.e. the power to become indistractable. In this exclusive interaction, the bestselling author turns our attention to the psychology of distractions and explains why, as paradoxical as it may seem, technology is not the culprit behind personal and workplace distractions. He also shares pertinent insights into how distractions are not just around us but more so within us, and how we, as individuals and leaders, can develop the superpower of indistractability.*

BY ANKITA SHARMA



Q When you started writing your highly acclaimed book ‘Indistractable’, you went extreme with cutting back on your technology usage to fix the distraction problems you were struggling with. What did you find out from this experiment?

A My gut reaction was to believe the popular narrative today, which is technology causes distraction, that we’re addicted to technology, and that we’re helpless because of the amazing algorithms, video games, social media, and the internet. So I read books by different people who espoused this idea of getting rid of your technology. Technology is the problem, go on a digital detox, that’s the typical advice. And I did that. I got myself a flip phone on Alibaba that could only make and receive calls and text messages. I also got a 1990s word processor that had no internet connection, and I thought, “Okay, great. I got rid of the apps—no internet. I’m going to be focused, and nothing is going to distract me. But there’s that book that I’ve been meaning to do some research into. Let me just give that a quick perusal. Oh, the trash needs to be taken out. Oh, geez, my desk is a mess. I should sort up the things on my desk.” What I noticed was that I kept getting distracted. At the end of the day, distraction is not a new problem. Facebook, iPhones or the internet didn’t invent distraction. In fact, 2,500 years before the internet, Plato, the Greek philosopher, talked about “*akrasia*” in the Greek, which means the tendency to do things against our better interest. Plato was getting distracted 2,500 years before these modern technologies!

What I eventually discovered was that the problem is much deeper than just blaming the latest technology. And that’s why I wanted to dive deeper, not just into technology distraction (of course, we need to deal with distraction that comes from technology), but into other relevant aspects.

Q Could you define what distraction means?

A The best way to understand distraction is to understand what distraction is not. Most people will tell you the opposite of distraction is ‘focus’, but that’s not exactly true. The opposite of distraction is ‘traction’. If you look at the origin of these words, both traction and distraction come from the same Latin root ‘*trahere*’, which means to pull. Both words also end in the same six letters: A-C-T-I-O-N. So traction, by definition, is any action that pulls us towards what we want. Things that pull us towards our values and that help us become the person we want to become are all acts of traction.

Any action that is not aligned with our values and pulls us farther away from the person we want to become is a distraction. So, understanding this dichotomy is incredibly important. This isn’t just some fancy wordplay; it’s fundamental to understanding what distraction is, because by definition, anything that you decide in advance with forethought, with intent, is fine. There’s nothing evil about scrolling Facebook or watching a YouTube video or messaging your family on WhatsApp. None of these things is bad if you use them on your schedule, because when you plan for them, you turn distraction into traction.

I will also argue that anything can be a distraction as well. How many times have you sat at your desk thinking, “Okay, now I’m going to get to work. I’m not going to let anything get in my way. I have to work on that project. But first, let me clear my inbox or finish a few things on my to-do list.” I used to do it, and I thought I was productive. What I didn’t realize was that I was allowing distraction to trick me into prioritising the urgent at the expense of the important, because I was thinking, “Oh, I’m doing something work-related. I’m checking email.

I’m doing to-dos on my to-do list.” But if that’s not what you plan to do with your time, it is just as much of a distraction as playing video games or scrolling Facebook.

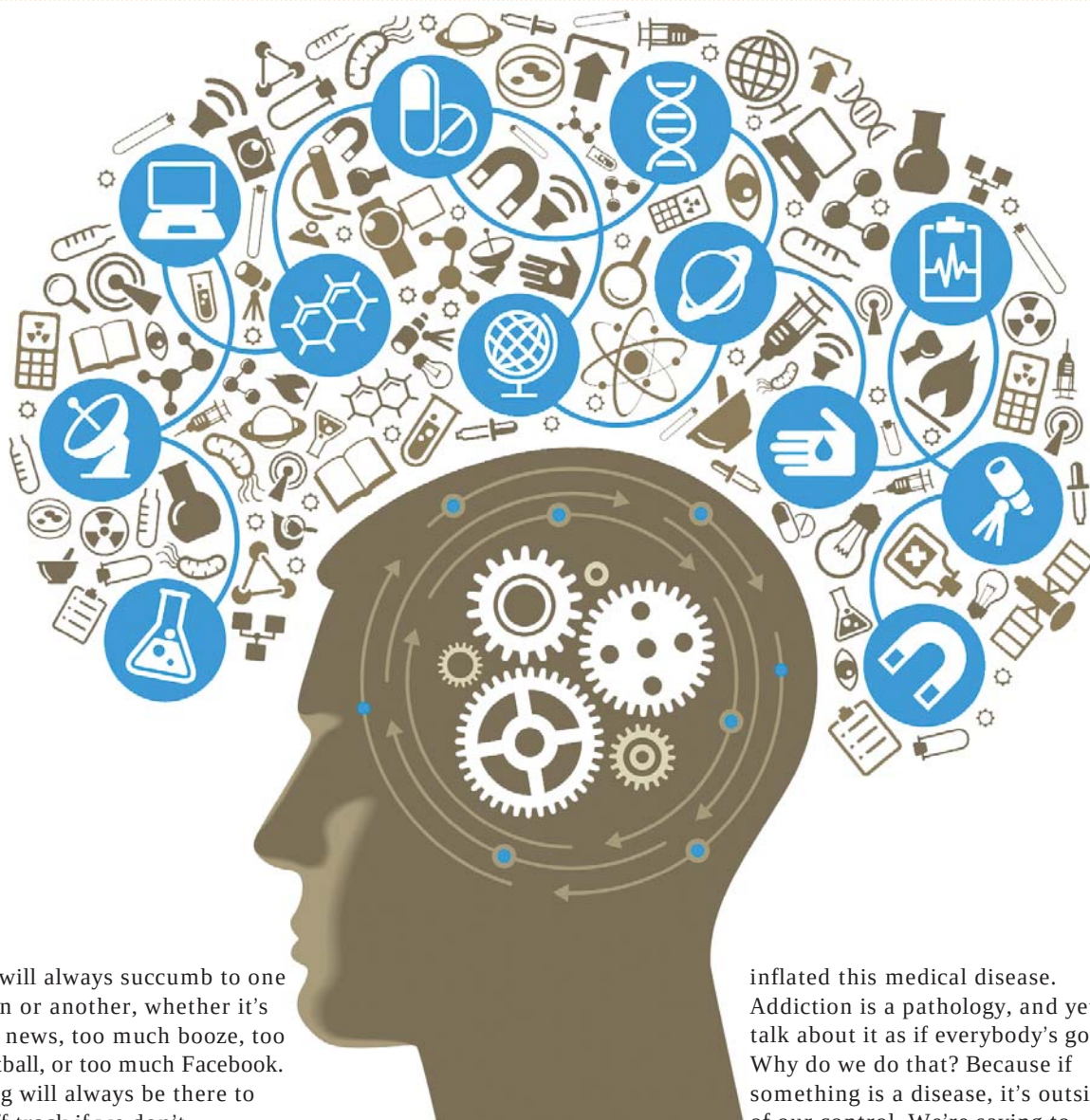
“The leading cause of distraction is not what is happening outside of us. Rather, distraction begins from within.”

Q If technology is not the problem, what are the root causes of distraction, and what’s the best way to cope with the intense urges to check our devices every now and then?

A There are two types of triggers: internal and external. If it’s the pings, the dings, the rings, or anything in your outside environment that leads you to some sort of action, those are external triggers. That’s what we tend to blame, right? When we get distracted, we say, “Oh, it was my phone, it was this, it was that,” things outside of me. But what I discovered in my five years of research is that the leading cause of distraction is not what is happening outside of us. Rather, distraction begins from within.

Most distraction in our day-to-day lives is not caused by external triggers. It is, in fact, caused by the internal triggers which are uncomfortable emotional states that we seek to escape from, such as boredom, loneliness, fatigue, stress, uncertainty, etc. All of these uncomfortable sensations are the root causes of distraction.

Fundamentally, time management is pain management. If we don’t understand the uncomfortable sensation that we seek to escape



from, we will always succumb to one distraction or another, whether it's too much news, too much booze, too much football, or too much Facebook. Something will always be there to take us off track if we don't understand why we are looking to escape, why can't we sit with our children without checking our device, why can't we do our work without constantly wanting to see what's in our email inbox, why can't we be alone with ourselves without constantly needing to take our mind somewhere else? We have to begin here.

The good news is that anyone can learn the tactics to become undistractable, and it starts with mastering the internal triggers. I teach people some simple techniques that they can use, so that the habitual response to discomfort is not reaching for something to take our mind off of our problems, but rather being comfortable with

discomfort, and knowing how to sit with that feeling so that it leads us towards traction rather than a distraction.

Q You ask people to be careful of using the term “addiction” and how it disempowers us. Could you talk a little bit about that?

A Addiction is one of those terms that gets thrown around much too often. Today, everybody seems to be getting addicted to everything. For instance, just the other day, I saw a restaurant menu that read, “Danger, addictive food.” My wife recently got a box of shoes that read, “Caution, addictive contents inside.” We’ve

inflated this medical disease. Addiction is a pathology, and yet we talk about it as if everybody's got it. Why do we do that? Because if something is a disease, it's outside of our control. We're saying to ourselves that we can't do anything about it and that it's not our fault. However, often, it isn't really an addiction; it's a distraction. But when you call it a distraction, you think, “Oh, a distraction. Now I got to do something about that. That's no fun. Can't I just blame somebody else? Can't I blame the tech company for this?” No.

Just like with alcohol, some people really are addicted to technology. But not everybody who has a beer with dinner is an alcoholic. There are single-digit percentages of people who are addicted to alcohol, and it's the same thing with technology. The vast majority of us are not addicted; we are simply distracted. We need to

stop over-using the word “addiction” because when we misuse that term, we are doing exactly what tech companies want. They want us to believe we’re powerless. They want us to justify the behaviour we know is not good for us by saying, “We don’t have any responsibility, we don’t have any power. This is outside of our control.” That is not true and not helpful.

“Distraction in the workplace is a symptom of cultural dysfunction.”

Q Your book describes a four-part research-backed model that sets out how to become indistractable. Could you briefly explain how each step in this framework can help overcome distractions?

A Of the four parts to becoming indistractable, the first is to **master the internal triggers**, which we talked about earlier. We have to start with those uncomfortable emotional states and build new habits and routines around how we deal with that discomfort in a healthy way.

Step two is about **making time for traction**. You can’t call something a distraction unless you know what it distracted you from. I work with many people who tell me how distracted they are, how the world is pulling them in all directions, and they can’t get anything done. When asked, “Well, what did you plan to do with your day? What did you get distracted from?” they say, “I don’t know. I didn’t plan my day. I don’t keep a calendar.” If you don’t keep a calendar, you can’t complain. You have no right to say you got distracted if you don’t know what you got distracted from. I used to do this. I used to keep a to-do list. And as it turns out, studies find that a to-

do list is just about the worst thing you can do for your personal productivity. It makes us miserable and teaches us that it’s okay not to finish what we say we’re going to do. We have to stop running our day with to-do lists and instead use calendars and schedules made in advance to help us become indistractable.

Step three is about **hacking back the external triggers**. This is where we get down to brass tacks. How do you hack back your smartphone, feeds, notifications, emails, group messages, and the biggest time-waster of all, meetings? How do you hack back when you’re trying to work at home, and your kid decides to come into the room where you’re working to interrupt you? A key to hacking back external triggers, the things in your environment that can lead you towards distraction, is to ask whether that trigger is serving you, or are you serving it.

The fourth step is to **prevent distraction with pacts**. Pacts are promises that we make to ourselves, to technology or other people in a way that provides a backstop, a line of last defence, a firewall so that when everything else fails, there is something to defend us from getting distracted.

To become indistractable, you have to use all of the four techniques. If you just use one, you’re not done, you’re just getting started. I teach you exactly how to do it. It sounds hard, but it’s not.

“Time management is pain management.”

Q On the workplace front too, we have sort of a love-hate relationship with technology. Interestingly, while writing your book, you visited Slack and observed that despite it being a technology company, the employees of Slack did not

have much of a problem with technology distractions. Could you elaborate on that experience and also the attributes of an indistractable workplace?

A My assumption was that the more a company uses technology, the more of an always-on culture they would have. Isn’t it the technology that’s constantly keeping us chained to our workplace? Well, not exactly. What I discovered was that distraction in the workplace is a symptom of cultural dysfunction. The real problem of technology distraction at work is that we can’t talk about those issues.

If you work at a company where you’re afraid to speak up and talk about this problem, I got news for you. Your biggest problem is not technology distraction. You got all kinds of other skeletons in the closet that people don’t want to talk about because what I found in my research is that there are three attributes of a company that provides an indistractable workplace environment. One, they give you psychological safety. They make it okay to talk about a problem without fear of getting fired. Two, they get a forum to talk about these issues. At Slack, for example, they actually use Slack channels to talk about all kinds of issues within the company, and workplace distraction is just one of many issues. When you give people the place or the forum to talk about these concerns without fear of getting fired, guess what happens. You solve these problems because they’re just like any company problem. There are lots of solutions out there; we just need to start the conversation.

The third attribute of a company that provides indistractable work environment is that leadership exemplifies what it means to be indistractable. For instance, when I walked into Slack headquarters, I was shocked to find that in the middle of this multibillion-dollar company in Silicon Valley, there was a motto written on the wall in



bright, pink neon letters that you can't miss. It said, "Work hard and go home." And everybody in the company, from Stewart Butterfield on down, knows that this is an important attribute and one of their values. They lead by example. When you go into a meeting with your manager at Slack, they're not talking on their phone because they want to show you how important you are. They give you their full attention and hold a meeting without devices so that you know that they are fully present with you. They respect people's time. When someone marks on Slack that they are not to be disturbed, they respect that. So distraction isn't a technology problem. In fact, the technology provides much of the solution.

When you have a toxic work environment, and you add all kinds of technologies to it, then you get a terrible situation. The technology can certainly be a catalyst to make things worse, but it's not the root cause of the problem. It's a deeper cultural issue when people don't work in an indistractable workplace. But the good news is culture can fix this. Cultures can change.

Q Many leaders have an open-door policy where employees feel welcome to ask questions or share feedback. While the goals are noble, there are several disadvantages to this, too, such as productivity losses and employees becoming overly dependent on management for making

decisions and solving problems. From your viewpoint, how could leaders maintain all the benefits of the open-door policy without it being a productivity killer?

A In addition to the frequent interruptions for the manager, the biggest issue is that we begin to rely upon someone else to think for us. The problem I think most managers face, especially since many people aren't now working in offices, is that people email you every five minutes. Why? Because they don't want to think. They want you to think for them. And every time you impulsively feel like you have to answer that email and the next and so on, you are essentially training them to believe that they are incapable of making decisions on their own, of thinking for themselves. When you enable that, it's easy to offload. Humans are cognitive misers. We don't like to think. It takes energy; it takes work; why would I do something that requires effort? Let somebody else do it. That's what your employees are doing to you if they're constantly sending you messages saying, "Is this okay, boss? What about this boss? What about that?" So, what you want to do essentially is to slow that down.

Don't make your availability at any time, e.g., "Reach out to me whenever you want; you've got my cell phone number, and you've got my email, 24/7." Instead, if you find that you're getting too many of these one-off requests—whether it's in the office, somebody's knocking on your

door too often, or you're getting too many emails—what you could reply with is this: "These questions that you have, if you can't figure these out for yourself, and they're still pertinent, please combine, and we'll discuss." You can hop onto a Zoom call and say, "Look, hey, every day from 4:30 to 5:30 or whatever, I'm going to be in Zoom. If you need me to pop in, we can talk live." This way, people know to not ping you every five minutes, but instead, to wait for a little while so that they can get access to you regarding the questions they can't solve for themselves.

Why is this so effective? Not only are you not interrupted throughout your day, but you're adding a bit of friction. Today, it's too easy to make your problem someone else's problem. So, what you want to do is to add some friction, make it a little bit more difficult and costly to pass the buck. This way, they now know and are thinking to themselves, "Oh, I sent him an email, but he's not going to reply right away. He's going to tell me to wait until Thursday. Maybe I should figure this out on my own." **HC**

To know more about Nir and his book 'Indistractable', visit: NirAndFar.com/Indistractable

Google Rolls Out Kormo Jobs App In India

BY ANUSHRUTI SINGH

Google has launched its job-listing app Kormo Jobs in India to boost employment opportunity.

The Kormo Jobs app was first introduced in Bangladesh in 2018, and then was expanded to Indonesia in 2019.

The application will help users to identify entry-level job opportunities and also to learn new skills and create resumes.



Last year, the tech giant brought an initial experience of Kormo Jobs to the Indian market

through a Jobs Spot section on Google Pay. As per the company, through the Google Pay integration, employers including Dunzo and Zomato were able to post more than 20 lakh verified jobs. There are, however, no details about how many people were able to receive employment from those listings.

Nevertheless, Google is now rebranding the Jobs Spot on Google Pay to Kormo Jobs in a bid to provide a consistent experience for users. **HC**

Life Insurance Scheme For Cantonment Employees

BY ANUSHRUTI SINGH

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh has launched life insurance scheme "Chhavni COVID: Yodha Sanrakshan Yojana", that will provide a cover of Rs five lakhs each employee working in cantonment areas across India.



A group life insurance scheme through the Life Insurance Corporation (LIC), was launched by the minister during a webinar attended by presidents, vice-presidents and chief executive officers of all 62 cantonment boards.

The life insurance scheme will benefit more than 10,000 employees in all 62 cantonment boards in the event of any unfortunate fatal calamity with an insurance cover of Rs five lakhs each.

According to a statement by the Ministry of Defence, the scheme will benefit permanent and contractual employees, including doctors, paramedics and sanitation staff.

"Citing welfare schemes like Ayushman Bharat, Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, Smart Cities Mission, mid-day meal scheme for school children etc, Singh said there should be no gaps in implementation of these welfare schemes in cantonment areas". **HC**

LinkedIn Reveals Most Popular Courses Of 2020

BY ANUSHRUTI SINGH

LinkedIn has announced the Most Popular Courses list in India shedding a light how its members are investing their time learning online.

As per the data the members on the platform have continued with their learning journey post the pandemic and online learning and upskilling continues to show an uptick in demand. In India, there has been an increase of 245% in the number of hours spent on learning from July 2019 to June



2020, compared to the same period a year before.

The top ten courses professionals are seeking the most in India are

Learning Python, Time Management: Working from Home, Strategic Thinking, Writing a Resume, Excel Essential Training (Office 365), Cert Prep: Project Management Professional (PMP)®, Remote Work Foundations Tips for Working Remotely, Python Essential Training, and Communicating with Confidence.

The stats also revealed that LinkedIn members spent over 420K hours learning in July 2020 alone, compared to 97K in July 2019 in India. **HC**



Can We Build Our Future Without A Foundation?

BY SWARNA SUDHA SELVARAJ

“Until you make the unconscious conscious, it will direct your life, and you will call it fate.” — C.G. Jung

IMPORTANT LESSON FROM OUR PAST

Back in the school days, when our teacher asked us to read one paragraph from the textbook, most (if not all) of us counted the students ahead of us in the seating order. We then quickly calculated the paragraph that we might have to read based on the number of students with an objective to prepare well. Instead of listening to the student reading their paragraph aloud, we kept practising our paragraph, in order to read well when our turn came. It was never hit-or-miss; it was always a hit because we got well prepared. Isn't this a practical example of how we were becoming future-fit in just a few minutes back in the day?

In fact, this is where many of us might have learnt the importance of becoming future-ready. Though we might not have consciously articulated it, we have it in us (if we are aware) to be prepared. Awareness is the foundation for planning actions that lead us to automatically analyse further, fill the gaps as required, apply the learning where appropriate, and sculpt a better future.

THE CURRENT JOLT

The pandemic struck when we were not expecting it. There have been



revelations for individuals, organisations and even governments on how prepared they were for the future. But we now have the awareness that is the basic requirement to become future-fit. There are clear steps that an individual, an organisation or a government could take today to be ready for the future. Some of those are discussed below.

INDIVIDUAL FITNESS

Aim to be adaptable and agile:

Just like physical fitness, skill fitness cannot be achieved overnight. It requires consistent and continuous efforts. For young

children and those yet to start employment, basic education is a must to build a strong foundation. For those who are ready for employment or are already employed, on-the-job education is key. Adaptability, a continuous learning mindset, and avoiding falling prey to comfortable jobs that do not provide a broad scope of challenges are essential to success. Technology platforms offer great opportunities for continuous skill development.

Stretch Yourself:

As the pace at which change is happening keeps increasing by the day, your industry-specific technical

skills will have an even shorter shelf-life, and it goes without saying that you must engage in continuous learning to address your skill gaps and stay ahead of the curve. However, long-term success is found by reaching beyond your comfort zone. For instance, your current role may not require much interaction with others, but your next career advancement might need a lot of people management and communication. Work on building these skills early on.

Also, don't limit yourself to your current area of expertise. Develop skills in the fields similar to yours or in areas that pique your interest. The idea is that you do your best work today while also upgrading yourself and creating options in case your role disappears tomorrow. Extending learning beyond your current expertise is a good insurance policy if things start to go bad. As Scott Adams says, "Every skill you acquire doubles your odds of success." Moreover, if you pick up these new skills based on your "Champtency"—a term that I refer to as the "natural strength of an individual"—your future fitness level would be even higher.

“Awareness is the foundation for planning actions that lead us to automatically analyse further, fill the gaps as required, apply the learning where appropriate, and sculpt a better future.”

ORGANISATIONAL FITNESS

Make Employee Learning Top of Mind:

Some organisations are still far behind in democratising learning,

despite its potential as an important investment for becoming future-fit. Providing the right technology platform for learning with clear career paths would enable continuous learning for employees and keep them future-fit. Many IT organisations are providing 24/7, hands-on learning opportunities for employees to make sure that they can learn any new technology on-the-go and deliver results quickly. Those organisations that do not invest in such platforms might be left behind in this ever-changing scenario.

Adjust Employer Branding To Changing Times:

Organisations must replace old ways of employee branding with “in-the-moment” strategies. Recent data from LinkedIn reveals that COVID-related posts that talked about how companies helped their workforce during the crisis and went an extra mile to support the broader community drove the highest degree of engagement among users. Looking towards the future, it will become imperative for organisations to tell more stories that are authentic, empathetic, and reflect their values and purpose as something beyond empty catchphrases.

Keep D&I High on the Agenda:

With many employees working from home, one silver lining in the ongoing pandemic is that organisations have been able to tap diverse talent pools, such as people with disabilities, new parents or caregivers who require flexibility. While remote working is not a panacea for all diversity-related concerns within organisations, businesses that sustain the momentum of leveraging diversity and inclusion in new ways will undoubtedly have a competitive edge going forward.

GOVERNMENT FITNESS

For governments across the globe, especially of the developing and under-developed countries, their

future is the younger generation. Education is an important aspect for future generations, and the pandemic has posed challenges that need to be managed in a phased manner. These countries are not fully prepared for online education.

Many children who are from rural backgrounds and/or from lower economic strata are unfamiliar with online education. Now that we have an awareness of such a challenge, it is best to prepare for a blended model of education with a clear vision of how infrastructure and motivation can be provided to students and teachers to adopt blended learning instead of 100% traditional brick-and-mortar learning models. This would pave the way for countries to become future-ready.

“Extending learning beyond your current expertise is a good insurance policy if things start to go bad.”

IMPORTANT LESSON FOR THE FUTURE

Accepting technology as a resource and learning to coexist with machines could be a great way of helping individuals, organisations, and governments become fit for the future. 

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 17 years of work experience gained from association with Tata Consultancy Services and Murugappa Group of Companies.



Design For Impact

The way in which a Learning module is designed has a telling impact on the participants. Therefore, this is an opportunity the Designer and Facilitator cannot afford to miss.

BY **DIPANKAR DAS**

Nothing is flatter than a flat joke. And no one wishes to narrate such jokes. Designing effective Learning is somewhat similar. It always runs the risk of falling flat. And if that is the case, then the consequences may not be a joke. However, designing an interesting and effective module is not everyone's cup of tea. Though Learning 'Content' is available everywhere, truly effective 'Content' is in short supply.

Ineffective Training often leaves the participant with the same feeling as she gets when she emerges from viewing a monotonous film – bored, drained and regretting the money and time spent on the film. When a participant emerges with such a feeling, it is the death knell of that Training, the Trainer and indeed that department or the Training consultancy. Needless to say, no one wants to be in those shoes.

A Wonderful Learning Experience

Instead, when you emerge from viewing a brilliant film such as *Jaws* by Steven Spielberg or *Pather Panchali* by Satyajit Ray, you emerge with thoughts and introspection. The few hours that you spent seeing the movie, somehow touched you, made you think, held out a slice of life experience, which you learn from, run over and over in your mind and may even resolve to do something as a result. Effective Learning is similar. It leaves you charged, excited and rearing to implement some of the new things you have learnt as a result.

Following the Design

Having done an effective Training Needs Identification (TNI), and zeroed into the key learning gaps that need to be addressed, it is essential to develop solutions around those gaps. Just as a building construction plan starts with a design plan, a Learning Design starts with the Learning Objectives. The Learning Objectives need to be drafted well. Needless to say, they need to be closed-ended and stated in a SMART way. The Performance that is being aimed for, the criteria of success and conditions under which the performance will be achieved, need to be mentioned, so that the Designers know what needs to be achieved at the end of the session or programme.

The bane of most Training is that it is left open-ended. Hence behavioural Training exudes a soft fuzzy feeling but rarely gets tested, while product or process Learning gets tested by abilities on the production floor which may be a bit too late to test. Remember, Training time is like a sacred space. It is here the employee needs are to be baptised with the right knowledge and practice. Making up for knowledge and practice gaps later during production is very difficult.

Learning Quotient

So, be it behavioural or hard skills, the participant should feel the urgency to learn, unlearn and relearn in this space. Far too often, the Learning phase is seen as a soft landing for new employees, before they

“Effective Learning is similar to watching a brilliant film. It leaves you charged, excited and rearing to implement some of the new things you have learnt as a result.”

“Designing a learning module is similar to being a writer or an architect. You need to think through the message you want to impart, the learning participants need to imbibe and the outcome that is to be delivered.”

get into the rut of real performance. But ironically, if we take the Learning phase as a real challenge and work seriously to enhance their abilities, chances are that the performing phase will be easier to manage and even lead. When the Duke of Wellington was asked how he managed to defeat the legendary Napoleon, he said that the seeds of success were sown in the playfields of Eton School, where he had studied. Indeed, the way we learn braces us for success or cripples us for life.

Getting into the ‘Zone’

The first hour of the Training session is very important. It is a challenging moment - you need to lay down the ground rules at the cost of sounding pompous, and at the same time, establish a climate of learning, mutual support and establish the credibility of the Facilitator. It is also the time when you assure the participants of the psychological safety of the Learning environment, which is important for everyone to learn freely, ask honest questions and not hide behind a façade of being knowledgeable, while churning doubts and insecurities in their mind. Often in Training parlance, it is known as getting the participant ‘into the zone’. Being in the ‘zone’ means not just comfortable and looking forward to learn, but someone whose curiosity has been heightened and is eager to go the whole hog to undergo the journey of transformation that good learning entails.

Ice-breakers are a great help in enabling participants to get into the ‘zone’. However, while designing, a delicate balance needs to be maintained between entertainment and learning, the blend of which is now famously christened ‘edutainment’. If the Energizer is a lot of fun, but unrelated to the content of the Learning session, then you run the risk of participants having a lot of fun and then reluctantly returning to the learning session for serious learning. Instead, the subject has to be blended into the energizers. For example, for Introductions, Facilitators often play ‘Two Truths

and One Lie’. If the session is on financial management, then the truths and the lies about the Individual could be around his or her saving habits, their first earning and so forth. It would set the context for the financial learning that participants would undergo.

Good Design

Designing a learning module is similar to being a writer or an architect. You need to think through the message you want to impart, the learning participants need to imbibe and the outcome that is to be delivered. Some key considerations would be how you time and schedule sections and sub-sections, sequencing of the learning, how will participants apply their learning or learn through experience and how can all of this be varied. These are concerns that need addressing for good design.

Presentation Mode

Let us start with the default mode, which is the Presentation Mode in a Lecture format. The Facilitator opens up the Presentation starts to share his perspective on the topic. Well, such days are thankfully numbered, because now the attention span of the audience is shrinking and it is important for the presentation to be varied with panel discussions, role-plays, storytelling, debates and discussions and Experiential Learning Activities or ELAs.

Why do we need to vary the modes and how can we do that? To know that, wait for the next issue. 

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.



ROHAN LELE

Feedback: The Cornerstone Of Performance

While most organisations focus on role clarity, goal setting and recognition, they often miss out on creating a culture where a two-way candid and constructive performance dialogue occurs between the Leader and his team.

Performance is the action or the process of performing an assigned task, activity or function. As professionals, we are more focused on the Goal or the end result. Our brains are wired to constantly focus on the goal/target achievement. Many professionals and leaders would counter, 'Is it wrong to remain focused on the Goal?'

In my opinion, the focus must shift from the Goal to the process of achieving that Goal. I accept the fact that nothing great has ever been achieved without a strong desire or a fire in the belly to achieve it and believe there must be one to achieve something great or outstanding. While one must have a strong desire to achieve the Goal, the focus must be on the process rather than the 'Goal' in itself i.e. how does one achieve it?

As we say in the world of manufacturing, the quality of the final product (output) depends on the raw materials and an efficient manufacturing process (input). Similar is the case with IT and the other sectors. This clearly shows the importance of the 'right' input to achieve the 'desired' output. The aforesaid is true for professionals in every walk of life. In the corporate world, our output i.e. performance, depends on several inputs i.e. role clarity, goal setting, work environment, recognition at work, inner motivation, performance

feedback and many more. While most organisations focus on role clarity, goal setting and recognition, they often miss out on creating a culture where a two-way candid and constructive performance dialogue occurs between the Leader and his team members.

In my own experience, I have seen how spending quality time by way of a performance dialogue has enabled members of my team to perform better and improve continually. This, in my opinion, is the most under-rated, and yet, the most important input for achieving great performance.

Here are a few mantras for the Corporate Leaders on how performance dialogue can be made effective and enable teams to continually improve and raise performance benchmarks!

“Spending quality time by way of a performance dialogue indeed helps individuals to perform better and improve continually. This is possibly the most under-rated, and yet, the most important input for achieving great performance.”

Be CANDID

Being candid is about being honest, straight forward, outspoken, and frank. This is a must to make the performance dialogue truly effective. More often than not, many leaders try not to be straightforward, frank, and honest as they feel that the individual might feel hurt and do not wish that becomes the reason for an individual to feel bad or hurt them. But we do not realise that by not being honest and candid, we are not really helping our team members. In fact, we are adversely impacting their performance since they would never realise where they are wrong or what needs to be corrected. Thus, in order to help individuals improve, it is really important to be candid and honest.

Your INTENT Matters

However, just being candid does not help! It must be backed by a 'genuine' intent to help others. Leaders often say, what if an individual is hurt or demotivated because of my candid feedback? Well here's the answer! If as a Leader, a candid feedback is backed with the positive intent of helping the individual to improve and get better, rather than a platform to only find faults and criticise, the individual receiving the feedback would never take it the other way.

As a Leader, one must be careful about the body language and the



words must be so chosen that they should genuinely ooze out care, concern and positive intent for the individual, and this will always work a great deal. While an individual may be slightly disappointed for being unable to achieve the expected level of performance, he/she would take your feedback in a positive light and work on it to improve. Remember, it is just not about 'what is being said', rather 'how it is being said'.

Performance feedback is an ART!

In cricket, a bowler changes his bowling strategy depending on the batsman to whom he is bowling. Likewise, in a business environment, the marketing and advertising strategy is altered on the basis of the product, market, demographics and a whole lot of other variables. Similar is the case with performance feedback. Performance feedback is an 'ART' and hence one needs to learn, practice and ultimately perfect it!

Many Leaders end up using the same approach while providing performance feedback for all performers. Most often, Leaders do not realise that the same approach of giving a feedback does not work with all kinds of performers, and they end up giving feedback as a mere mechanical process because they have a mandate for it. This truly hurts, and in fact, ends up demoralising many in the team.

An organisation typically has three types of performers i.e. low,

solid and outstanding. It is important for a Leader to approach the feedback differently depending upon the type of performer. While a low performer should be given a 'prescriptive feedback', a solid performer should be given a 'constructive feedback', whereas an outstanding performer must be provided with 'words of motivation and a reinforcing feedback'. Remember, 'one size, fits all' never works!

“While a low performer should be given a ‘prescriptive feedback’, a solid performer should be given a ‘constructive feedback’, whereas an outstanding performer must be provided with ‘words of motivation and a reinforcing feedback’.”

Make it REAL TIME

Many organisations have a culture of giving feedback once or twice a year. However, if we were to go by the statistics, this clearly does not work. Organisations have begun to realise the value of giving real-time feedback, and hence, it is being advocated by several companies. It is better that feedback is given on the go or more real-time rather

than wait for an appraisal cycle to happen.

Datapoints available on the internet mention that inadequate or no time-based feedback leads to high employee turnover and disengagement respectively. Real-time feedback provides employees with sufficient time to think, reflect and act to improve their performance, and thereby, push them to do better each day at work. As has been said in the beginning, performance feedback is a very critical input for achieving the desired level of output. Let us hone the art of giving a feedback to perfect it! **HC**

Note:- Views expressed in this Article are the personal views of the author and do not represent the views of Atul Ltd.

About the Author

Rohan Lele is Head – L&D and Employee Care, Atul Limited. He comes with an experience of 15 years and has worked with both Indian and Multinational companies in various HR roles in India and Asia Pacific. Rohan Lele has completed his Masters in Human Resources Management from the Faculty of Social Work, M. S. University of Baroda is currently pursuing his Doctoral Programme (PhD) in Human Resource Management.



Journey Mapping and Personas

The COVID-19 pandemic has come about at the opportune moment for organisations to recognise the fact that they need an engaged and committed workforce to realise their vision.

BY AMOL GUPTA

“An employee journey map demonstrates an employee's experience in a visually diagrammatical way in the organisation across different stages of the employee life cycle.”

The global business landscape is going through a rapid change. An increasing number of organisations are now adopting customer-centric business strategies to provide end customers with utmost satisfaction and ensure long-term brand loyalty. However, companies often tend to overlook the fact that their employees are their most significant assets and one of the most critical stakeholders through whom they need to ensure the successful implementation of their customer-focused initiatives. The COVID-19 pandemic has therefore come about at the opportune moment for organisations to recognise the fact that they need an engaged and committed workforce to realise their vision.

Can the principles of ensuring customer satisfaction by studying the customer experience journeys be applied to employees as well; to motivate them, boost their morale, and inspire them to commit fully to the cause of achieving business excellence? Enter employee journey mapping.

Employee journey mapping

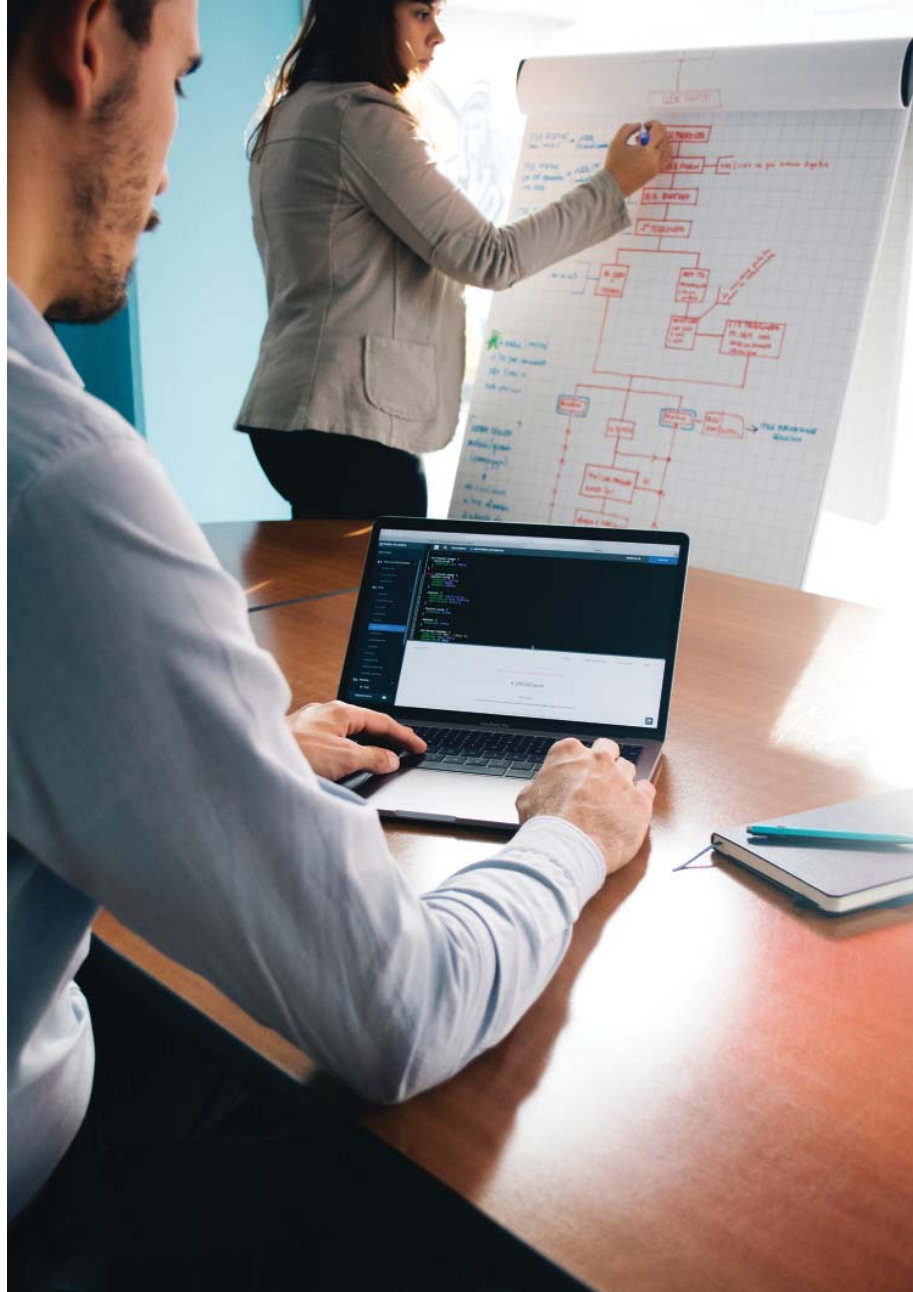
The journey of an employee entails end-to-end experiences acquired by him/her during the entire duration of the time spent in a job - from applying for it until leaving the organisation. Employee journey mapping refers to the practice of visually representing the entirety of an employee's journey. An employee journey map demonstrates an employee's experience in a visually

diagrammatical way at the organisation across different stages of the employee life cycle. It comprises of memorable experiences such as the first day of work, first performance review, certain professional milestones and so on.

Like customer journey mapping, employee journey mapping is the process of understanding an employee's journey, expectations, and experiences from the company. It helps employers to understand the workforce's responses and emotional reactions at different moments in their professional journey. Such an understanding enables them to maximise experiences that elicited a positive response from the employees and improve employee engagement. Most importantly, it also helps them in assessing situations that have led to possible discomfort, stress, or anxiety to an employee and provides an opportunity to alleviate it and work towards minimising recurrences. Employee journey mapping is primarily a business process that helps companies to assess the impact of moments that mattered to an employee and enhance employee satisfaction.

Measuring employee experience

This is particularly helpful in those industries that struggle with a high attrition rate. Measuring employee experience with the aid of a visual map is a win-win for employers and employees as employers can improve employee retention strategies and reduce attrition. Even if an employee



employees and creating employee personas. Journey mapping entails collecting and analysing information about their experiences at different stages of interaction with the organisation. Journey maps are best created for specific employee personas. Employee personas are fictional characters designed to help organisations and talent management teams understand the likes & dislikes, the challenges, thoughts, motivations, behaviours, goals, and aspirations of employees. (Source – Gartner)

Every business has a unique environment - socially as well as psychologically. Organisational culture encompasses the values and behaviours that constitute such an environment. The concept of organisational culture was first introduced by Dr Elliott Jaques in his book *The Changing Culture of a Factory* in 1951. The idea that organisations not only have very differing cultures, but also unique subcultures was further proposed by Schein (1992), Deal and Kennedy (2000), and Kotter (1992).

According to Flamholtz and Randle (2011), organisation culture can be viewed as a 'corporate personality' consisting of values, beliefs, and norms. These values hold the power to influence the behaviour of employees.

If you are looking to identify the current state of organisational culture and create a roadmap for the future state of culture, it is recommended that employee journey mapping and employee personas be put to use. This should be followed by putting together a framework to define the 'why, who, when, what and how' of the desired work culture/future mapping. Besides providing clarity, it will also simplify the complexities of breaking down work culture under the lens of personas.

3 steps to employee journey maps

There are three steps to create Employee Journey Maps –

- Identify
- Map the Journey
- Create an action plan

decides to quit the company, the information gathered from the exit interview can help employers identify the point at which the said employee decided to move on from her current organisation, and thereafter, examine the reasons that motivated her to do so.

Incidentally, noteworthy moments may not always imply significant events or milestones or the outcome of critical initiatives. It can also indicate small yet meaningful moments such as interpersonal interactions among employees that have had a profound impact on them. By studying them, employers can introduce initiatives that promote better employee collaborations.

Employee journey mapping generally begins by segmenting



“Businesses that tap into the potential of employee journey mapping can build powerful employee engagement strategies that can help them feel valued at an organisation.”

Be mindful of the pitfalls such as mapping only to what directly connects with HR activities or processes. Another mistake to avoid is not having an accompanying narrative. One should look more broadly and not just at HR or other select functions. It is imperative to share a compelling story and visual with the audience that highlights the recommended next steps.

Also, let us take the scenario of a fresher in a company, and how personas can be utilised to cognise and map their journey in the format of experience. If the plan is to improve their experience on their first day at work, we must identify what matters to them on their first day, their expectations, their job roles and responsibilities, the people they are interacting with, and what this employee is thinking and feeling. We need to clarify the employee pain points as well as the potential improvement opportunities. Thereafter, we need to estimate strategies for reducing pain points and focus on streamlining integration. Similarly, this could be used across various employee life cycles, which leads to overall culture building in an organisation.

Lastly, we must continue to refresh personas on a regular basis to focus

on behaviour, emotion, and pattern, validate it and test with employees from time to time. We also need to update the employee personas based on changing business and People Strategy needs.

Businesses that tap into the potential of employee journey mapping can build powerful employee engagement strategies that can help them feel valued at an organisation. This will not only lead to increased efficiency and productivity, but also an increased rate of retention of the best talents by creating an ecosystem that prioritises positive employee experiences. Great customer experience begins internally, with satisfied employees. 

About the Author

Amol Gupta is Chief Human Resources Officer, India & Philippines, FIS. With an overall experience of 23 years in Human Resource Management he has held different positions at Barclays Technology Center India, SunGard, Infosys BPO, Lupin Ltd. and a few others. Amol, an alumnus of UC Berkeley Extension, SIMS, Symbiosis Law College and Delhi University and has additional certifications like SPHR, HRMP and SHRM – SCP.



City, Citizens And the Corporate Culture

For an organisation that takes pride in harnessing synergy from a diverse workforce across the globe, it is important to have a fine blend of people and their vibrant culture in building one's organisational values.

BY KESHAV SRIDHAR



Do you remember the TV serial *Gul, Gulshan, Gulfam* that was telecast on Doordarshan during the 90s? If you are a Millennial, you would obviously have an 'oh really!' kind of reaction to this question!

FYI, it was one among the many good programmes to watch out for during those good old days. And the reason for bringing this up is because – is the title of this write-up not sounding similar to this TV series? However, I am not sure to what extent the titles are synonymous to each other!

Well, each of us strives for a *Swachh*, safe, prosperous and a beautiful place to live. Whether it is our home, locality, city or the workplace, we take pride in the association that we develop over a period of time with the place and the people around us. Every city has a unique culture and its people form an integral part of the distinct identity of that city. One may interact with people from two different cities from the same MNC and you will definitely identify the unique flavour of each of the locations, which is treasured by the organisation.

People define culture

People make an organisation, and the city in which it has pinned its location has a major contribution in shaping up the overall organisational culture. Hence, while recruiting Talent and facilitating Training programmes in your company, it is very critical to have an understanding of the different regions, the people and their culture. And, if your organisation does not embrace and reflect the local culture, then it will not strike a good chord with the folks of that region.

Also, for an organisation that takes pride in harnessing synergy from a diverse workforce across the globe, it is important to have a fine blend of people and their vibrant culture in

“If your organisation does not embrace and reflect the local culture, then it will not strike a good chord with the folks of that region.”

building one's organisational values. A company which cannot celebrate its people, is not an 'organisation' in its true sense.

Let us take the example of Bengaluru and Hyderabad. Though both of them have always been contenders in the race to be India's Number One IT Hub, both of them have had a very healthy competition with mutual admiration for each other. The workforce of *Namma Bengaluru* and *Mana Hyderabad* have definitely influenced and contributed to the vibrancy of the workplaces in these regions, just like any other region in the world. Let us understand the people from these two major IT hubs in our country.

Namma Bengaluru

1. Karnataka has an extraordinary speciality; apart from producing Bharat Ratnas like M Visvesvariah, CNR Rao and Bhimsen Joshi, to giving India the great Field Marshal K. M Cariappa and industrialists like N R Narayana Murthy, to boasting of having contributed almost half of the Indian Cricket Team during the 90s, it is like an India within India. It is the largest state in South India with very rich natural resources and cultural heritage.

Kannada is the official language of the state and the other languages of prominence are Tulu, Kodava, Konkani etc. In addition, different dialects of Kannada are spoken in different regions of the state. For example, the dialect spoken in *Uttara Karnataka* is very different from *Dakshina Kannada* and despite such diversities and differences, the people here have never really wanted to part ways by breaking the state into smaller pieces.

2. People from Mysuru and Bengaluru are usually multi-lingual and very accommodative by nature. They would try to speak in your language and would always like to make you feel at home. For a North Indian who may be struggling to differentiate between the various languages of the South, this is a very welcome place. Same is the case for everyone else in the world, and this is why this region has remained as a host to the IT hustle-bustle in the country for almost three decades.

3. Embracing a cosmopolitan culture was natural for the locals here, as this region was one of the most frequented places for trade and also for film shootings - right from the time when the Hindi Movie industry had not been baptised as *Bollywood*. However, the irony, as most things in life, is that the people of this region were not truly interested in the commercialised form of movies. Instead, they always had a very keen taste for fine Arts such as Carnatic Music. However, of late, things have started to change, especially after a few good story-based commercial movies were made in the recent past.

Though the folks here are very welcoming towards other cultures, they take immense pride in their rich heritage and culture. And, you better call their language Kannada and their state as Karnataka rather than calling it as Kannad or Karnatak!

4. This region hosts many elite Institutes and Universities too, with some of them being one among the oldest in the country. Apart from being technically competent, it is observed that the communication skills of Graduates from this region are very good as compared to the other regions.

Also, the Mysuru region, in particular, has always been very well planned with all the required amenities. When compared to other cities of India, it is observed that the people of Mysuru and Bengaluru like to follow the rules of their land very diligently and the locals are sticklers to cleanliness. When you go around the city, the aroma of 'Filter Coffee' mixed with the cool breeze of fragrant air blowing through the numerous Jasmine markets, gives you a very refreshing and pleasant feeling.

5. The biggest plus point of this region is the weather and the people here are truly blessed by *Maa Chamundi*, as this region has always been prosperous and protected, despite having rather unstable bouts of Government in the state.

When you work in an office in Bengaluru or Mysuru, you can distinctly observe that the aesthetics, cleanliness, flexibility and openness are second nature for the people and organisations here.

Mana Hyderabad

1. If there is one Indian city which is the true symbol of the so-called Ganga-Jamuna *tehzeeb* in the modern Indian context, then it is Hyderabad or the erstwhile *Bhagyanagar*. There is something charming about this city, just like the monumental Charminar, the serene divinity of Birla Mandir and the majestic sets of Ramoji Film city.

Apart from producing the Elegant Azhars and the 'Very Very Special' Laxmans in cricket, it has also produced some great Badminton stars like *Guru Garu* Gopichand and Smashing Star Sindhu, IT professionals like Satya Nadella and many reel stars from *Tollywood* as well, whose dubbed movies in Hindi are a great hit in the North.

2. Here the people love their Movies, *Teen Maar* and *Paan*. One should not be surprised if *Tollywood* comes up with something bigger than *Bahubali* soon. The genuine craving for cinemas among the people here has created a market for such larger than life kind of portrayals. And, with *Bollywood* miserably failing to produce quality-content movies, as was the case until the 90s, the nationwide market for Movies is wide open for the *Telugites* to pounce upon, provided there are no other strings attached which may stop them from doing so.

3. Hyderabad is a confluence of cultures where people from all parts of India and the world would feel at home. Barring a few politically motivated incidents of violence, as is the case in the other parts of the world, this City has been a true symbol of a progressive Modern India, with strong roots nurtured by their *tehzeeb*.

Some say that the other side of the coin is very dangerous and that it is just a matter of time before some notorious party is able to muster the required numbers to come to power and disturb the calm. However, some counter this argument that the city has stood the test of times for more than 400 years. They say, *What didn't happen then, can't happen now!* In fact, some strongly advocate that it should be made the second capital of India.

4. However, whoever visits the city loves the distinct identity that the locals carry. You will hardly find a *Hyderabadi* who does not love their *Jannat-ul-Firdous* attar. The aroma of *Biryani* and *Chai* is quite common in almost every major street in the city. However, nothing can beat the taste of *Qubani ka Meetha* with Vanilla Ice-Cream. The uniqueness of the people here is that they seem to have the flamboyance of a *Northy* and the modesty of a South Indian! And of course, they are also equally competent technically.

5. All said and done, laying down the foundation of Hi-Tech City during the mid-90s has been a major game changer for this city to bring it on the global map as a major IT destination. Since then, it has also seen a surge in the industrial and overall development of the city.

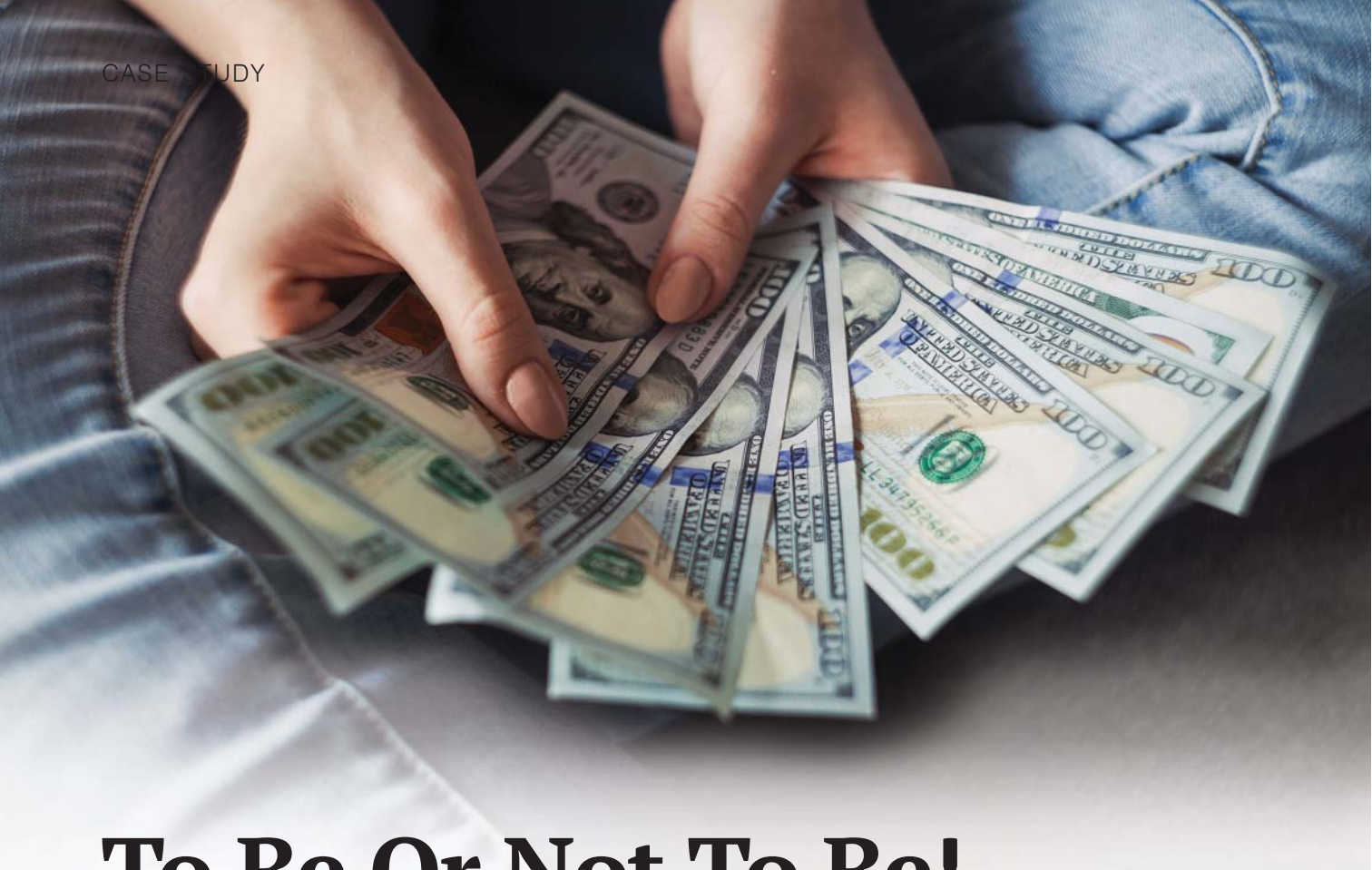
One of the major challenges that is being faced by some of the world's biggest cities at some point is that the locals begin to protest the 'poaching' of jobs by the migrants. In the Indian context, since there are only a handful of Tier-1 Cities, and there is bound to be cutthroat competition for jobs in these cities.

Though the state Governments definitely have absolute control in case of Government jobs, it is very difficult for them to influence or control such things in the private sector. If they remain to be too pushy they may force the MNCs to leave the state. Instead, the state Governments should focus a lot more on the overall development of the people and their region. Because, any mature organisation would definitely value a genuine connect with the locals of the land, but not at the cost of merit and the quality of talent. 

“Any mature organisation would definitely value a genuine connect with the locals of the land, but not at the cost of merit and the quality of talent.”

About the Author

Keshav Sridhar is a HR Consultant & OD Specialist. A seasoned HR Professional, he wields an experience of 15 years and has worked with Google, Partygaming, Aditya Birla Group, BITS Pilani University etc. Keshav holds a degree in Mechanical Engineering and a Post Graduate Diploma in Human Resource Management. He can be contacted at connect@keshavsridhar.com.



To Be Or Not To Be!

That 2020 is not a normal business year can in no way called an understatement. However, HR organisations are still required to carry out scheduled processes amidst the lockdown owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, and performance appraisals happened to come around the same time. While a majority of organisations did carry out performance appraisals, it was mainly done to bolster employee morale, given the testing circumstances in which the employees are presently embroiled. Several organisations that were severely hit by the pandemic were, however, forced to take hard decisions.

BY **DR. SHAMEEM. S**

Salary revisions are carried out by organisations after the appraisal process. Owing to the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent lockdown, several organisations are under tremendous pressure to run their businesses. Many of them have decided to go ahead with pay cuts for their employees to sustain this phase. In spite of all these, every functional organisation has to manage the

performance appraisal of their employees and the subsequent salary review process.

One morning, Ramesh Arora, the owner of a recently established pharmaceutical company, was faced with a dilemma due to the upcoming process of salary review. It had been three years since the company's inception, and most of the employees were getting impatient and were eagerly looking forward

to a revised pay structure. However, Ramesh had limited funds in his budget, and was, therefore, reluctant to reward the underperformers. He had also not carried out appraisals nor executed the process of salary revisions thus far. He decided to reward only such employees who added value to the company. He anticipated that a reward plan of such a type, after two consecutive years of frozen salaries, could lead

to conflict and resentment among the employees. However, he wanted to devise an objective process to revise the salaries of the employees based on performance. Ramesh, then, decided to carry out a sudden inspection to observe the performances of the employees.

Ramesh walks towards Suhan to have a chat.

Suhan (On a call): I am sorry to hear that, but are you sure you can't make it? Take care then.

Susan disconnects the call.

Suhan: I am not sure how, but he always ends up with some medical issue.

Ramesh: It is really funny to hear his reasons; I think he is the only one who is least motivated to work.

Suhan: You are right. But now, the situation is quite different. A few minutes before his call, three other people called me and said they won't be coming to work. In fact, I am expecting more calls.

Ramesh: This is disappointing. I am surprised how they can even behave like this. Absenteeism is high and it is affecting productivity. How can they even think we won't notice the fact that they keep absenting themselves often in this situation?

Suhan (nodding his head): Yes, I understand, these last-minute leaves are difficult to handle. Now we don't have sufficient time and resources to complete today's tasks. Anyway, I will manage to send the orders on time. Don't worry. Excuse me, Sir...

Ramesh: Yes, please carry on.

Ramesh is pretty impressed with the way Suhan handled the other employees and also his ability to manage the work by himself. He is convinced that Suhan is one of his key employees and must be duly rewarded.

After a few minutes, he went to see Daisy.

Daisy: Good morning, Sir. Good to see you here.

Ramesh: How is it going? Just wanted to ask you about your team members – Allen and Eva.

Daisy: Yes, sir. How can I help you with the information? In fact, I wanted to discuss with you regarding them before the performance appraisal.

Ramesh: Then, go ahead. Quite often, I notice them on the floor, chatting with each other about entertainment shows. Once, they were talking to each other without even noticing me.

Daisy: I agree, they are too busy chatting and are not productive. They are less motivated to work.

Ramesh: Have you ever told them that they must not engage in such unproductive sessions during office hours?

Daisy: Yes, of course, many times. If I warn them, they apologise at that moment and again engage in such behaviour. They work only when I keep an eye on them. Indeed, I have a tough time managing them.

Ramesh: I am really disappointed. Why will these employees not do the right thing unless someone is standing over them?

Ramesh decided that the two employees, Allen and Eva, will not be given salary revisions unless there is some improvement in the forthcoming years. He realised that at least ten percent of his employees could be sent out since they were not productive. Allen and Eva, as reported by Daisy, were hardly showing any improvement, despite several warnings. They must be sent out since they come about as incompetent, unreliable and detached. But at the same time, he began to wonder whether he had failed to find a way to motivate his employees who are not contributing to the company.

Finally, he decided to have a discussion with the HR manager, Priya.

Priya: Hello Sir, I have all the employee records for your perusal.



You can check and let me know if I need to provide further information on any of the employee.

Ramesh: Thanks, I need your help on the salary revision process, based on the performance appraisal of the employees. I have already made a few observations.

However, I need you to prepare a list of deserving employees and underperformers so that we can make a decision. I don't want to revise the salary of all the employees. Only those who contribute to the organisation will be duly rewarded.

Priya: Sure Sir, I will do that. I will prepare the list and give it to you tomorrow.

Ramesh believed that giving a raise to some people and not to others will create problems. However, he wished to devise a fitting salary revision process to ensure objectivity. **HC**

About the Author

Dr. Shameem S is Assistant Professor in OB/HRM at Great Lakes Institute of Management, Chennai. She has previously worked at National Oxygen Limited, Institute for Financial Management and Research (IFMR) as faculty, and as a Guest Scientist at University of Gottingen, Germany. Dr. Shameem holds a PhD in Management specializing in HRM/OB from Department of Management Studies, DoMS, IIT Chennai and an M.Sc. in Applied Psychology from Pondicherry University.

Analysis By **Ravi Mishra**



As an employer, Ramesh must understand that performance appraisal and salary revision are two different processes. One may, however, link performance appraisal with salary revision to an extent, and irrespective of the fact whether salaries are revised or not, appraisals need to be implemented regularly, and as per a defined cycle. At the same time, Ramesh needs to have a discussion with the HR head, Priya, over issues related to poor performance, the causes and the possible solutions to enhance the same. This is a very important deliverable and outcome of the HR function. And, as against Ramesh walking around the plant and observing employee behaviour at the workplace, it should have been Priya who was required to explicitly raise the concern after due consultation with other vertical and functional heads.

Performance Culture

Every organisation has a culture that evolves over a period of time during the various stages of organisational life cycle through employees (new and old) such as; their orientation, interaction, socialisation, collaboration, dealing with the organisational crisis, role modelling of team leaders, responses of top management and vision and mission of the company.

The varying differences in the interaction and response by Suhan, Daisy and Priya with Ramesh are also apparent. On the one hand, Suhan is highly focused to meet the business requirements in spite of his team members being absent. On the other, while Daisy complains about Allan and Eva, she does not offer any affirmative action or initiative to overcome this. Priya, the key anchor and responsible for driving the best performance from employees seems to have limited her outcome to complete the data checkboxes and providing information to Ramesh. In fact, Priya should have engaged herself with the employees to ascertain the reasons behind their poor performance and their casual approach at the workplace. She should be encouraging employees to open up and share their views and perspectives.

Employee Motivation

Organisations need to fully understand the context instead of

reacting on a piecemeal basis since the employees today consider themselves as key stakeholders. This raises the issue of Ramesh being candid with his workforce and sharing the organisational health, business strategy and challenges with them to establish a connect and seek their ideas and point of view. Several companies, who constantly engage with their key stakeholders - from end-customers to employees in different forums - have managed to keep themselves ahead of the curve.

Also, there is no mention of employee rewards and recognition. Performance Management cannot be executed casually by way of looking around once a while at the workplace to ascertain an employee's presence and their activities. It is a wellstructured approach and a process that utilises the current capabilities of employees in a productive manner and develops this for the next level and future stage to mitigate the risk and challenges like what company is





facing in current crisis due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Employees anticipate annual salary revisions so as to meet their personal and social obligations. Ramesh, therefore, needs to place himself in the employees' shoes to understand issues on the other side of the table.

Dealing with the current crisis

The fallout owing to the COVID-19 pandemic is indeed detrimental for the survival and sustenance of a company, and hence, it is required that it comes about as responsive. Firing 10 % of the workforce will not help the company in any manner, and instead, bring forward another crisis that will further demotivate them when the company fails to revise employees' salaries for two years in succession. Leadership teams should engage employees by establishing its own credibility and respect in terms of trust, equity, fairness, empathy, compassion and commitment to win the hearts and minds of employees, which may prove to be the *sutra* for the way forward.

This is the time to create energy and passion among the team across the levels so that employees can give their best performance. The pharmaceutical sector, as such, will witness constant growth. Therefore, Ramesh needs to work with a fresh outlook to establish a growth trajectory. If employees are being absent, the HR is required to go into the details without being biased. One has observed that on several occasions that even though the employee wanted to report for duty, he could not do so owing to family pressure owing to fear psychosis or the consequences of the pandemic.

Everyone has differing emotional levels and constraints when they fail to resume/attend work. We should therefore be compassionate, but at the same time, people must not be left free. Employees, who are truly underperformers must be given a chance to improve their performance. If they do not accept the given opportunity positively and prove themselves, it is time to go for action on separation. The Company can consider making pay cuts of the employees in higher pay

packets by way of engaging. It is also a good initiative by the company if they commit that the employees will be compensated once the organisation witnesses an improvement in its finances.

The present situation may indeed prove to be a blessing and offer some radical changes on the way forward. Many companies are shifting their approach, which is more relevant and effective in time to come by experimenting and innovating new practices. Ramesh and his team can thrive on it. 

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**



Performance Management System (PMS) is one of the critical processes in any organisation since it helps align individual goals with the strategic goals of the organisation, and enables in driving a performance-driven culture. It is, therefore, important for organisations to have a robust process that knows what to reward and what not to. A poorly implemented PMS, or worse, having no PMS, may lead to low employee morale and high turnover. Hence, Ramesh's dilemma is understandable since he is trying to find the best way possible to appraise only the performers in his organisation, the limited budget notwithstanding. However, he also fears disappointment among the underperformers who are working with him for the last two years with their salaries remaining stagnant.

Rewarding people based on actual achievement against their goals is the very objective of the PMS, since it allows you to distinguish good performers from the rest. And Ramesh is not wrong in deciding that the compensation philosophy must be based on meritocracy alone. However, it is important to ensure that there is a clear definition for good performance. Unless employees are aware of the benchmark for good performance, they may never be able to reach that mark.

Also, it is equally important to ensure that the workforce is provided with the required support to achieve the defined goals and are periodically given directions to enhance performance. Ramesh may, in fact, be forming opinions about good and poor performers on the basis of hearsay alone. It is imperative to examine the data before arriving at any conclusion. It is also essential to understand whether employees have objectives and measurable goals in the first place. Are they even aware that their performance levels are not meeting the expectations of the organisation or do they even know what they need to do to ensure they are rewarded?

The other challenge that is evident here is that some of the leaders were struggling with increasing absenteeism in the organisation and lack of focus on work. This should not be passed off as individualistic traits of a few employees, since this is a phenomenon that is of a bigger concern. Disengagement is not an event, it is an attained state that disconnects you from the organisation. Often, absenteeism and the lack of accountability is an outcome of disengagement with the organisation and constant communication helps bridge that gap.

Ramesh must truly reflect whether he has done enough to keep his employees connected with the purpose of the organisation. Compensation is surely a motivator, and if that is not on offer, you need to keep your people brought on to your mission with a compelling purpose. You cannot expect someone to commit themselves to expend an extraordinary effort if they do not have a good reason to do so. Ramesh should also focus on appreciating the efforts of his people from time to time. Appreciating and recognising efforts is a crucial

validation for that effort and it encourages repeat behaviour.

It is understandable that the COVID-19 pandemic has adversely affected most businesses and it has gotten everyone in a cost-saving mode. While being cost prudent is necessary to survive; investment is equally essential to spur growth. Ramesh's pharmaceutical company is a new venture and there have been no salary revisions since the time it came into existence. While salary revisions have to be based on performance, this is a peculiar situation where people have been working with the organisation and have withstood the thick and thin hoping that they will be rewarded eventually. Hence, albeit minimal, it may not be a bad idea to revise the salaries by looking at the performance, not just for the current year but for previous years as well.

Clarity of goals, continuous and timely feedback and support on performance parameters and appreciation and reward for good performance are the key ingredients for inculcating a performance-driven culture in the organisation. It not only aligns everyone to the organisation's mission and goals but also goes a long way in building a culture of trust and meritocracy.



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.

Organisations Can Check Aarogya Setu Status Of Employees

BY ANUSHRUTI SINGH

Aarogya Setu has launched a new feature 'Open API Service' will facilitate organisations to get the health status of their employees or other users.

According to the Ministry of Electronics and IT, the service can be availed by organizations and business entities, registered in India with 50 plus employees, to query the Aarogya Setu Application in real-time and get health status of employees or other Aarogya Setu Users, who have given their consent for the same.



The new feature will help people, businesses and the economy to return to normalcy, and aims to address the fear/risk of COVID-19 pandemic.

No other personal data shall be provided through the API service.

Registration for the new service can be done at openapi.aarogyasetu.gov.in. 

OYO India Extends Furloughs For Some Employees

BY ANUSHRUTI SINGH



OYO India has extended the furlough for some of its employees till the end of February 2021 and has also given them the option of the Voluntary Separation Program (VSP).

"The measures we took in April were based on the circumstances that followed India's decision to enter a 21-day lockdown period. In a matter of a few hours, travel came to a standstill, people could not leave their homes and hotels were shut down. Occupancies and revenues for the entire hospitality industry, including OYO, were deeply impacted and we had to decide how to survive this crisis", the hospitality unicorn wrote in a blog.

"We know it is challenging to hold back our impacted colleagues due to a situation that neither they nor we can control or wish away. Given the context, we have created a set of options for YOpreneurs on LwLB in India to make a decision that is best aligned with their long-term career goals and financial requirements."

The company will also offer career transition support, OYO ambassador programme and OYO Helpdesk for supporting the employees in withdrawing provident fund (PF) and to help them with any other queries. 

TCS Launches Return-To-work Solution

BY ANUSHRUTI SINGH

Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) has introduced "TCS Safe Workplace", a return-to-work solution that helps organisations quickly transition to a safe, secure and productive work environment.

The new solution uses existing enterprise platforms to design and create a workplace command center that assesses the readiness of employees, the work

environment and the workforce model; automates the return to work processes, including contact tracing, shift management, and workspace planning; and monitors critical risk factors.



Also, TCS Safe Workplace helps companies manage self-attestation from employees, awareness communications, and grievance resolution. It identifies pandemic zonal hotspots and enables fact-based decision-making, so an organization can proactively adapt its operations to avoid issues that may affect its employees and customers.

It enables organisations to jumpstart return-to-work programs within four weeks and scale support to manage thousands of employees across various locations. 

Leadership & Critical Thinking - A Philosophical Perspective



The one attribute among several leadership subtleties that can make all the difference for me is critical thinking, and henceforth the world ,will belong to the men and women of the mind.



JOY GEORGE

We live in a scientifically advanced and digitally guided age, which is slowly but surely becoming sensitive to the Transcendental Power that hovers in this universe. An effort to find solutions to the biggest problems of life, the world, and God, is now a subject of discussion and debate among people in general, and not just the intellectual luxury of a few. The desire to know, the quest to give meaning to life, the longing to find a solution to the insoluble has become a personal quest for every person — in the workplace, on the street, and in the field alike.

We are no longer confined to the edges of the universe or a living on the surface of life. We are now brimming with a desire to know the grain from the husk, the value of a person, and answers to innumerable questions that life imposes. This is indeed the thinking age, the age of reason.

One aspires to show that critical thinking is not a mere occupation that can be set aside for a few, it is instead, an indispensable keystone of the conduct of life itself, for a leader, in every walk of life. If this is an age of reason, it is time for us to think critically and be precise.

“Critical thinking has become that most difficult task which is rarely performed, but mostly desired in this age of the mind we live in now.”

Philosophy and the Pursuit of Truth

As a form of explosive thinking, Philosophy claims to provide critical answers to the ultimate questions, which after deliberate exploration, makes such questions enigmatic and puzzling. The central and characteristic attempt of Philosophy consists of an inquiry into:

- The credentials of the subtle
- The supreme and the evasive
- The critical attitude to any kind of tradition, practice, or belief system

It delves into statements and concepts to analyse every fibre in the pursuit of truth.

It makes one wonder:

- Can modern-day leaders develop that kind of an insatiable desire to go after issues and problems to

get to the root of things in a workplace?

- Can they employ critical thinking to find solutions instead of prescribing solutions based on some isolated success stories alone?
- Do our organisations not need such originality and purity in thinking from our leaders since every problem can be unique in the realm of people?

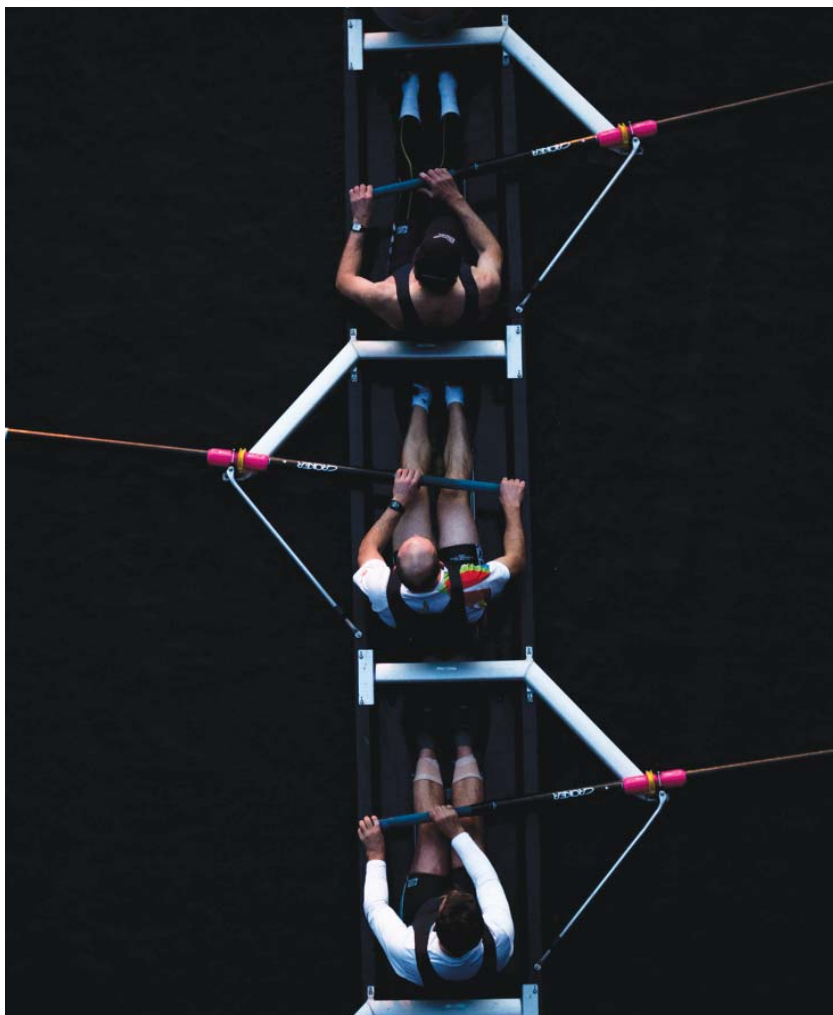
On many occasions, a person lacking in critical thinking goes through life imprisoned in the prejudices derived from common sense, from the habitual belief of one's culture and experience. They also fall prey to the conviction that spring up in a tender mind, without the consent of pure reason. To such an individual, this world with all its volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity poses no question and causes no concerns.

Using Critical Thinking to Find Solutions

Today, many leaders operate at such detached levels that they are unable to find newer solutions to the issues they deal with on a daily basis. On the contrary, a person who is thrilled by the variety in this universe finds that even the most insignificant events pose problems to the mind, and that we can, at times, come up with only incomplete answers. This helps them to come up with imaginative and creative solutions while accepting the limitations of what can be done.

In other words, critical thinking makes one humble and pragmatic in approach. Critical thinking, in effect, resuscitates a person who has been drowned, questions the deeply rooted practices in place, strikes hard on any sort of arrogant dogmatism, and gives practical solutions. The art of critical thinking, therefore, is a genuine search to make life a chain of meaningful incidents than leave it as a pure string of accidents.

You will always find some overzealous set of leaders constantly adopting practices that are said to be proven elsewhere and benchmarking themselves. They refuse to take the



“While a lot of people continue with the old-world philosophy of ‘hard work creates successes’, many have transitioned to working smarter and thinking sharper.”

bull by the horn, and think on their feet.

Experience has limitations and can be outdated but thinking will never be! Thus, leaders are hired for their thinking ability, more than their practical experience.

People with critical thinking possess the ability to:

- Look at data dispassionately
- Assess situations without judgmental subjectivity and
- Make decisions unclouded by emotions

One believes that this ability is quintessential for all those in leadership roles. Critical thinking has become that most difficult task which is rarely performed, but mostly desired in this age of the mind we live in now.

The ability to distinguish Good from Great

“Creative thinking is today’s most prized, profit-producing possession

for any individual, corporation, or country. It has the capacity to change you, your business, and the world” – Robert P. Crawford, author.

Today, the best paying positions in the job market are where thinking — classified as creative, critical, or professional — is identified and positioned as primary. While a lot of people continue with the old-world philosophy of ‘hard work creates successes’, many have transitioned to working smarter and thinking sharper.

Perhaps, it is time for organisations to relook at the pay and perks philosophy, move away from dividing the leader’s salary by the number of hours they spend, or even the decisions they make. This simply creates an impression of them being overpaid at least in the minds of the ordinary.

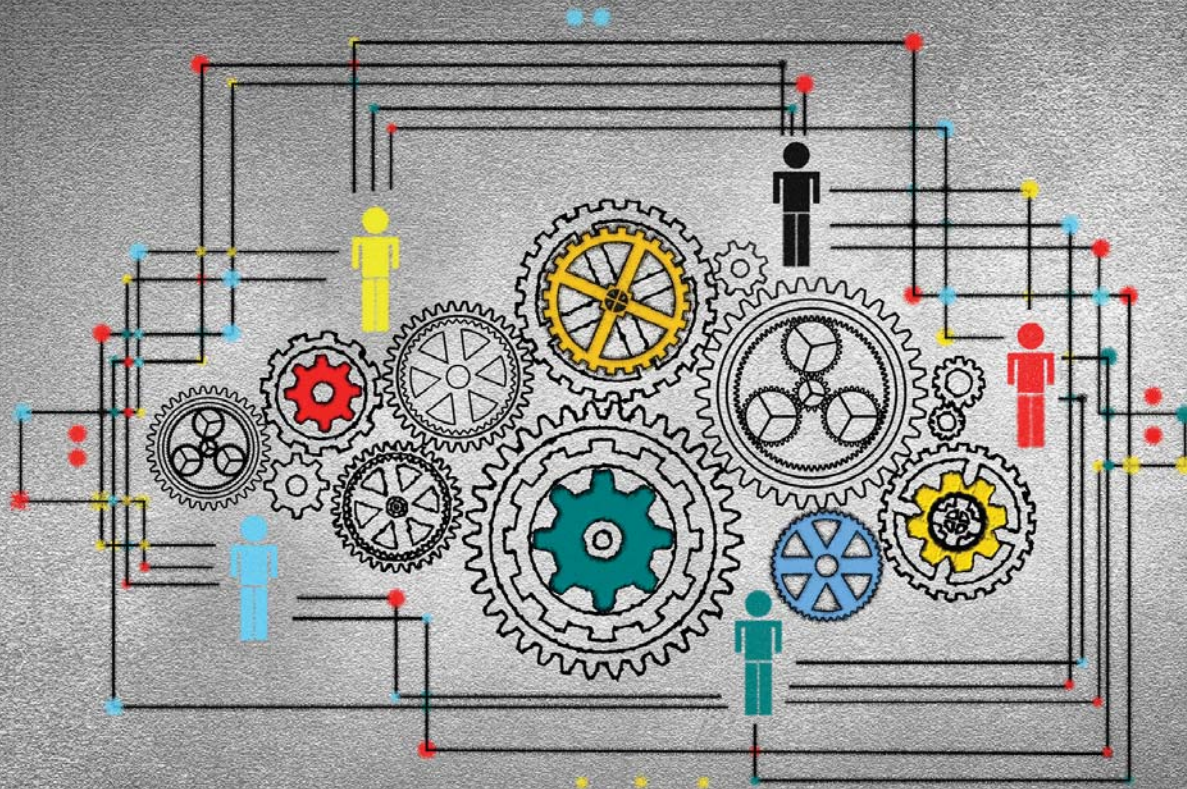
In the entire process, one might realise that a lot of leaders are underpaid, considering the quality, originality, novelty, and profundity of their thinking. Further, these can be the asset, key differentiator, and indication of the true potential of the organisation. In short, the ability to think critically distinguishes the good from the great and the middle class from the world-class. The one attribute among several leadership subtleties that can make all the difference is critical thinking, and henceforth, the world will belong to the men and women of the mind.

Many of the contemporary leaders often pigeonhole the very desire and capacity to think critically. Gone are the days when a leader could be effective with mere domain knowledge. To sound sensible and appear credible in this age of reason, leaders need the culture and habit of critical thinking. 

About the Author

Joy George is Head – Human Resources, CDK Global India. He comes with an experience of over 18 years in employee life cycle management and extensive experience in global business partnering in India, UK, US & APAC. He has proven ability to manage organic and inorganic growth with understanding of HR strategies and policies.





SURESH DATLA

Embrace The Art Of Change

By constantly embracing change, we have steadily evolved from being hunter-gatherers to farmers-herders, ultimately donning the role of the most dominant species on the planet.

More than two millennia ago, Heraclitus, the Greek philosopher had said, *there is nothing permanent except change*. The history of human evolution stands testimony to the continuous efforts by the human race to change its status quo. By constantly embracing change, we have steadily evolved from being hunter-gatherers to farmers-herders, ultimately donning the role of the most dominant species on the planet.

Medieval and modern history bear testimony to the manner in which the art of creating change was mastered by the human race. An incremental change gave way to disruptive change. Since the last few generations, change has become a way of life. We embraced change in the way we live, buy, work, communicate, travel, and entertain. We are presently living in a world stalked by a deadly virus, and the manner in which we adjusted to



initiative as a solution to a specific problem or for the growth of the organisation.

- The top management foresees that stakeholders (mostly employees) would be resistant to change and tackles the resistance by convincing stakeholders about the necessity of the change initiative – typically called CM.
- People assigned with the task organise and implement the initiative in a coordinated and organised manner.

The brighter side of the CM process is the manner in which it is organised and coordinated with stakeholders and followed through. The flip side is that it takes a top-down approach. The management first zeroes-in on a change initiative and sells the idea to employees to minimise resistance. Thereafter, they go through the next steps of implementing the change initiative.

The top-down approach does not do much about pioneering change and is similar to a person trying to woo another into a short-term romantic relationship. In the current age where information is as pervasive as air, stakeholders can easily see through these efforts. This creates a situation where much of the organisational energy is spent on pushing people who are reluctant or sceptical about changing the status quo.

Consequently, evidence indicates that of all the change management initiatives in the corporate world, only 30 per cent see success. The prospects of success of this conventional approach in the post-corona world are yet to be understood. In order to thrive, we need to build organisations that constantly explore opportunities to change and then embrace it at an organisational level and not just at the Top Management level.

Components of Change Embrace:

Change-ready Culture: Build an organisation where stakeholders are proactive to change.

the 'new normal' is also apparent. Through Change we survive!

As a species, humans never went through a mass change management programme or training to traverse through all these ages. Therefore, why then are we, as employees, required to be put through Change Management Programmes? Why is there a resistance to change? And is Change Management (CM) the best way to navigate through change in an organisation? Can we find a better approach?

Given the fact that change management is a 60-year-old concept and the pace and frequency of change have undergone tremendous transformation in the last 60 years, the time is right for an overhaul of Change Management. The answers to these questions lie in Change Embrace (CE) as an approach with CM as a sub-process.

So, what does it mean?

Change Management

The conventional Change Management process in the corporate world has majorly been like this:

- Occasionally, the top management identifies a particular change

“The brighter side of the CM process is the manner in which it is organised and coordinated with stakeholders and followed through. The flip side is that it takes a top-down approach.”

“History suggests that initiators of change thrive and those who adapt to change survive. Hence, it is a smarter move to become an organisation that explores and initiates change rather than be reluctant or averse to change.”

Some steps to keep in mind while trying to build a Change Embrace Culture.

- Build structured programmes that facilitate employee participation in identifying opportunities to create change for the better. Create programmes to promote employees initiating and owning change at all levels on a day-to-day basis. It creates a sense of partnership and ownership among employees and they start seeing the sincerity in Top Management's drive for change.
- Change-readiness should be built-in as one of the core values. Continuous improvement and exploration for change should be propagated as key competencies in the process of measuring employee performance.
- The organisation should build an environment of trust where people know that they may lose turf at times due to the new way of doing things, they would be adequately taken care of. This dispels any doubts and kills reluctance to change and thereby eliminating the need to woo or trick employees into accepting change.
- The organisation needs to create success stories of people who have embraced change and made progress. This should be built to an extent where Change is looked at as an opportunity rather than as a threat.

Associates vs with Management:

In organisations where Change Embrace is built as a cultural aspect, initiation of change or identification of opportunities for progressive change can come from anyone and any corner, including the Top Management. Unlike a traditional organisation where change is Top-driven, organisations with a change embrace approach create more opportunities for progressive change.

Change-agility Competency:

While the cultural aspect is being built, it is also important to build change-agility as a competence at individual levels. Change-ready culture builds enthusiasm around

change embrace and an environment of trust at the organisational level. Change agility is the ability to think through the impact of change till a granular level, adapt self, and help the surroundings adapt to change astutely.

Change- Management Skills:

Having made the field ready for deploying change, now we go back to our good old concepts related to Change Management of organising, coordinating, informing, and implementing change. CM now takes the form of a skill that is less complex and can be drawn into a set of sequential steps that can be walked through with higher ease.

The difference is that this is now purely administrative and requires very little workaround convincing reluctant employees to change. The organisation is change-ready at a cultural level, people are competent at implementing change and hence CM is very likely to have enhanced chances of success.

Thus, we need a change in approach to change. History suggests that initiators of change thrive and those who adapt to change survive. Hence, it is a smarter move to become an organisation that explores and initiates change rather than be reluctant or averse to change. 

About the Author

Suresh Datla is a keen enthusiast in Talent Acquisition, Training & Development Initiatives, Organisational Culture and Behaviour sciences. He has rich international experience in Human Resources Management in both Manufacturing and Service sectors. He partners with Leadership teams of various organisations in acquiring and building great teams. Suresh is an XLRI Alumni and can be reached at dsuresh@bridgingcareers.com



VIKAS DUA

Equity: The Democratising Pillar In The D-E-I Framework

The 'Diversity, Equity and Inclusion' trinity aka the 'D-E-I framework', enables an organisation to be truly all-embracing. It becomes an environment that celebrates uniqueness and allows each one to flourish.

There is no denying that in recent years, the 'Diversity and Inclusion' (D & I) agenda has been furthered in the corporate arena. Fuelled by greater awareness in our populace and supported by a more vocal Human Resources fraternity, sustained efforts have been made to take this charter ahead. Organisational leaders have defined 'diversity targets' and religiously measured themselves against them, in a manner that can only be considered as noble.

Having laid the groundwork, the time is ripe for the HR community to complement these efforts by focusing on driving 'Equity' in the workplace. With this new dimension in the mix, the 'Diversity, Equity and Inclusion' trinity, also referred to as the 'D-E-I framework', enables an organisation to be truly all-embracing. It becomes an environment that celebrates uniqueness and allows each one to flourish. To understand this more lucidly, it is important to understand each of these elements and realise the finer nuances that differentiate them.

Diversity

As organisations grow from within their community to also expand outside national borders, it is critical for them to include employees who are diverse. Diverse in terms such as nationality, race, language, gender, religion, age, sexual orientation, and more. Diversity brings in many

benefits, and the most important among them is the contribution of diverse thoughts and perspectives. This is a great value add to the strategic direction and operational workings of an organisation, enabling it to be able to serve its customer base (which is likely to be more diverse) more effectively.

One must caution that the number-tracking approach often deployed towards measuring diversity within the organisation, can be its biggest bugbear. It can detract the ranks from fully understanding the true worth of the diversity initiatives and reduce it to mere 'management' of data.

Inclusion

With diversity what must come along is inclusion, for the former by itself, is mere lip service. If, within a diverse group of individuals, a few are unable to contribute effectively without fear or hesitation, then the entire objective of creating a diverse team is missed. To be inclusive is to create internal processes that encourage each of the employees to participate fully without any fear of retribution, or worse still, being ignored. Inclusion encourages more wholesome sharing and debate within an organisation and creates an environment that is more collaborative, engaging, and positive. It, therefore, becomes essential to

“To be inclusive is to create internal processes that encourage each of the employees to participate fully without any fear of retribution, or worse still, being ignored.”



“When an organisation’s leaders follow an equity-based approach in all its employee interactions in the hire-to-retain cycle, they ensure that there is a thread of ‘fairness’ that is woven into the cultural fabric of the organisation.”

make conscious and directed efforts to make everyone welcome in all business transactions where they can add value and include the views of those who are in the minority.

Equity

Having a D & I driven approach, however, is only a partial endeavour in creating a genuinely great workplace. To enhance the overall workplace quality and experience for all employees, an approach that is based on the pillar of ‘Equity’ is, therefore, much desired. Such an approach takes into account the historical reality of our societies across the globe.

It is no secret that our societies and communities today are the result of social dynamics and norms that have evolved over centuries. Not all this evolution has been, what one may call, healthy. The haphazard and often majority-driven approach has created groups of marginalised people. Discrimination and denial of opportunity has had a long-term, detrimental impact on their growth.

When an organisation’s leaders follow an equity-based approach in all its employee interactions in the hire-to-retain cycle, they ensure that there is a thread of ‘fairness’ that is woven into the cultural fabric of the organisation.

The starting point for promoting an equitable approach is absorbing the understanding that not all individuals start from the same place. In some cases, certain groups may be advantageously placed while others have to encounter barriers.

The next step is to, therefore, address individualistic needs to ensure that everyone has the same level playing field. So, while inclusion aims at providing an equal opportunity or experience to all within the organisation’s fold, equity aims to personalise that opportunity or experience, keeping each individual’s unique construct at the core.

The weakhearted may be wont to argue that it is difficult, impossible even, to set right decades of discrimination. But the only counter to that has to be a firm resolve to drive establishment of equitable processes in environments under their span of influence.

To sum up, I would like to quote Ben Hecht who writes in his article, ‘Moving Beyond Diversity Toward Racial Equity’, that was published in the Harvard Business Review—“Instead of trying to change *some* people to fit the organisation, we must focus on transforming our organisations to fit *all* people.” This, in essence, is what a truly diverse, inclusive and equitable organisation would look like! 

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 the 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 Programme.



KALPANA BANSAL

The Rise Of Cognitive Platforms

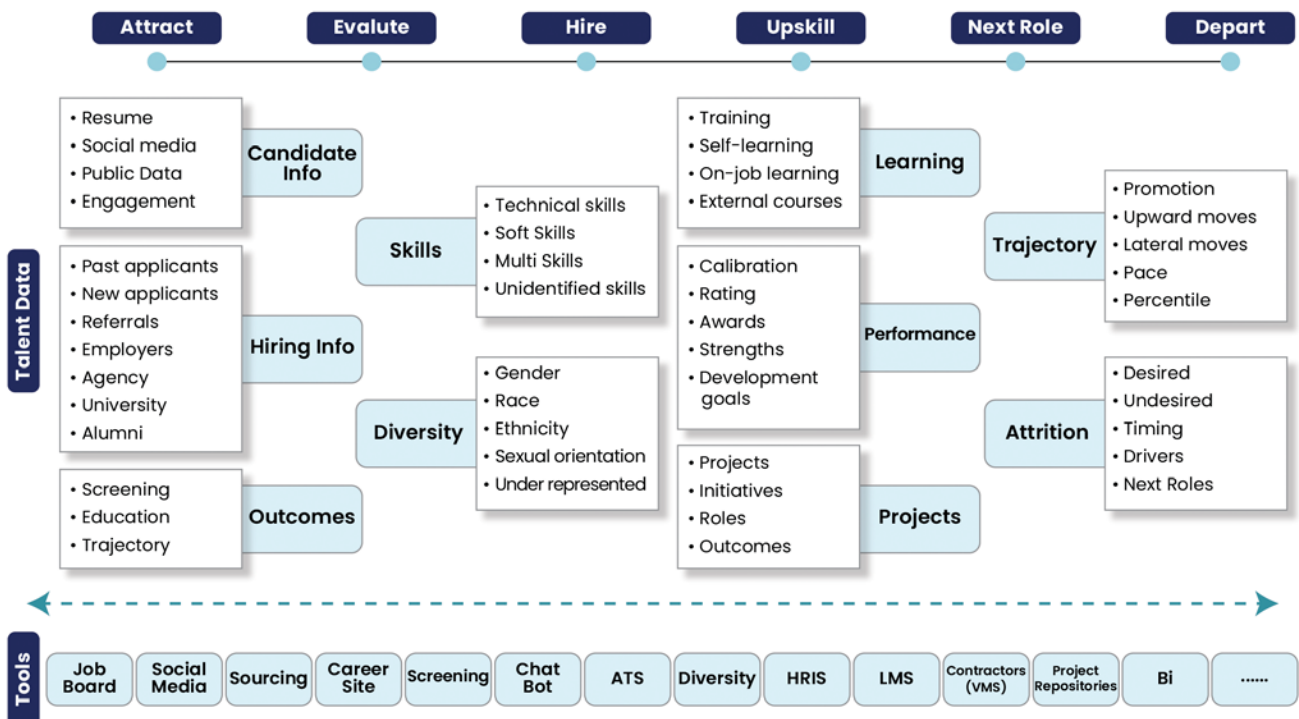
Cognitive platforms herald the future of talent experiences, and usher in a transformation for the HR function. The cognitive era will ensure that organisations will be able to anticipate talent movements and proactively work towards delivery unique tailor-made solutions.

The current HR Technology landscape is fraught with multiple tools and interfaces along the employee lifecycle that capture segments of employee data. Hence, organisations are constantly grappling with the challenge of integrating them into a single stakeholder friendly interface that delivers strategically on Talent Insights that drive business outcomes.

Seamless flow of data through the employee lifecycle means across multiple devices demand a level of cognition on the part of the system.

The Future of Platform

A cognitive Talent platform would seamlessly enable organisations to transform how they hire, develop and retain a diverse workforce through curating and delivering Personalised Talent Experiences. There is a significant movement from 'integrated talent management' to 'talent experiences'. Artificial Intelligence (AI) and RPA (Robotic Process Automation) enabled talent practices are the first steps towards facilitating delightful talent





experiences through 'Cognitive' Talent Management.

Cognitive automation combines the power of Artificial Intelligence and rules-based automation (robotic process automation – RPA) to help HR functions. This stage is a new era in automation, delivering an integrated, seamless platform of 'curated talent experiences' and application delivery. This is thus the beginning of the future state for talent management. In this stage, organisations enhance the use of such automated processes to deliver a coherent talent strategy using the latest technologies.

The Talent Platform Landscape

An open interface cognitive system would seamlessly integrate internal data on talent pools with external data to create a free flow, dynamically updated talent exchange that is

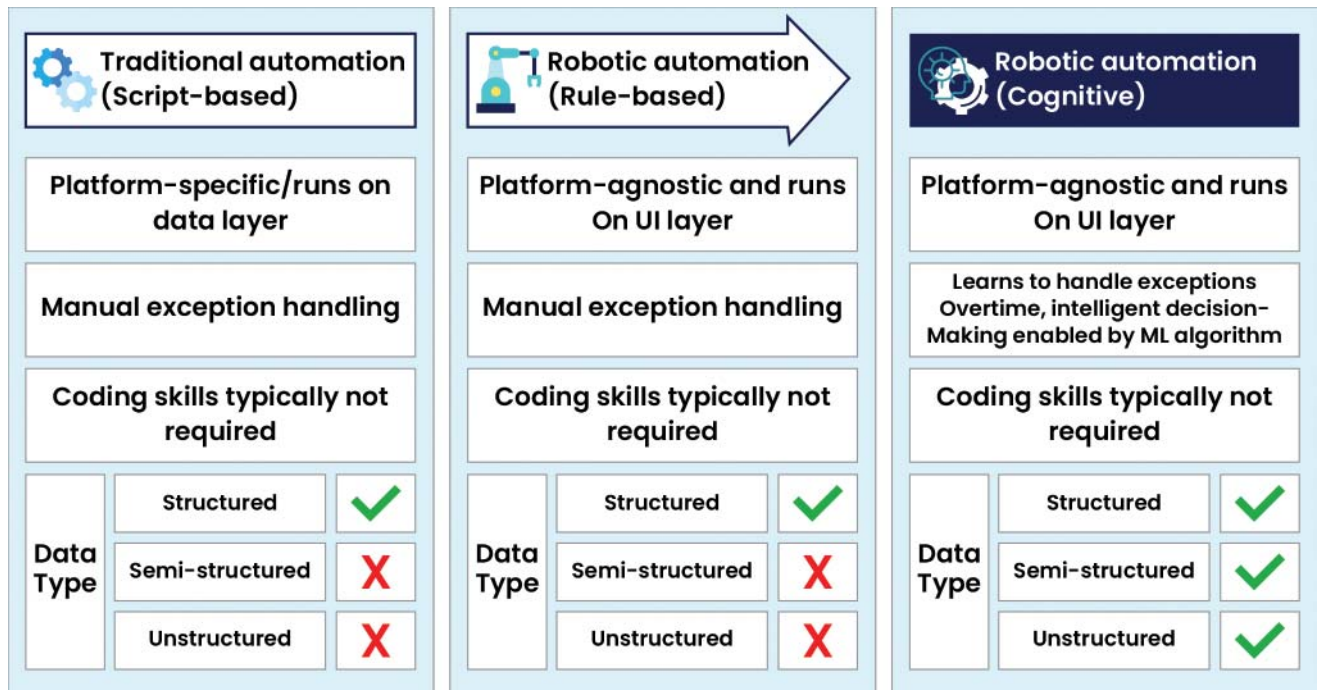
relevant currently and is constantly adapting itself to the external environment.

Workforce Planning

- Workforce planning needs to be ongoing basis project requirements and skills analytics for the projects/ vacant roles. Scenario planning must be used for identifying the requirements
- Workforce planning must be integrated with talent acquisition/ talent marketplace for continuous, quicker turnaround time on requirements

Career Management

Careers are no longer a result of vacant positions and qualifications. They are viewed today as a constellation, resulting from education, experiences, interests, gigs and others as depicted driven by employee needs and hence need to be democratised.



Internal Mobility Marketplace

With a change in the design of the organisation, transformations are also apparent in the movements and experiences of employees. With the Talent Marketplace, the ability to work in a networked organisation designed basis projects /gigs becomes easy. The platform would enable:

- Advertising projects/gigs on an ongoing basis for the networks to support agile organisation
- Identifying/recommending key skills profile for the said projects/gigs through skills matching
- Integrating internal mobility marketplace with individual employee's skills profile interface to enable democratised career management

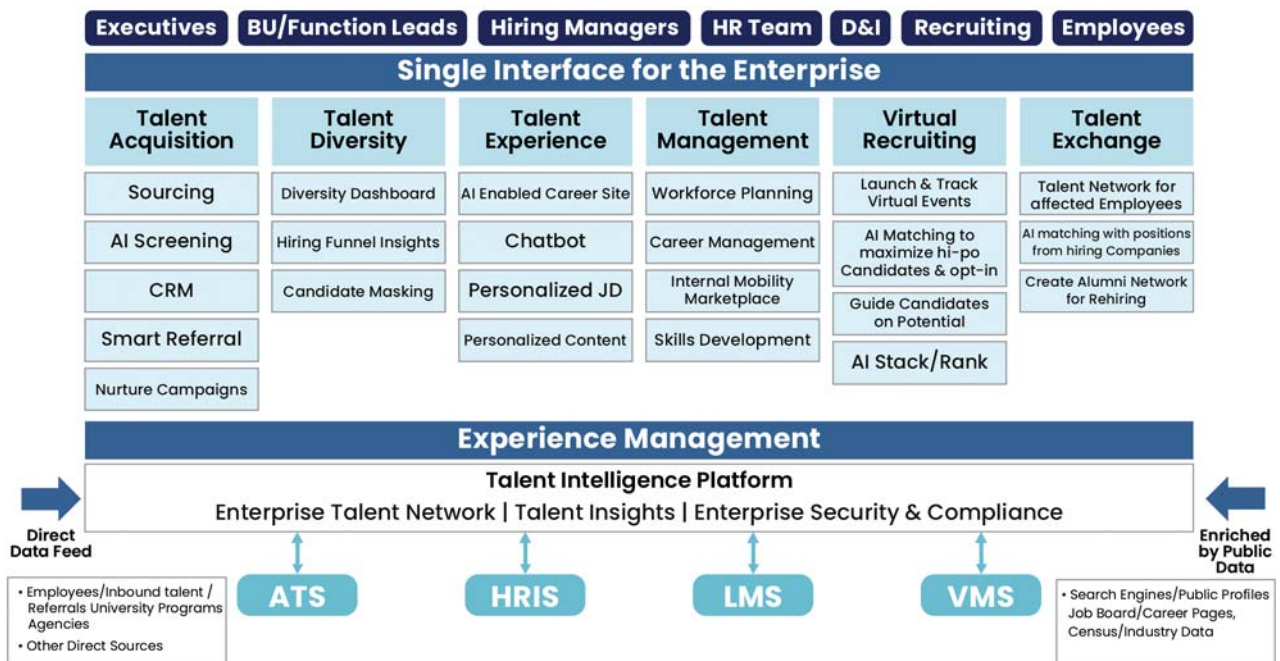
Skills Development

- Development interventions need to be a result of continuous feedback from projects/gigs/skills gaps emerging from the role
- Deeper current and future skills must be aligned to the emerging business landscape through keyword matching in LMS, Coursera and LinkedIn Learning

- The progress and proficiency of employees must be updated on a real-time basis. Acquired skills must be added to the skills profile on an ongoing basis to facilitate deployment to projects or for succession planning and others

Talent Network for affected employees

- Building skill-based talent networks for job seekers and potential candidates enabling a common platform for job seekers and talent teams
- Assessing the strength of candidates with artificial intelligence-enabled tools that automate the assessment process and can even perform personality tests
- The tools view goes beyond keyword matching and hunts for patterns and interests that denote curiosity and drive
- To be integrated with the talent acquisition interface for the strategic use of the network. Skills analytics to highlight strong profiles from the network for gigs/roles
- Predicting next best move for the employee basis skills match



- Highlights and guides the employees towards the best possible career movement basis insights gathered from the individual's career constellation

Talent Acquisition

Talent acquisition is a crucial function in Human Resource Management and is poised to witness revolutionary changes owing to upcoming technological developments, especially Artificial Intelligence (AI) & Machine Learning (ML) technologies.

AI-driven sourcing would be fully automated and proactively search for candidates based on their relevant technical skills and competencies on a professional profile. To that extent, this dynamic search would not be triggered by a position or vacancy, but by the availability of skills of interest to the skill matrix of the organisation. AI-driven skill ontology-based recruitment platforms can match the prospects skill profile with the required skills for the organisation, and sort the suitable candidates as per rank based on their 'fit' for the open position. It can also be triggered to automatically assess, video interview and profile the behavioural traits of prospects and do a "cultural

fitment" and reduce cycle time for the selection.

As a result, line managers could double up as recruiters and get a highly targeted search query, and thereby eliminate the need to screen hundreds of candidate profiles for a given position.

Cognitive Screening: Once recruiters have sourced resumes, the next step is to screen and prioritise them. This is often being done by a resume parsing tool, using Natural Language Processing, deep learning, and machine learning to screen resumes contextually.

AI-enabled screening helps in matching skills and prioritises suitable resumes. It matches the candidate profile based on required skills, history of job transitions, expertise level at various skills and then candidates are ranked as per their matching score/ percentage.

Virtual Recruiting: Video interviews are being used at the first level of elimination and provide a use case for automation and RPA. From shortlisting resumes using skills matching to virtual scheduling using RPA, to decoding the messages and serving transcripts and feedback, automation can be a game-changer in

“Cognitive automation is the beginning of the future state for talent management. In this stage, organisations enhance the use of such automated processes to deliver a coherent talent strategy using the latest technologies.”



the recruitment process. Using the power of AI & ML technologies, it is possible to convert recruitment into a completely virtual process. The most crucial part of the process i.e. interviews can be conducted virtually and analysed.

AI-matching to maximise hi-po candidates & opt-in: AI-matching of skills/ competencies/experience/ expertise with the required skills for the open positions sorts the hi-po candidates which are suitable for the given position. The AI-driven CRM and nurture campaigns help ensure more opt-in from the hi-po talent.

Talent Diversity

Diversity and Inclusiveness are not just socially mandated compliance requirements, but are a part of the larger agenda of the sustainable global organisation. Diversity and inclusion can be seamlessly integrated into the organisation's processes of the future using Cognitive automation to set algorithms to curate the right mix of gender, orientation, religious preferences and even personality types for the organisation. ML can enable the system to accurately predict the right mix for the organisation.

Diversity Dashboard:

Organisations are making use of analytics to create Diversity Dashboards that monitor different key metrics related to diversity and inclusion. Cognitive automation provides mechanisms to embed these checks within the workflow. It is possible to embed work rules such as providing priority to resumes of females, or of particular ethnicity basis rules-based

processing, to enable the organisation to be on top of its diversity charter.

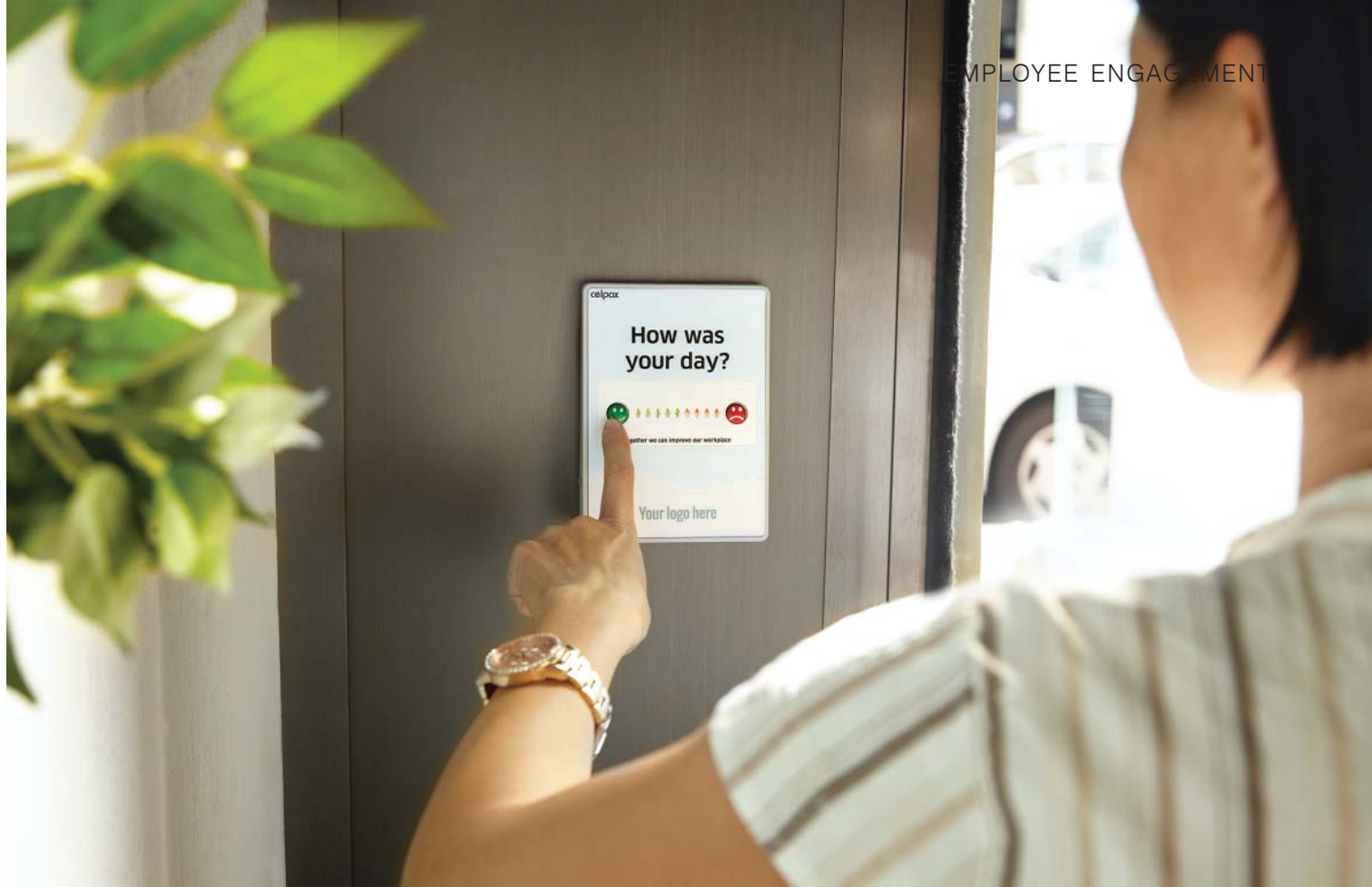
Candidate Masking: Candidate masking shows the potential to help reduce hiring bias in the screening process. Cognitive technologies can blur images, or faces, or even superimpose a layer to protect the identity of the candidate. It is even possible to change the voice and render it gender neutral, this ensures that unconscious biases or prejudices of the hiring managers are minimised and talent is assessed based fitment for the role.

AI solutions such as NLP based algorithms can provide a way of ranking the candidate's suitability for the job using a matching process of the applicants' skills and experience, irrespective of age, gender, or ethnicity, with job postings. This feature has been already seen on various job portals and LinkedIn, and is something that organisations are increasingly adopting in their Applicant tracking systems. It is possible to customise these conditions or rules for the organisation to deliver optimal results.

Cognitive platforms herald the future of talent experiences, and usher in a transformation for the HR function. There is potential to move the HR work processes several notches upwards and repurpose the HR professional to work as an enabler and evangelist and let the mechanical routine chores be taken over by automation. The cognitive era will ensure that organisations can anticipate talent movements and proactively work towards delivery unique tailor-made solutions. 

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.



A Tide Of Opportunities

With employees playing multiple roles at home, managing household chores, and work pervading through their personal space more than ever, the new normal did present its own set of challenges.

BY SWADESH BEHERA



Bringing healthcare systems, economic progress, and world cultures to a screeching halt, besides causing a paradigm shift in the way we operate, the COVID-19 pandemic, anchored by social distancing, has forced us into a new world order. When the lockdowns were first announced in India in March, and we began to work from homes, the changes were unbeknownst to both employers and employees. There were growing concerns about sustaining the work culture in the manner in which it has been nurtured. With employees playing multiple roles at home, managing household chores, and work

pervading through their personal space more than ever, the new normal did present its own set of challenges.

However, every dark cloud has a silver lining. Even as we find ourselves in these unprecedented times, there came an opportunity in the crisis—ensuring that employers and employees remained connected in their own way. This is an opportune moment for corporates to reset their employee engagement skillsets as we work remotely, a trend that could last longer than anticipated. From healthcare packages to upskill training, and mental healthcare workshops to virtual engagement activities,

“As we shift to virtual teams, building a connect, staying in touch with your people and reading into their emotional ques gained prominence as we were acquainting ourselves better to this new work culture dynamic.”

corporates are making good use of the time to bond with their employees. As we shift to virtual teams, building a connect, staying in touch with your people and reading into their emotional ques gained prominence as we were acquainting ourselves better to this new work culture dynamic.

Lifting the Pall of Fear for Employees

Just when they were starting to accept the new normal of remote working, employees across sectors were left intimidated by the pandemic. Crumbling economies led to a huge surge in unemployment numbers in several countries. Multiple studies conducted over the last few months reveal that a major share of the workforce was worried about losing their livelihoods to the pandemic. However, on the bright side, several corporates managed to make the best of the time to ensure that their employees developed a trust with the system. Organisational values are put to test during times of adversity, and corporates who have acted as per their values will reap employee goodwill and productivity when things start looking up.

We are living in times when everyone is personally affected by the pandemic-driven crisis, and are still learning to strike the perfect work-life integration. Hence, it is highly crucial to how leaders drive their teams during such testing times. Organisations should consider the current external environment and the insecurities that employees and their families face due to this.

Many initiatives can set an Organisation apart like increasing insurance coverage for employees, creating a COVID-19 emergency fund to help employees meet exigencies, providing 24*7 physician consultation for families, and creating COVID-19 response resources to help employees with all the training, communication, support etc. In such times, when the workforce is primarily working from home, Human Resource departments can truly utilise the time to drive

leadership development programmes to help employees upskill, online induction and onboarding programmes and even celebrate special days on online forums. Transparency in communication is the biggest gift that you can give your employees today. Be it clear, authentic communication from leaders to allay fears about job losses or empathetically dealing with employees and continuing to take decisions as per organisations values - all these will help organisations in driving high performance even though everyone is working virtually. While organisations are doing all this, they may also provide surveys or provide other forums to employees to provide and inputs candidly and anonymously, if needed.

Time for Mental Well-being

With the impact of the pandemic sweeping across the world, we are also witnessing elevated levels of anxiety and stress among people. Corporates are addressing this with strong policies that include psychological help not only for the employees, but also for their families. It is comprehensible that new measures like quarantine and lockdowns have deeply impacted people's routines. Therefore, simple steps like creating Employee Assistance programmes, counselling and psychological help, providing meditational and spiritual sessions can go a long way in helping employees.

Strong measures on holistic healthcare, going the extra mile to ensure that they feel secure, and motivational talks by the leaders instil positivity in employees. From enhanced benefits to employees and additional incentives to those on the frontlines, corporates are working earnestly to make employees feel valued and at the same time, financially covered. This is the time to foster connections with employees and it all comes down to how well we connect with them in an empathetic manner, and likewise, engage with them.



“Everyone is personally affected by the pandemic-driven crisis, and are still learning to strike the perfect work-life integration. Hence, it is highly crucial to how leaders drive their teams during such testing times.”

Remote working has brought the interlinking between our personal space and professional lives to the fore. This is an opportune moment for the managers to drive the change. The hour of crisis must be looked at as an opportunity to upskill our employees with new training sessions. The quantum of growth in any sector is often driven by how skilled the workers are. Today, with many employees finding themselves limited within the confines of their homes, upskilling them with relevant training is a great way to keep the morale high. Many corporates are looking at newer ways to improve the skill sets of employees, as working from home is making room for more learning and knowledge sharing programmes. Things will not be the same in the postCOVID era. Organisations that are agile and innovative will make use of technology and digital solutions and are in fact working on the means to embed and develop new capabilities so that they are equipped with better chances to succeed.

We are living in times when personal well-being is more connected

to professional productivity than ever before. However, it is interesting that employee management, performance trends, and experience strategies are changing at a rapid pace. Organisations are tailoring their operations and goals to fall in line with the new world order, keeping employee welfare at the centre of their new outlook. The prized moment to act basis the values of the organisation is NOW! 

About the Author

Swadesh Behera is the Senior Director-HR for Boston Scientific India for their Commercial, GBS, IT and R&D entities. He demonstrates a robust HR experience of 25 years with achievements across the globe with diverse sectorial experience in MNCs & Indian Organisations in Healthcare, Pharmaceuticals, FMCG and Manufacturing. He has worked in organisations such as Coke, Tata Steel, Ranbaxy, Merck, and ICI. Swadesh is a postgraduate from TISS, Mumbai.

Workplace Sexual Harassment In A Post-COVID World

BY RICHA MOHANTY, KAUSHALYA MADHAVAN & YASHVI GANERIWAL

COVID-19 and the subsequent lockdown has transformed the workplace from a physical to a virtual space and has blurred the lines between home and office. Given that remote working or 'work from home' ("WFH") is gradually becoming mainstream, employers today have an uphill task of ensuring that the same rules of professional etiquettes are maintained in a virtual workplace, as in the case of a physical workspace, and that the virtual workplace is safe and free from all forms of harassment including sexual harassment.

Given the lack of physical interaction between individuals, there is a general misconception that incidents of sexual harassment at the workplace are lesser in a WFH situation. On the contrary, newspaper reports suggest that there was a sharp rise in complaints of sexual harassment during the lockdown, while WFH was at its peak.

The above has brought into focus, questions around the ambit and scope of the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 ("POSH Act") and whether it would cover an act of sexual harassment in a WFH situation and/or on a virtual forum.

Status of sexual harassment in case of WFH

Under the POSH Act, the term "workplace"¹ has an inclusive

definition and extends to not only the place of work or office premises of an employer but also *inter alia* to

- (i) Any place visited by an employee arising out of or during the course of employment
- (ii) A dwelling place or a house. Further, in the case of *Saurabh Kumar Mallick v. The Comptroller and Auditor General of India & Anr.*², additional factors such as:-

- (a) proximity from the place of work
- (b) control of management over such place/residence
- (c) the 'residence' being an extension or contiguous part of the working place, have been considered relevant to determine what constitutes the 'workplace'.

In light of the above, the definition of workplace under the POSH Act seems to be wide enough to encompass the 'home' or virtual spaces being accessed in the WFH scenario, within its ambit.

The inclusion of a 'dwelling place' within the definition of workplace is typically viewed to provide for redressal of sexual harassment of domestic workers under the POSH Act. However, this aspect of the definition too, can be considered to enable the investigation of sexual harassment in case of a WFH situation.

While virtual/online sexual harassment has not been expressly mentioned, the POSH Act contains an inclusive definition of sexual harassment, which is wide enough to cover incidents that occur online. Sexual harassment under the POSH Act includes the following unwelcome acts or behaviour (whether directly or by implication):

- (i) physical contact and advances
- (ii) a demand or request for sexual favours
- (iii) making sexually coloured remarks



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- (iv) showing pornography
- (v) any other unwelcome physical, verbal or non-verbal conduct of sexual nature.³

All such incidents except physical contact can occur in a virtual space, and the wording of clause (v) expands the definition to include any verbal/non-verbal occurrences of a sexual nature. A common question that crops up then, is what kind of acts/incidents are likely to constitute sexual harassment in the virtual space.

Examples of virtual or online sexual harassment

There are several kinds of acts or behaviour that can amount to sexual harassment in a virtual space. Some such examples include cyberstalking, posting of sexually abusive comments by colleagues on the company portal or on social media platforms, persistent flirting, sending inappropriate texts/jokes through emails or text messages over WhatsApp etc., non-consensual sharing of sexual content or images, bullying, trolling, dressing inappropriately during video calls, provocative content appearing at the background of a video call (for example, if there is an inappropriate image or a quotation hanging on the wall during such calls), taking screenshots during video conferences, asking/compelling employees to attend video calls at odd hours etc. In fact, there are judicial precedents whereby Indian courts have observed that unwelcome acts of a sexual nature occurring through social media platforms or via electronic texts/messages, tantamount to sexual harassment.⁴ Therefore, in a WFH situation, while physical forms of harassment like touching, groping, staring etc. may not exist, various other forms of harassment, are possible.

Virtual inquiries by internal committees ("IC") and other challenges

Typically, IC proceedings are conducted in person. However, on



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account of *inter alia* social distancing norms, non-availability of all parties in one location, travel restrictions imposed by the government etc., IC proceedings, at least in the immediate future, are likely to be held virtually than in person. Given that there is no express provision in the POSH Act which mandates physical meetings, IC meetings may be held virtually. However, due to quorum requirements specified under the POSH Act, video conferencing should be preferred over telephonic proceedings.

However, there are several challenges in conducting IC proceedings virtually, both for the IC members, and the employer. Due to connectivity and internet bandwidth issues, there could be interruptions in proceedings, which could result in unnecessary delays or postponement. Unlike in a physical meeting, IC members will not have control over the actions of the parties and enforcing attendance, production of documents, examining evidence or cross examining the parties etc. could pose practical challenges for the IC, even though it has the powers of a civil court. Further, there is a risk

that parties could breach their confidentiality obligations by recording the session or having others present in the same room including their lawyers (which is restricted under the POSH Act)⁵, without the knowledge of the IC members. Additionally, conducting virtual proceedings would also demand considerable co-ordination between IC members (who could themselves be in separate locations) especially for preparation of the report, obtaining e-signatures of all parties etc.

Moreover, given that such incidents will no longer occur in the physical office space, getting any direct evidence in the form of CCTV footage, or eyewitnesses, will be challenging. In the absence of a physical meeting, the IC will also find it difficult to read body language and it may be easier for the parties to avoid difficult questions. Hence, the IC members may have to place a lot of reliance on the statement and complaint of the aggrieved woman.

Due to the reasons above, adhering to the timelines mentioned in the POSH Act for *inter alia* completion of the IC proceedings, will also be difficult. The Supreme



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Court of India has, by an order dated March 23, 2020 (“**SC Order**”), given respite on this front by permitting the extension of the limitation periods under general/special laws, which would also apply to the timelines mentioned under the POSH Act. However, for good order, in case there are deviations from the timelines specified under the POSH Act, the reasons for the same should be recorded by the IC, to avoid any challenge from any of the parties concerned.

Role of an employer

Given the constraints within which an IC has to work in a WFH scenario, employers will have to play a pivotal role in providing all possible support to them, in his regard. First and foremost, there is a need for employers to revisit their internal policies under the POSH Act or their code of conduct

to specifically provide for redressal mechanisms in a WFH environment and to facilitate virtual IC proceedings. Additionally, employers should reconsider their policies governing employee behaviour/conduct to ensure that dress codes and overall work etiquettes are observed during virtual meetings/interactions. Employees and IC members should also be adequately trained and sensitised towards the evolving nature of sexual harassment and the manner of dealing with such incidents.

While the pandemic has paved the way for an alternate work environment, the menace of sexual harassment has not abated and the same will continue to exist in some form or the other. Hence, the onus would be on the employers to ensure the safety of women within the realm of the POSH Act, even in case of WFH or on a virtual space and to provide a conducive environment for victims of sexual harassment, to come forward and voice their grievances, without any fear of retaliation. **HC**

- 1 Section 2 (o) of the POSH Act.
- 2 Saurabh Kumar Mallick v. The Comptroller and Auditor General of India & Anr., Civil Writ Petition No. 8649 of 2007.
- 3 Section 2 (n) of the POSH Act.
- 4 Majeesh K Mathew v. State of Kerala, order dated June 20, 2018, Kerala High Court; Chandrakant v. The State of Maharashtra, order dated December 20, 2018, Bombay High Court; M. Palanisamy v. State of Tamil Nadu & Ors., C.M.P (MD) No. 11270 of 2017.
- 5 Section 11 of the POSH Act read with Rule 7 (6), Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Rules, 2013.



Q With ‘work from home’ (“WFH”) becoming more prevalent, social interactions with colleagues that are not always limited to work, are also occurring online. Occasionally, colleagues also interact informally on Zoom meetings and may also organise virtual get togethers, etc. If an incidence of sexual harassment occurs during any such virtual event, would the same amount to sexual harassment under the Sexual Harassment of Woman at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 (“POSH Act”)?

A Yes, any form of sexual harassment by a colleague on a virtual medium, would fall within the ambit of the POSH Act, and therefore, a complaint in this regard can be made by the aggrieved female colleague, under the POSH Act. The concept of an “extended workplace” is recognised under the POSH Act and in addition to the physical place of work, the definition also includes *any place visited by an individual arising out of or during the course of employment*. In the current instance, a virtual team party would be akin to a physical office party.

Q In the wake of the pandemic and the subsequent migration to a WFH model, it is difficult to conduct physical inquiries. How can an internal committee (“IC”) conduct an inquiry regarding a complaint of sexual harassment, under the POSH Act, in the present WFH environment?

A In the current WFH model, ICs can conduct virtual inquiries through video conferencing. Given the quorum requirement under the POSH Act, inquiries through audio conferencing

should be avoided. Various online platforms are available and can be used for the conduct of such inquiries, such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Skype or even WhatsApp. However, it is recommended that the anti-sexual harassment policy adopted by an employer (under the POSH Act), be suitably amended to enable such virtual IC meetings so that either of the parties to the dispute, do not raise objections against such an online inquiry.

Q In the event a complaint of online sexual harassment has been filed by a victim before the IC of their employer, is such a victim precluded from availing other remedies, for instance criminal remedies under the Indian Penal Code, 1860 (“IPC”)?

A No, filing a complaint under the POSH Act does not preclude the victim from filing a criminal complaint under the IPC. A remedy under both the POSH Act and the IPC may be pursued simultaneously. Under the IPC, Section 354A deals with sexual harassment, in addition to other provisions such as Section 354D, which deals with stalking. With an increase in incidents of virtual/online sexual harassment, a victim can also, in addition to filing a complaint before the employer’s IC under the POSH Act, initiate proceedings under the Information Technology Act, 2000 (“IT Act”), for redressal of cyber-crimes such as cyber-stalking, discomfiting social media interactions such as being subject to sexually abusive comments on social media, online trolling, etc. Section 67A of the IT Act lays down that publishing content in electronic form, which contains sexually explicit acts/content, is a punishable offence. **HC**



5 Myths About AI In HR

If you are assuming Artificial Intelligence (AI) will take over the world, you need to modify your thought process since it has already taken over the world.

BY HARJEET KHANDUJA

“The transactional side of HR has been shrinking over the past few decades, but the good news is that the strategic side of HR has been evolving at the same time.”

A few years ago, I asked a taxi driver if he would take me to the railway station. He shook his head and stated that there was a taxi strike. I asked him the reason for the strike and he replied that it was due to the launch of CNG. CNG had been deemed as unsafe, and hence, they were protesting for the safety of the passengers.

This is a typical change management problem. We had been putting liquid (petrol/diesel) in our vehicles all these years. Suddenly, someone claimed that our vehicles can run on gas. We found it difficult to comprehend as to how gas will be stored in a petrol pump, and how is it going to be transferred into a vehicle, and how the vehicle will run on gas.

Over a period of time, people saw that it worked and also experienced the benefits offered by CNG. No further questions were raised.

If we were to look back in history for over a hundred years, we will always come across resistance for change. When the modern-day version of electricity (Alternate Current) was being popularised, there were protests claiming that it is potentially dangerous to life. When computers were being installed in government offices, there was a huge hue and cry about how computers will take away all the jobs. Today, we use electricity as well as computers (the little mini versions you carry in your hand are also computers, per se).

It is human nature to resist anything new since we anticipate risk. When I was a kid, my brother told me that there was a ghost in one of the nearby houses. I believed in that statement for years, and would always run while crossing that house.

The next wave of change is Artificial Intelligence (AI). Although there are no active protests about it on the streets, there is a lot of passive resistance, mostly because we have not explored the possibilities and have developed certain myths in our mind based on what has been told to us. I spoke to some of my HR friends and listed the top 5 myths about AI for HR.

1. AI is only for HR of IT companies

AI is only for HR of IT companies or at most technology companies. Firstly, since technology companies have to sell AI as a product, they showcase it by implementing it in their HR departments. Secondly, they have a workforce which actually works on the development of AI. So, they know how to use AI.

Uber is a platform organisation which uses AI extensively for matching drivers and travellers, route optimisation, driver on-boarding, fraud detection and much more. The platform is being used by customers and drivers, and not coders. When we analyse several of the processes used we can infer that they are technically HR processes.



2. AI is costly

Most people believe that AI is a costly proposition. Of course, AI is costly if you go out and look for it in a fancy showroom.

On Valentine's Day, if you go to the best florist in town and buy a bouquet of roses, it is going to burn a big hole in your pocket! If you buy roses from the wholesale market and are willing to put them together on your own as a bouquet, then you get it at a fraction of a cost.

Similarly, AI implementation frameworks are freely available on multiple open source platforms including ai.google.com, TensorFlow, Keras, etc. What you need to do is to determine the bouquet you need and the people who can prepare that for you.

Even many off-the-shelf HR software are offering their services (where AI is inbuilt) on a variable cost

model. You do not have to make an upfront investment to experience the relevance and ROI on AI solutions (such as AI evaluated video interviews).

3. AI is a technology job, what has HR got to do with it?

It is a compelling argument that HR is a doctor of human psychology, not human technology. The typical answers you get for this question are even more interesting. The job of HR will change from psychology to technology.

If you observe, all consulting and technology companies do not hire technical people alone. They hire subject matter experts as well. What do you think these subject matter experts do at these companies?

Let me take the simple example of implementing a Chatbot. Chatbot technology is available for free on the internet. However, you need to



“AI has already taken over the world. Nothing has apparently happened to the world, instead, the world has become a better place.”

configure a Chatbot for your own company. You need to know the kind of questions that people will ask, and how you would like to answer them based on your company's policies. Again, it is not about questions and answers alone. You need to decide, how you want to build conversations based on the value system of your organisation. In short, HR professionals need not be programmers, but they should be tech savvy (not scared to carry out business on a mobile phone).

4. AI will eliminate HR jobs

AI will eliminate HR jobs. Frankly, if it were to supposedly eliminate HR jobs eventually, then will you be really able to stop it by resisting it?

The transactional side of HR has been shrinking over the past few decades, but the good news is that the strategic side of HR has been evolving at the same time. Let us look at the definition of the word 'organisation'. Organisation is a group of people who come together to work towards a common goal. Can you take HR out of this definition?

Over the years, a formal set of HR activities were established, that worked for most of the organisations. Instead of intent, people started believing those set of activities are HR. When AI is automating some of those activities, we get unsettled that it is going to eliminate HR jobs. This is the time to redefine those “set of activities” which will redefine HR based on intent.

In short, even if some HR jobs get eliminated, HR functionality is not going anywhere.

5. AI will take over the world

How fast can human beings run? The maximum speed is 45 km/hour. We invented the motorcycle which can run multiple times faster than us. Are we scared that a motorcycle is better than us? We use the motorcycle to enhance our speed to achieve more. A Motorcycle is artificial muscle power, AI is artificial brainpower. If we are not scared of the motorcycle, then should we be scared of AI?

Indeed, the popular recruitment platform, has been making use of AI to show people relevant jobs for their profile. When recruiters shortlist a candidate, they get to see candidates with similar profiles. LinkedIn prompts responses when someone writes to you. Google completes your sentences when you are writing a mail.

If you are assuming AI will take over the world, you need to modify your thought process since it has already taken over the world. Apparently, nothing has happened to the world, instead, the world has become a better place.

On the flip side, when humans invented nuclear weapons, it was predicted that the world will be wiped out in a decade. Seven decades have passed and we are still there on the planet. The human race knows how to survive. **HC**

AI is here to stay and so are we.

About the Author

Harjeet Khanduja is an international speaker, author, poet, visionary, influencer and an HR Leader. He is an alumnus of IIT Roorkee and INSEAD. He is currently working with Reliance Jio. He is an SAP HCM consultant, Six Sigma Green Belt and Assessor for Predictive Index. Harjeet has 2 published patents and his new book “Nothing About Business” is a chartbuster on Amazon.

Culture: The Marathon Runner



Business is a marathon. Sometimes, it is easy to deliver spectacular results over a short span, but the true test of business excellence lies in delivering strong results over a wider time span.

BY **ASHISH PRADHAN**



There has been a great deal of talk over the relevance of an organisation's culture on talent attraction, development, and retention. It has been widely accepted that organisations with a nurturing culture attract the best talent and have a higher chance of retaining this talent. In today's highly connected and digitised world, organisations are working in a more transparent manner – much akin to the metaphorical glasshouse. This is notwithstanding the fact that portals

such as Glassdoor render a glimpse about an organisation's culture for prospective employees. There is also strong evidence that some cultures are conducive to a high retention rate.

In my career spanning more than 25 years, I have always tried to foster a culture focused on the core values of Trust, Appreciation, Conceptual clarity, Transparency and Self-discipline and have witnessed strong business results that have been above the industry average. This prompted me to question –

“Organisations with a nurturing culture attract and retain the best talent. In today’s highly connected and digitised world, organisations are working in a more transparent manner – much akin to the metaphorical glasshouse.”

- Is there a more direct link between Culture and long-term business success? There is, of course, a link between talent acquisition and retention with business performance. Is there evidence of a more direct correlation?
- What happens to the long-term performance trajectory of companies with a strong bias towards result orientation at the expense of process and people orientation?
- Do we see any remarkable differences, and can we derive some inferences from these?

Drawing parallels to sport

Let us look at two examples from a non-business environment.

In 2018, South Africa and Australia - the two top cricket teams in the world – were fighting for supremacy in an intense four-Test series. At the start of the third Test, the series was tied 1-1. The team that would win the third Test would most likely win the series. In such a background, Bancroft, an Australian player, was found to have broken the rules of the game and tampered with the ball to assist the seamers. All hell broke loose – Steve Smith and David Warner, the Australian Captain and Vice-Captain respectively, were sacked, and the manager Darren Lehmann replaced. The fracas reached to an extent wherein the Prime Minister of Australia was forced to make a statement. The debacle was laid at the doorstep of the ‘Win at all costs’ culture of Team Australia. Australia lost the third Test and was demolished in its next outing in Johannesburg. The Australian one-day international team suffered a whitewash a couple of months later. Further, in October, the T-20 team was whitewashed by Pakistan. The team lost many more series at home in the subsequent summer.

In 2011, India was playing against England on the latter’s home ground. And right before lunch, Ian Bell was

mistakenly declared run-out, much to the displeasure of the audience. When the two teams returned after lunch, there were boos for M.S.Dhoni, the Indian Captain. This soon turned into cheers as people saw Ian returning to the pitch. Dhoni had reversed his decision to appeal after he realised that it was a mistake. He was given a standing ovation for the same by the audience. Though India lost the match, they managed to win hearts. Under Dhoni, India went on to become the most admired team in the world, and Dhoni himself was looked upon as a charismatic leader whom people wanted to emulate.

If we accept that the success of a Cricket team (or any sports team) is reflected in its ranking as well as sponsorships and popularity (both are closely linked – sponsorships follow popularity), then there is little doubt as to which of the above two teams emerged as more successful in the long run. The Indian cricket team has been consistently ranked amongst the top teams and so is the Australian team. The difference, especially after the ball-tampering episode, lay in the sponsorship and popularity of the team. The Australian Cricket team was reviled as cheats and lost millions of dollars in sponsorships. They were booed at many of their matches. Neither the corporates nor the fans wanted to be associated with a team that cheated to win – the episode was christened ‘Sandpaper-gate’ in an obvious reference to the Watergate scandal from the Nixon era. In contrast, the Indian team was extremely successful in bagging big sponsorships and was cheered in almost all the grounds in the world. Clearly, there was only one winner in this contest and the power behind this performance was – Culture.

Let us dig into this a bit more. The Australian culture has always prided itself on its tough as nails, never give an inch and never say die attitude. The Australian cricket epitomised this culture. Over the years, people probably did not realise the point at which this culture slipped into a mindset of ‘Win at all



“Culture is defined as, ‘How people behave when no one’s looking’. And this captures the true essence of the values that employees have internalised and hence exhibit these in their default behaviour.”

costs’. This unfortunate transition placed a lot of emphasis on winning that the ‘how we win’ or the process of winning became a sad casualty. The entire focus was on winning and little or no attention was given to softer aspects like sportsmanship and humility in winning. We can find examples galore in annals of corporate history that symbolise this – Volkswagen, Enron, Luckin Coffee, Satyam, the list goes on. All these are examples of corporate fraud that occurred due to a culture which did not respect the ‘right way of winning’ and had poor core values.

Behaving when no one’s looking

Culture is defined in many ways, but the definition that one likes is, ‘How people behave when no one’s looking’. This definition captures the true essence of the values that employees have internalised and hence exhibit these in their default behaviour. First and foremost, the Organisational leadership must identify the cultural cornerstones which they want their employees to internalise or the so termed “Culture Vision” of the company. They should then proceed to embody these values in every decision and transaction. People

recognise what is expected from them based on the cues they pick up from how their leaders behave rather than what they say. Culture value statements mean nothing when they are not backed by leadership behaviours that mirror these values. The other important point to keep in mind is that sometimes culture changes inadvertently. This slow change is almost insidious in nature. It is important to capture this drift right at the onset otherwise the drift can become so significant that it needs a major and sometimes painful course correction – a la Broken window syndrome.

Business is a marathon and not a sprint. It is sometimes easy to deliver spectacular results over a short span of time, but the true test of business excellence lies in delivering strong results over a wider time span. The difference between Good companies and Great companies is that good companies deliver good results many times, while great companies deliver great results almost all the time over several decades. While the external world sees the end results, the leadership of a great company is as much, if not more, concerned about how the results were delivered as the results themselves. They would be, I am sure, keeping a close watch on the course of the harbinger of sustained above-par results – Culture. 

About the Author

Ashish Pradhan is President, Siegwark India & Greater China. 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.

Trailblazing The Way Forward

Arjun Mohan, CEO — India, upGrad, has charted an inspiring path to become what he is today. While many of us struggle to find the perfect ingredient for being successful in our career, Arjun is one of those rare kinds who had found his passion and strength early on and decided to go with them. The fact that Arjun began his career in Edtech as a teacher and went on to become the CEO of India's leading online higher education company at a young age speaks volumes about his prowess and spirited attitude. In this exclusive interview with Human Capital, Arjun discusses how online education is getting assimilated into the mainstream and how upGrad is changing the game of the Indian Edtech ecosystem.

BY ANKITA SHARMA

Q You joined upGrad at a time when the COVID-19 crisis was deepening. The experience of becoming a new CEO in an organisation is not without its learning curves and challenges, and when you add COVID-19 and work-from-home to the equation, it seems even more daunting. Please share your reflections on the first few months at upGrad, which have been inevitably shaped by the pandemic.

A I joined upGrad when the company, with its unique brand proposition and result-oriented offerings, was already on the growth trajectory. Owing to our online model, we never really felt the operational challenge that many companies felt when we switched gears to remote working. Thanks to the complete trust the organisation put in me and the unconditional support of the employees, we were able to pivot into a 100% online company. We moved our sales, delivery, production, etc. online in no time. Our sales team that used to physically meet customers moved seamlessly to doing these meetings through video calls, and to our

surprise, they showed substantial improvement in performance. The SMEs and artists were trained to shoot videos of products and campaigns at home, which our team remotely edited to keep the flow going. We even did a professional ad shoot via Zoom. So while the first few months were challenging, we are proud to have achieved what we have done so far. We grew 100%+ from Q1 last year, and marginally from Q4.

“The online learning sector will continue to rise in the future, equipping India for a more competitive world that lies upon us.”

Q The Edtech space was witnessing growth at breakneck speed even before the pandemic, with the Indian online education industry poised to reach INR 360.3 billion by 2024, according to a pre-COVID estimate. With

the catalyst of the pandemic, online learning is bound to skyrocket even more. How do you see the scope and opportunities for online learning in India — now and after COVID-19 abates?

A Edtech has accomplished more in the last 100 days than it had in the previous five years. upGrad, after the pandemic outbreak, launched the whitepaper with FICCI, in which research indicated that 92% of learning leaders had confirmed the adoption of online learning journeys, up from 68% in the pre-COVID-19 period. Most of these leaders are in the areas of data sciences, AI, ML, full-stack software engineering, digital marketing, and MBA courses.

Even before COVID-19, online education in India was on the rise, and people were making a gradual shift from offline to online. However, with COVID-19 hitting the world suddenly, the pandemic has steered everyone towards online learning, making it mainstream rather than just another option for learning and upskilling. Online education has hit the fast track, and with various universities and colleges adopting



edtech platforms, we think the demand will be sustained even after the COVID-19 era. In India, we have never had a crisis that redefined skilling; this is that period. The comfort, safety, and flexibility offered by online education will continue to steer the demand.

We are enabling 100+ universities and colleges, which includes MHRD's NIRF Top 100 universities, to seamlessly replicate their classes online, and forecasting an INR 1200 crore annual run rate with profitability, a game-changer in the Indian edtech ecosystem. Most recently, we graduated a batch of 2859 learners, which marked IIIT Bangalore's largest convocation in the history of 21 years and perhaps India's largest convocation for any online course. The batch included learners of Post-Graduate Programs in Data Science, Machine Learning (ML) & Artificial Intelligence (AI), and Software Development/Blockchain.

Therefore, the online learning sector is not temporary but here to stay, and with the growing popularity, it will continue to rise in the future, equipping India for a more competitive world that lies upon us.

“Edtech has accomplished more in the last 100 days than it had in the previous five years.”

Q At upGrad, which course enrollments are seeing a spike in interest among professionals in India since the pandemic struck?

A The pandemic proved to be counter-cyclical for edtech. At upGrad, we have witnessed significant uptake in terms of traffic on our platform and revenue (we are considering Q4—Jan, Feb, and March—the pre-COVID-19 quarter and Q1—April, May, and June—the

Rapid Fire

- **Favourite quote:** "If ignorance is bliss, why seek knowledge."
- **Complete these sentences:**
 - **Life is ...** exciting
 - **I strongly believe in ...** fairness
- **What comes to your mind when you hear these words?**
 - **Resilience:** Never Say Die
 - **Self-Discipline:** Winning
 - **Inclusion:** Teamwork

post-COVID-19 quarter for the below data).

While all verticals have grown in Q4 vs Q1, the **MBA** vertical has grown by 63% in terms of revenue and 82% in terms of learner base, making it the biggest winner. The MBA vertical includes the global MBA programs we launched earlier this year in partnership with the renowned Liverpool Business School (LBS) and Deakin Business School.

Data science vertical, which has always been on a growth trajectory for us, continues to grow with the Master of Science in Data Science, having grown by more than 60% in terms of both revenue and learner base, making it our bestselling data science program in this quarter. This program, with India's renowned IIIT-B and the UK-based Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU), offers a globally recognised, fully online master's degree. Closer to home, our PG Certification in **Digital Marketing and Communication** with MICA has grown by 70% in terms of both revenue & learner base. Perhaps the program has grown to be the leader with around 40% of the market share.

In terms of interested candidates, sheer organic interest for our programs went up by around 120%. Women seem to have taken up slightly more of an interest in upskilling, having grown by around 32% quarter on quarter, as compared

to men who have grown by roughly 28%.

Both youth and older individuals have been considering upskilling. Our website saw a 42% increase for the 45–54 age group in the AMJ quarter, which is the highest amongst all other age groups, followed by the 18–24 age group, which grew by 40%.

Q On the recruitment front, upGrad wears two hats, one to recruit for your own teams, and the other to build a talent pool of upGrad learners from where other companies can source talent. How are upGrad's programs differentiated to make learners job-ready and more employable?

A We follow an outcome-oriented approach and offer our learners the best personalised content, which in turn complements their professional growth.

We offer programs in the areas of tech, management, data, and law, which acquaint learners/ professionals with new-age skill sets and have them meet the rapidly-changing industry demands. Moreover, our rigorous program structure and steadfast mentorship end up enhancing learner's employability quotient at large. Our program completion rate stands at 80%, which otherwise is around 3–6% for MOOCs, and we have onboarded 32,000 paid learners so far, thereby impacting half a million individuals globally.

Honestly, we live in an era when edtech is mushrooming and has become a crowded place. Yet, in a price-sensitive country like India, we are in a position to command an ARPU of INR 2.5 Lakh, which is the highest across the Indian online education space.

In the last quarter, we have seen a learner who enrolled for our Data Science program achieve the highest salary hike of 250%, along with other learners across domains, who have achieved more than a

100% salary hike. These numbers, indeed, bear testimony to our robust outcome-based delivery approach.

India offers a huge labour market, and, for upGrad as a recruiter, we have not faced any shortages. While skill and experience for a role are critical to us, what is equally important is that whoever joins us is able to see the multitude of career opportunities as well as the learning and growth we offer at upGrad. Believing in our purpose, fitting into our entrepreneurial culture, and rallying around our growth targets is a prerequisite for us. We have seen active solicitation as an employer, and we believe in the right talent and the right experience at the right compensation for a long-term commitment. With that said, we have experienced a bit of a surge in talent availability given the current economic slowdown across sectors.

Q While organisations in several sectors continue to swing the axe on jobs to deal with the current situation, upGrad, on the other hand, plans to double its employee base to capitalise on the boom in the Edtech space. What are your top business and talent priorities for the coming months?

A Our plans on hiring are based on our long-term commitments. We continued to be cautiously optimistic during the pandemic, onboarding 40% of our leadership team in the midst of COVID-19 knowing fully well that we wanted those senior leaders to enable our long-term growth plans. For the rest of the organisation, we delved into the right mix of talent and competence, ensuring that our growth plans are amply supported by continuously raising our organisational capability. We were prudent for some of our financial decisions as well, but we quickly realised that, as much as we wanted our consumers to commit to learning with us, we wanted our employees to commit to the mission

and purpose of upGrad. Our salaries, bonuses, and benefits continue to be the same for our employees, and we are continuously evolving how we can support our employees through this 'work-from-home' transition.

We will most likely double our headcount by the end of this fiscal year while being equally focused on getting the right talent mix into the organisation and staying true to our growth plans. We ensure that our talent comes from diverse backgrounds to provide us with the advantage of curating unique experiences and bodies of work that make upGrad the most exciting startup to work with. The career opportunities we offer range from technology to sales and marketing to operations – we welcome college graduates and experienced professionals who believe in the purpose we serve at upGrad.

Q What's something outstanding upGrad has achieved during this period of extraordinary challenge?

A We have helped 100+ offline institutes and universities to go online since the pandemic outbreak,

enabling thousands in India to continue their education with minimal disruption.

Migrating to an online ecosystem is not a mere matter of placing a webcam in front of the teacher. Quality of education will plummet if sessions, participation, and evaluations are not supervised with equal precision as they are in an offline setup. Quick to gain the advantage, upGrad—India's edtech leader—had promised access of its proprietary tech platform to all colleges and universities at the very onset of COVID-19 pandemic, before Lockdown 1.0. Over 100 colleges and universities, so far, are using upGrad's platform to replicate their offline classes online. These institutes include Jamia Hamdard University and Lovely Professional University, which are among the MHRD's NIRF Top 100 universities, with the former being recommended as Institute of Eminence by the Government of India.

I would not refer to "upGrad Live" as merely a "tech platform," because it's much more than that. It's a digital campus we have built for universities and strengthened for over half a decade with investments to the tune of 100 crores. "upGrad Live" supports multiple assessment formats, including coding tests, in its inbuilt coding console, quizzes, and projects for individuals and groups. Plagiarism checks and proctored exams allow for fair grading. Session analytics provide an alternative to class monitoring in an offline setup. We provide our partner universities with the complete LMS (Learning Management System), allowing a seamless transition.

The Litmus test for any tech platform is the volume it can handle without crashing. Around 100,000 learners are logged in to our platform as we speak with over 8500 hours of live sessions conducted in the past three months, and we are ready to take it to 1 million learners. **HC**

Up-Close and Personal

Q What has changed the most for you since the COVID-19 outbreak?

A No more travel; I used to be on the road four days a week. Work schedules have become a thing of the past; it's as if I am working all the time.

Q Which hard-won lessons will this pandemic have taught you?

A Don't wait for things to get back to normal. Adjust to the new normal or risk becoming irrelevant.

Q What would we be surprised to learn about you?

A I started my career in edtech as a teacher and still take classes for IIT JEE Physics and Math students in my leisure time.



With a dynamically shifting demand-supply curve, more so against unpredictable attrition trends and relentless competition, a robust talent management strategy and a mechanism for enticing and retaining High potential talent become essentially vital for organisational success.



NAMRATA CHOUDHURY

The global economic scenario, with its consequent paradigm shifts with regards to the human capital - in terms of formulating agile workforce models based on demand-driven instantaneous requirements and analysis of trends and metrics for talent acquisition, talent utilisation, talent development and retention - has elevated the human capital challenges worldwide.

In the prevailing disruptive environment, HR professionals are expected to hoist their standards of innovation, conceptualisation, strategic methods, and implement relevant strategies that contribute effectively towards organisational development. With a dynamically shifting demand-supply curve, more so against unpredictable attrition trends and relentless competition, a robust talent management strategy and a mechanism for enticing and retaining High potential talent become essentially vital for organisational success.

Increased rush for automation

The outbreak of COVID-19 has created an unprecedented social and economic disruption leading to large-scale reverse migration, pay cuts, job loss or pink slips across the country. Under such situations, an aspect of prime importance for employees is that they have a safe workplace wherein they are valued for the contributions they have made for the organisation.

In the wake of COVID-19, there is a greater surge among organisations that are looking out for the takeover of routine human jobs by machines with the help of AI (Artificial Intelligence), RPA (Robotics Process Automation) and various industrial robots. They are thus making a transition towards automation. Like the other departments, Human Resource leaders too are adapting AI for generating value addition to the

organisation. Chatbots for compliances, hiring, employee services, employee development, and learning are already being used extensively. The triggering of automation to such an extent will primarily affect strategies towards human capital retention.

The need for employee retention strategies

The challenge is further exacerbated by a rapidly shifting global economy that increasingly requires the workforce to be pioneering, adaptable and highly skilled. In order to safeguard the interest of the Human Capital, effective employee retention strategies can be systematically planned by employers to generate an environment for employee encouragement. This can be achieved by way of developing policies and practices that cater to their diverse requirements.

Well planned Employee engagement results in employee retention, but the strategy is required to be carved on the basis of the existing demand. Under the given circumstances owing to COVID-19, the manner in which an organisation plans and implements engagement will emerge as the deciding factor behind employee retention and employee motivation.

The conceptualisation of newer HR operating models and specific interventions to unleash the Human Potential during such difficult times is the need of the hour. An empowered employee experiences greater motivation in the workplace. And motivated employees will perform better, leading to improved employee retention, and in turn, a greater economic turnaround of the organisation.

Need for demand-driven talent retention

The need for a demand-driven talent retention model anchored by the organisation is essential to catalyse a talent development strategy across all sectors and geographies. This can be accomplished by way of building centres of excellence.

In fact, the retention of key performing employees is critical to the lasting health and success of an organisation. The performance of employees is directly aligned to excellence, client/customer satisfaction, and the overall growth in business along with the better establishment of the employer brand. Also, the performance of employees is associated with employee motivation, effective succession planning, acquired organisational knowledge, value system, culture and ethics.

One of the major aspects is to understand and analyse whether supply can truly surpass demand, and secondly, the need to understand the kind of employees who are covered under the categories of layoffs and who are being retained.

In an organisation, employees are broadly categorised into four categories based on their performance and potential. Employees who are scarce in the dimensions of performance and potential are called 'strugglers'. Such employees whose performance is below potential are termed as 'under-performers'. The other two categories comprise the 'High performers' and the 'Star performers' who are at the higher end of the performance continuum. 'Strugglers' and 'Under-Performers' constitute about one-fifth of the employee strength and are apparently the first category to be covered under the layoffs or the pink slips. The second category of 'High Performers' and 'Star performers' are termed as the 'talent' segment. This is the segment that an organisation wishes to protect by exploring and implementing various retention strategies.

When an organisation adapts an advanced retention development strategy, it is largely capable to retain key performers, as compared to an organisation that adapts the very basic of strategies. An advanced talent development strategy can create a talent pool which signifies the availability of a talent pipeline of potential successors with the required competencies to climb the next level

“The segment of ‘High Performers’ and ‘Star performers’ is what an organisation wishes to protect by exploring and implementing various retention strategies.”

“An organisation can design the talent development structure, define the skill and capabilities to ensure that the business derives the competitive advantage through its human capital retention strategy.”

of key positions which are critical to an organisation's performance.

An organisation can design the talent development structure, define the skill and capabilities to ensure that the business derives the competitive advantage through its human capital retention strategy.

Fierce competition for talent

With the fierce competition for talent and the necessity to develop a strong succession plan, advanced retention development strategies will remain a vital factor in employee capacity development. Identifying organisational fitment or high-performance as an individual contributor not only emerges as the primary criteria for identifying a high performer, employees are also evaluated on parameters which are scientific and psychometric-driven assessments. These assessments

combine data analytics from performance management, career development plan and competency mapping or capacity building indices.

The evaluation of an employee based on the results of competency mapping includes several other parameters such as Adaptability/flexibility, Inquisitiveness, Conscientiousness, Risk managing Approach and Competitiveness are found to be very critical in identification of successful performers.

Employees are an organisation's business. And those who manage businesses both large and small face stiffer competition domestically and abroad. An organisation should use 'collaboration to win' strategy wherein employees and teams are being oriented and encouraged to adopt collaborative relationship amongst the team and build a culture that recognises, rewards and celebrates achievement.

In the absence of advanced retention strategies, the reputation of an organisation can be adversely impacted that shall ultimately affect the economic position of the organisation. An organisation's leadership style, ethics and values are critical for organisational success. They are also the integral pillars for the development of a motivated and focussed workforce.

Workforce acumen is indispensable to the country's economy. An organisation must therefore thrive to protect the talent pool from the non-retentive wrenches and expeditiously implement kicking retention strategies! **HC**

About the Author

Namrata Choudhury has expertise in Strategic HR, Talent Management, Talent development, Performance and Retention management and HR Advisory & Consulting have worked for MNCs like Banking Financial Services industry, Media and Entertainment Industry and Strategy/Management Consulting organizations. Namrata is an IIM Kolkata Alumni with specialisation in Human Resource Management and degree in Information Technology.



Appointments



IBM Appoints Nickle LaMoreaux As CHRO

IBM has appointed Nickle LaMoreaux as the Chief Human Resources Officer (CHRO). She is a seasoned HR leader and has served various HR leadership roles across the world and has worked on many large transformational projects while at IBM, such as the acquisition of Red Hat. LaMoreaux has pursued BSc in industrial and labour relations from Cornell University, and holds a master's degree in business administration.



Temenos Appoints Monica Rancati As CHRO

Temenos has appointed Monica Rancati as the Chief Human Resources Officer (CHRO) and member of the Executive Committee. She is responsible for all aspects of Human Resources globally. She has more than 15 years of experience in HR management, talent management, executive talent acquisition and development, employee relations, M&A and other human resources disciplines. Most recently, Rancati was associated with Microsoft, where she led the HR function for Western Europe.



BharatPe Appoints Jasneet Kaur As CHRO

BharatPe has appointed Jasneet Kaur as the Chief Human Resource Officer (CHRO). Kaur is a seasoned HR professional with 21 years of cross-functional Human Resource Management experience across companies such as DHL, PepsiCo, Maersk, Microsoft, Mercer, Reliance Life Sciences.



HSBC Appoints Nidhi Arora As SVP-HR

HSBC Bank has appointed Nidhi Arora as the Senior Vice President of Human Resources. Most recently, she was the Director-HR at S&P Global. Arora is a seasoned HR executive with a unique ability of strategic thinking and championing tactical execution. She has nearly two decades of experience in various facets of human resources, including shaping organisational culture, employee relations and talent and organisational development.



Cloudera Appoints Sarah Shin As Chief Diversity Officer

Cloudera has promoted Sarah Shin to the new role of Chief Diversity Officer. Shin previously served as the Head of Diversity, Inclusion & Learning at Cloudera where she led various diversity and inclusion initiatives focused on leveling the playing field for women and underrepresented minorities. Before that, Sarah held various D&I and HR leadership positions at Apple, LeapFrog, HPE, and more.



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