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DEMOCRATISATION OF LEARNING

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From The Publisher's Desk



Sir Tim Berners Lee, the man who invented the internet aka world wide web also democratised information by way of releasing the internet's source code for free. If not for him and the internet, Learning as we know it, would be vastly different today. If every human being has the right to information, by the same analogy, every employee has the right to Learning. This, in a nutshell, forms the theme for the August edition of Human Capital. The COVID-19 pandemic, however, has accelerated the pace of learning with a Work From Home regime as also the looming threat of mass attrition. Going down mythological lanes, Vikas Dua introduces us to the very first victim of autocratic learning, Ekalavya. However, Ekalavya's grit to master archery without the

crucial right thumb gave birth to the technique being practised in modern-day archery. Dr Moorthy K. Uppaluri writes that the work from home imperative has placed a different spin in the knowledge worker space. Nishath Usmani writes that democratising learning is not about giving up control, it is about sharing and adopting a new mindset.

In an exclusive interview with Human Capital, Srinivas Konidena, Vice President, Product Development, Asia Pacific, ADP discusses how investing in User Experience (UX) enhances Employee Experience (EX) and yields greater returns for businesses. In yet another exclusive conversation, Krish Shankar, Executive Vice President and Group Head-HR, Infosys, provides an exciting take on the evolving role of a CHRO, the areas where HR needs to be more courageous and the anticipated changes in the talent landscape.

In the case study, Dr Farah Naqvi, drawing inspiration by the best-selling book "The Set-Up-To Fail Syndrome", writes that managers tend to scrutinise an employee for the slightest of errors and subsequently brand him as an average performer.

The Persona section features Michael Bungay Stanier, the founder of Box of Crayons, who shares unique insights into how advice-giving can be counterproductive, why we must stay curious longer, and how leaders can become more coach-like.

Carpe Diem!

Neha Jain

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Owned by
Mukesh Jain

Managed by
Neha Jain
Ph : 7060177222
Editorial@humancapitalonline.com

Editorial
Ajay Kumar
ajay@humancapitalonline.com
Ankita Sharma
ankita@humancapitalonline.com

Subscription
Harsh Agarwal
Ph : 7535077222
subscribe@humancapitalonline.com

Customer support & Feedback

Surbhi Garg
Ph : 7534877222
support@humancapitalonline.com

Advertisement
advertise@humancapitalonline.com

Corporate and media connect
info@humancapitalonline.com

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David Thomas

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

BY GAUTAM BRAHMA

A wooden surface with Scrabble tiles arranged to read "WORK FROM HOME" in three horizontal rows. Various other tiles are scattered around, including "I", "V", "L", "A", "S", "A", "Y", "S", "E", "P", "T", "G", "C", "T", "Y".

The research team did not poll the employees on their opinions around these findings. This could have provided additional insights into the volitional aspect of the observed behaviour. In other words, did managers communicate more because they found work quality dipping otherwise? Did teams shorten meetings to accommodate calendar pressure ('many more meetings') or did meetings genuinely become more

productive and therefore shorter? And so on. Polling employees would have also thrown light on how they feel about such a comprehensive and granular monitoring of their time. Do some people find it oppressive that each time they open a tab, make an entry on their calendar or send a message, they are generating data that will be analysed by someone they do not even know?

Next, the assessment. One has been getting feedback from business leaders that the work from home option is stressful for managers and particularly difficult for assimilating new hires. No amount of onboarding effort comprising documentation, videos, one-on-one orientation, and team meetings can replace the acculturation that happens when a new hire physically observes seniors, juniors and colleagues at work and chats with them in between work. Similarly, team mates find it hard to effectively engage with someone they have never met in a physical setting. How detailed should their communication be to such a person, to ensure that he or she understands what has to be done? In the absence of regular visual cues, how does one know whether feedback has been accepted positively or caused offence? And so on.

“Learning on the job is suffering in cases where it involves close and continuous apprenticeship with an expert. People are exhausted from elastic work schedules and are looking for greater, ‘normal’ structure in their workday.”

A recent article in the Wall Street Journal compiles more such anecdotal evidence and concludes that companies may be tiring of

pure-play work from home. Projects are taking longer to complete. Freshers from campuses who are in their first job are finding it difficult to ask for help in small but important matters that they would otherwise have resolved through observation. Learning on the job is suffering in cases where it involves close and continuous apprenticeship with an expert. People are exhausted from elastic work schedules and are looking for greater, ‘normal’ structure in their workday. Possibly because of all this, companies that have made physical attendance optional, in recent times, are seeing a lot of people choosing to come to work.

“People who have not yet lost their jobs are terrified that they might. As jobs go away, the fear-driven productivity may hold for some more time”

Laszlo Bock, former head of HR at Google and author of ‘Work Rules!’, is quoted as saying that the early productivity gains of work from home have levelled off. His precise words are, *“It was people terrified of losing their jobs, and that fear-driven productivity is not sustainable.”* This is worth pondering. As a matter of fact, jobs are being lost. No day passes without some announcement of that sort by some company or the other. Recently, the papers reported a rise in psychological stress disorders in people who have not yet been infected by the novel coronavirus but are scared that they might get infected. Something similar is happening at work with people who have not yet lost their jobs but are terrified that they might. As jobs go away, the fear-driven productivity may hold for some more time, but clearly, Bock is right and this is not sustainable.

What then is the way forward? Unfortunately, no clear consensus is emerging around this, other than the eventual return to co-located working with safeguards. These include increased spacing between seats, rostering to allow a fraction of employees in the office by rotation over the week, greater hygiene requirements from employees, modified menu and service in cafeterias and more elaborate cleaning routines by housekeeping staff. This will continue to be an area of innovation, experimentation and study and we will keep returning to it.

Meanwhile, companies are distracted by more pressing matters like survival in a moribund global economy and local economies that are spiralling down in many sectors. Some companies will fold up, some will be crippled, and some will have to pivot to a completely different business model. For such organisations, employee work location becomes a secondary issue. **HC**

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2. “Companies Start To Think Remote Work Isn't So Great After All”; Chip Cutter; WSJ; 24 July 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.

A Level Playing Field For Learning

With the evolution of learning encompassing the learner, the provider and the learning tools and techniques, it is only imperative that the entire methodology of learning will be enhanced.

BY VIKAS DUA

Eklavya - a model disciple. That is how Indian mythology from over 5000 years ago presents him to us. And, while we get familiar with his journey, the scriptures also teach us a lot more that, in a strange play of cosmic drama, is becoming a reality today in 2020 AD.

For the uninitiated, a brief recount of the story of Eklavya from the “Mahabharata” is warranted at this point; so here goes.

Eklavya was a young tribal boy in the state of Hastinapur, belonging to one of the lower castes. He aspired to learn archery under the wings of the renowned ‘guru’, Dronacharya, the teacher of the royalty, including the stately prince, Arjuna. However, when he did approach the great master, Eklavya was spurned. After all, it was beneath the learned teacher's dignity to coach an individual who was not from the upper ‘Brahmin’ or ‘Kshatriya’ castes. Undeterred, Eklavya went back to the confines of the forest and built a mud statue of guru Dronacharya. With great reverence, he worshipped his guru, and practiced the art of archery with incomparable passion. Years later, when he chanced upon Dronacharya in person, the latter was surprised to see the extent of Eklavya's dedication and the finesse of his skill. Not desiring any other



mortal being to surpass his cherished student, Arjuna, guru Dronacharya proceeded to ask Eklavya to share this thumb with him, in the form of 'guru dakshina'. Needless to say, along with losing a thumb, Eklavya would lose the ability to practice archery. Nonetheless, without flinching, Eklavya sliced off his thumb and offered it to his teacher, thus earning the title of a 'model disciple'.

Perfunctorily, it may be injudicious to pass this off as a bit of mythology or dismiss it as a folk tale. The truth is that this anecdotal story which many a grandparent has narrated to his or her grandchild, has reflected a harsh reality of the world that has existed in India for centuries. A reality in which knowledge and learning has been access controlled, not unlike the air-cooled server rooms that dot every large-sized corporate's headquarters and require entrants to key in their digital codes (or scan their fingerprints or eyes, in more sophisticated setups) before they can enter within.

To be fair, governments over the years have taken steps to ensure that knowledge is available to all those who desire to grow. The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act of 2009 lays down that every child between the ages of 6 to 14 years has the right to free and compulsory education and it also presents the guiding approach and penalties for non-adherence. Even higher education is subsidised and well-meaning campaigns like 'Beti Padhao, Beti Bachao' further push the masses to understand the importance of education.

Even as these calibrated measures by the government and many other social initiatives by nonprofit, education-focused organisations have taken root and tried to take everyone forward, we have had a very familiar situation playing out. The private sector, as always, has come to the rescue in establishing centres of learning covering the entire play school to post-graduation spectrum.



With higher funds at their disposal, they have managed to deploy the best of faculty and infrastructure to make education delivery a lot more wholesome. While there are several upsides, it is the downsides that should concern us. For a society long segregated by castes and many regional aspects, education has unfortunately also become a divisive factor. The more financially sound individuals, to a certain extent, could 'create' their own paths into the hallowed halls, run more as businesses than centres of learning. It seemed for years that the very 'equality' that our founding fathers enshrined in the 'Constitution of India' would remain a distant dream.

“It must be kept in mind that when we create a framework that makes learning more absorbing, accessible and affordable, we need to ensure that it benefits the larger population.”

No more! Finally, we seem to be at a cusp of real change. And, there have been a couple of inflection points which have placed us in this position. Taking a cue from the field of science, I am taking the liberty to christen them as below.

1. The 'Jio' Effect

In the year 2015, as per a report by TRAI*, for an Indian telecom subscriber, the cost was 226 per GB of data consumed. By the year 2019, this cost was a mere 11.78. It is no secret that this was the result of the foundation of the telecom market being shaken by Mukesh Dhirubhai Ambani's Reliance Group with the launch of Jio, its telecom venture, in 2016.

Backed by high grade infrastructure, the 'Jio' telecom network is essentially a 4G network, built ground-up, that carries 'Voice over LTE', over a fiber-optic backbone. It has enabled high volume of data to be carried across the length and breadth of our large nation and played a transformative role. What this means is that along with emails and social media posts, it also has enabled the speedy transfer and download of data heavy



SAKSHI SOOD

HR-Business Partner
Merck Sharp & Dohme

“A revolution is sweeping through L&D and we are witnessing a top-down approach to learning. Unlocking internal knowledge is radically good for business. Tacit knowledge is ideas and experiences that employees have but aren't expressed and hence untapped. It is this type of knowledge that is more relevant. It drives performance, increases resilience and weaves a culture of innovation. This isn't just a wisdom-of-the-crowd approach: Organisations need a curation layer to make sure the information is correct but benefits of this democratised approach are multi-fold - Flexibility, relevance & agility etc.”

videos. It is these 'videos' that are serving a yeoman service in 'bringing the tutor to the home' for many of the unprivileged students or those who are not in a location where high-quality education is easily accessible.

Today, it is not uncommon to find a feisty, young girl from one of the smallest towns in our hilly regions to win a reality dance contest, beating participants from across the rest of the country. Her teachers? None other than her 'gurus' on the internet whose moves she has followed with reverence, but never met, just like Eklavya from the early ages.

2. The 'Lockdown' Effect

While the growth in internet connectivity continued its spiral upwards post the launch of 'Jio', the break-out moment for education and learning truly came about due to the 'lockdown' triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic. With the entire nation or parts of it in a lockdown for over four months now, the online world has become the lifeboat for everything, be it, entertainment, business, health, or more importantly, learning. Encouraged by the Government, the academic world was swift to move onto online delivery of classes to ensure that the learning journey of its students was not impacted adversely by the lack of in-campus classes. Many professionals who discovered additional time at their disposal due to their workplaces being shut, took to the online learning platforms to build their skills. In a strange turn, one even witnessed a 'gold rush' for online certifications, a trend mainly triggered by the student community. With the aim of bolstering the value of their resume, click-happy individuals proceeded to pursue one course after another, often in varied disciplines and without a clear perspective of the end objective.

At this juncture, therefore, the question that arises quite appropriately is this - What is the



ANUSHREE SINGH

Country HR Director, India Sub-continent- AkzoNobel India

“While organisations were already on the digitisation journey, the outbreak of COVID 19 has accelerated the technology adoption. Digital transformation and AI have empowered organisations to offer their employees option to upskill on the go. Embracing a culture which encourages development and upskilling through online mode and AI tools has helped build a democratised learning environment at work benefitting both the employer and employee. Today, the focus is not restricted to building skills for future roles, rather continuous upskilling to stay relevant. The current time is an opportunity to help employees adopt new and contemporary ways to balance their work, personal time and their development goals.”

future direction for learning? Clearly, there is a tectonic shift that is playing out and it involves the below:-

1. A Mindset Shift: Traditionally, a premium has been attached to on-campus learning. Even if professionals have taken the initiative to invest in 'distant learning' through programmes that offer weekend classes or the like, the qualification obtained has been seen through coloured lenses by hiring managers. Today, thanks to greater proliferation of online programmes, many offered by some of the world's most renowned centres of learning, there is a higher acceptability of such certifications. As we move forward towards what Human Resources experts call a

‘skill-based economy’, the importance of ‘what one has learnt’ will overshadow ‘from where one has learnt’. Truly, a mindset shift.

2. ‘Anytime, Anywhere’

Consumption: Additionally, we are also seeing an uptick in the adoption of learning platforms such as Coursera, Udemy, Upgrad and the like. With learning now available in an ‘Anywhere, Anytime’ mode preferred by today’s consumers, the spread is only bound to increase, bringing into fold learners who have been denied access, either due to lack of funds, societal norms or simply, lack of easy access.

3. Enhanced Supply: The technology backed evolution of the

distribution of learning will also provide a much-needed boost on the ‘supply’ side. Today, anyone with a computer, a web camera and an internet connection, can be a provider of learning, be it skill, knowledge or experience. While we have always been accustomed to our tutors being embellished with fancy degrees, the future will see and value ‘gurus’ anointed by the ‘student consumers’ themselves, in a manner not very different to how we are used to rating restaurants on a food delivery platform.

With the evolution of learning encompassing the learner, the provider and the learning tools and techniques, it is only imperative that the entire methodology of learning will be enhanced, leading to more rapid development in thoughts and knowledge across disciplines.

“After losing his thumb, Eklavya was able to rebuild his archery skills using his index and centre fingers and gave birth to a new technique of archery that forms the basis of the modern archery.”

With this perspective, let us rewind to the times of Eklavya to see how his ‘thumb-less’ future played out. It will thrill the cockles of everyone’s heart to be reminded that even after the loss of his thumb, Eklavya was able to rebuild his skill of archery using his index and centre fingers, becoming exceptional at it. He gave birth to a new technique of archery that forms the basis of the modern form that is practised by sportspersons to this day. It lends credence to the fact that once we decide to put our minds to achieving a goal, nothing can stop us. However, we must



Dr.(HC) SARAVANAVASAN K S
AVP - Learning & Development,
Omega Healthcare Management
Services Pvt. Ltd.

“We live in a VUCA world where our learning requirements are also constantly evolving. The role of L&D professionals also has to evolve accordingly. We need to remember that humans are gifted with an innate learning ability that helps to automatically learn, adapt, and overcome any challenge. Each person has their own picture of how to learn. Hence L&D professionals have to now evolve to become facilitators who guide and teach individuals how to learn. This will help promote a culture of self-learning, increase the overall learning agility of the organisation, and truly empower the learners.”

keep in mind that when we create a framework that makes learning more absorbing, accessible and affordable, we ensure that it benefits the larger population. And, therefore, to see a more level playing field for learning emerging, not only in India, but globally, is truly exhilarating!



About the Author

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



PRADEEPA RAVINDRAN
Vice President-HR, Indium Software

“In the last 25 years, I have seen a paramount shift in the trend of learning, from a traditional learning methodology where learning is dictated, to creating a democratised learning culture where the learner is empowered. This new method, where the learners understand that they are involved in designing their self development goals, has increased their motivation and involvement in the learning process tremendously. Designing an approach by bringing visibility to all training activities, creating a two-way communication strategy & encouraging knowledge sharing are a few steps I believe can be a good start to change the face of learning. To let learners know they are not just passengers in this journey, but they are effective co-pilots, who have all the power to change its course is the most important goal here.”



Power To Your People

By making work from-home an imperative in the knowledge worker space, the ongoing pandemic has put a different spin on the game. The world of work is in a state of turbulent flux, now more than ever.

BY DR. MOORTHY K. UPPALURI

Political instability, nationalistic initiatives, economic volatility, wage inequality, skill gap, immigration for work, changing business priorities, and technology disruption along with the pandemic's indelible mark on the society are some very critical forces impacting the business world and jobs in different strata of the society today.

Augmented Reality, Artificial Intelligence, and Machine Learning on top of Social, Analytical, Mobile and Cloud technologies have not only brought about a remarkable change in the world of work, but have also made online learning possible, prevalent, compelling, and invigorating. Development enabled by technology, making the content available for the learners on-demand, anytime, anywhere, and any device to consume at a pace suitable to their style and aptitude, and also to reiterate and review at their will and convenience has made way for such a paradigm shift in learning. This would constitute the mostsuited definition of 'Democratisation of Learning'. Technology presents the required information whenever and wherever required to perform a task without needing to memorise it. It also derives from human decisions to reiteratively learn and optimise such decision-making, thus taking the burden away from the human mind, releasing the human intellect

and capacity to be applied to the challenges of a higher order.

Providing resources

Workforce distribution comprising of high and low-skilled jobs, unemployment and underemployment is evidently bi-polar and the spread between these poles is only widening by the day. While the onus of development continues to be on the employee, companies have a critical and instrumental role to play in providing the resources and environment for the upskilling, reskilling, and redeployment essential for their survival and also to fuel the growth of the business.

And to top it all, the ongoing pandemic has put a different spin on the game, by making work-from-home almost an imperative in the knowledge worker space. The world of work is in a state of turbulent flux, now more than ever. Cumulatively, all these factors will completely transform how the work gets done and where, redefining jobs and the skills required to accomplish them. Businesses must Reimagine, Reinvent and Rebuild themselves to thrive in this world of new order.

Increasing Shelf-life of skills

The increasing skill-gap and the ever-decreasing shelf-life of skills are making the highly regimented

and long-drawn programmes (4-year undergraduate) seem unduly lengthy, demanding, expensive, and irrelevant. Students must be trained to learn while they are in school. One believes that the current undergraduate degree(s)



MANSIJ MAJUMDER

HR Head, Manipal Global Education Services

“Instead of a top-down approach, the efficacy of knowledge distillation is best through communities. These communities of knowledge already exist in the organisation where people reach out through informal networks, on chat or in hallway conversations. People seek mainly two types of information: working knowledge and tribal knowledge. Working knowledge is what is required to do the job; easily accessible via online courses, YouTube videos, articles, etc. Tribal knowledge comprises insights into how things work in the organisation, and is more contextual. Codifying, formalising and ensuring that these communities of knowledge are updated and active will be the biggest challenge.”



RAJNI KHURANA

Chief Human Resources Officer,
U GRO Capital

“With Gen X and Gen Y gaining prominence in workforce, corporate lives are lived far more on cloud. People work anywhere, anytime and on assignments of their choice. This mirrors as such in their learning preferences too - they learn anywhere, any time and on dimensions of their choice. With trends shifted to continuous feedback, availability of learning content aplenty on web, employees today believe in continuous development rather than making this event based. AI and tech disruptions have led to shelf-life of skills diminishing alarmingly. The only way organisations can contribute to a learning environment today is by providing two critical inputs to people - a) relevant employee specific skills/ attributes gap, b) open playing field to choose how, when, where and with who to learn. Gone are the days of prescription and future is all about a democratic approach to learning.”

are overrated, expensive and ineffective. These programmes can be shortened to restrict the theory and learning to core fundamentals and essential skills that serve as a strong foundation. Such trained talent can then pick-up the remaining and required skills on their own, leveraging the learning platforms either within the company or in the public domain along the course of their career and life.

The present-day classroom education is noticeably light on employable skills, leave alone any mention of emerging technologies. The shelf-life of the said skills is decaying very rapidly with the pace at which technology is evolving. For all the authoritarian old

schoolers, it is quite paradoxical to think of learning and development happening in an unstructured, and unorganised manner. Along with the exponentially increasing enthusiasm and acceptance for online learning, there is an equally dominant reluctance amongst the current knowledge-seekers towards the outdated, irrelevant, constricting, and disengaging teaching in a classroom setting. It is not just the format of classroom teaching, but also the content and the style that is losing its appeal with the millennials.

Understandably, this skill-gap contributes significantly to unemployment. All these developments cumulatively make learning in the current era a life-long process. Technology disruption and digital transformation of businesses will result in either elimination of jobs due to automation or evolution resulting in improved productivity, or the emergence of new jobs of higher cognitive order.

For over a decade, universities and faculty have been experimenting with the concept of flipped classrooms, wherein the learning of theory and content happens outside of the classroom at the student's will, then followed by the collaborative interaction of the cohorts wherein they engage to enhance their learning from their peers. Massively Open Online Courses were a huge step forward in accelerating the transformation of the education system and making online learning rampant. The techniques and methods applied to assess, validate, and ratify the learning are also dated. When the entire class applies themselves to repeat, memorise and reproduce what they have learnt to demonstrate their learning, their potential is only curbed if not buried. The days of rote learning and memorisation are long gone with the advent of technology and its permeation into business and all walks of human life.

HR being the talent architect and custodian of the organisation's

culture owns the roadmap to foster such L&D that is pivotal for the future success of the business. Baselining the inventory of all the skills available in the organisation and understanding the skills required to support the ambition of the business helps in determining the skill gap for the business.

“HR being the talent architect and custodian of the organisation's culture owns the roadmap to foster such L&D that is pivotal for the future success of the business.”

L&D programmes have delivered business impact when they are aligned with the business objectives



VINODH CHELAMBATHODI

Chief Human Resources Officer, FSS

“The Pandemic bestowed an unprecedented opportunity to redraft futuristic Learning philosophy. Simplicity should take over the new learning design because there is no other substitute. The recovery from this pandemic presents us with two distinct choices- The first choice was to recoil back to yesterday's normal, revert to old tested methods, predicted outcomes, and settling down with yesterday's results which might even fail. The second choice is committing to an exploratory path, where we experiment and chart a new course and enter into a new world of possibilities. This appalling pandemic brought a singular clarity and urgency to experiment and design an entirely new, people-centric organization learning practice.”

and customised to engage and enhance the contextual and experiential experiences of the participants. On-the-job learning can be through online content that is bite-sized for easy consumption, comprehension, and application. Mere digitisation of existing course content is tantamount to pouring old wine into a new bottle and is clearly not the way forward. Doing so would be colossal depredation of resources along with the golden opportunity of rebuilding the L&D engine. L&D teams must be wary of this and not fall prey to this easy temptation. A simple four bucket categorisation that is seemingly obvious, but often forgotten could



RITU AGAST

Director-HR, Pearson India

“The worldwide technological disruption has led organisations to focus upon L&D programmes and take various initiatives to upskill/reskill their employees. However, when talking about democratizing learning in the corporate space, it is important to look at it from two perspectives: the employees' and the organisation's. From an individual employee's perspective, it is possible that only a handful of people might get access to L&D trainings, owing to their individual potential and digital capabilities while another set of people may find it hard to learn through a tech/digital platform and need a personalised, face-to-face way of learning. From an organisation's perspective, this will mean determining whether their technological infrastructure is suitable to meet the needs of their employee base, see if employee in the organisation is mature to understand where they lack required skills and are ready to adapt/embrace digital learning improving their knowledge.”

be the first step in driving the transformation of the current L&D programmes viz. Continue, Start, Stop, Evolve. L&D teams must identify such programmes or interventions that have completely lost relevance and are failing to have any impact in line with the changing environment and discontinue them. If they can be optimised to improve the relevance and enhance the impact, they must be placed in the evolve category.

“Well-planned and well-executed L&D programmes are like creating an oasis that not only draws the fauna to the pond but also makes it drink.”

Similarly, L&D teams must identify whitespaces that have not been thus far addressed and apply resources to buy or build programmes to begin addressing those opportunities. This includes developing those leadership skills like agility, collaborative decision-making, compassion, empathy, innovative, inclusivity and unlearn/relearn that are in increasing demand due to the unprecedented challenges and business conditions that are currently being encountered. Unusual times demand a shift in strategic business thinking. That leaves the ones that are working and are well-appreciated by the learners and the business which can be continued as-is. Well-planned and well-executed L&D programmes are like creating an oasis that not only draws the fauna to the pond but also makes it drink. When done right, they result in correcting the underemployment and underutilisation of talent that the business has already invested in. Democratisation of learning leads to enhanced productivity, diverse career paths, and thereby improved retention of talent, all of



ROHIT THAKUR

CHRO, Paytm

“Given the COVID-19 situation, democratising organisation learning has become an even more crucial aspect to ensure an employee's growth. As the entire corporate world adjusts to a 'new normal', it is important that we focus on re-defining the flagship learning and development programmes. The business leadership and human resource teams should adapt to new and innovative practices that help employees to upgrade their skills, promote knowledge sharing and keep their motivation level high as they continue to work from the safe confines of their homes.”

which contribute to the growth and profitability of the business.

The need to offload the burden

L&D teams can become lighter and efficient by offloading some of their burden by beginning to work closely with the academic institutes, to architect the syllabus and course work and ensure their relevance to the industry trends so that by the time the talent graduates and is seeking employment, they have the skills that are relevant to help them hit the ground running. On the other hand, businesses can offer internships and apprenticeships along the course of the year to enhance their interaction with the prospective workforce, which gives them the exposure and opportunity to develop the skills and attitude to thrive in such culture and hit the ground running if and when they are hired for full-time roles.

It is common knowledge that development generally begins with

the realisation of a gap in skills or knowledge required to attain an aspirational goal and the motivation to address that need. This might come from the feedback of peers or supervisor, or a mistake committed, or watching other people's reactions or failure, or not being up to a task – in other words, from experiences or assessment of self and/or others around. It is proclaimed that such development will be about 70% from on-the-job experiences - working on regular tasks and problems, about 20% from the feedback of both peers and supervisor(s), and the balance 10% from planned interventions like either online or inclass sessions.

Much of the planned intervention today is to build the behavioural and social skills, enhance networking and collaboration amongst the participants. L&D must now think

about digitizing even this 10% to ensure such planned interventions are effective and sustainable. It is not that the in-person interactions are going to be eliminated but are going to be reduced for sure. That said, why not reduce the pain of travel, time away from family and health risks by leveraging technology if it does not compromise the effectiveness and impact.

Fostering a culture of learning

Each L&D organisation must foster a culture of learning and architect the strategy/roadmap that best fits the organisation's development needs in this quickly evolving world of online learning. It does not behove for any organisation to reinvent the content that is already available in the public domain just for the sake of proprietorship. One may curate the content that is most appropriate for their own organisation from the broad choices that are freely available in the public domain and host it on an appropriate platform that enables friction-free access and ensures interactive engagement amongst employees. Then prioritise their budget/spend on either buy or build. Content that is readily available in the market for a price may be purchased and only that which is proprietary in nature and not available can then be built by the company either by an inhouse team or an outsourced vendor. Global organisations may consider distributing this workload of in-house development or shared outsourced work to extend the efficiency of their budgets.

Digital platforms enable quick feedback from the participants to make the necessary improvements on priority. When the content and format are learner-centric, immersive, gamified, and right, it creates the much required 'pull' and employees would register to take such courses without any 'push' from the L&D team and/or the business to comply with some internal learning or development metrics. The picture



DR. ROSHAN JOSEPH

Head - Learning & Development,
QuEST Global

“The world of learning has phenomenally changed. If L&D teams can create an environment where an employee feels empowered and involved in their development journey, they will have succeeded in establishing a strong learning ecosystem. The process can be enabled by providing employees access to infrastructure, curated content, and experiences. When it comes to learning, employees should have the flexibility, choice, and opportunity to learn from a wide array of courses. Learning should happen via bite-sized on-demand courses that can be accessed from anywhere, anytime. Employees must also get a chance to learn through sessions run by leaders, on the-job experiences, and collaboration with peers.”

of success for a well-executed L&D roadmap is the creation of this learning pond/platform where all the learners are drawn to quench their thirst for development and the business can clearly see the return on the investment through enhanced employee morale, retention and business productivity. 

About the Author

Dr. Moorthy K. Uppaluri is the former CEO and MD - Randstad India, a global business leader, an angel investor and advisor to early-stage startups. With vast domestic and international experience across diverse sectors like IT, manufacturing, and professional services, Moorthy is credited with evolving business strategy, building brands, growing market share, improving operational excellence, driving innovation and fostering a people-centric culture. He is also a featured author and an eminent speaker.



DR. MITUL THAKKER

Chief People and Compliance
Officer, IKS Health

“Organisations evolve perceptively during challenging times. There is a consequential mindset shift of the employees as well as the employer, creating synergies between two is the key for a rewarding learning program. As we stride into the 'new normal', encouraging learning of new skills and sharpening existing ones for the workforce is crucial for these times. Organisations must create a learning ecosystem to build skills that can help them evolve and emerge as better versions of themselves. The democratisation of learning is about giving the opportunity, platform and support to develop themselves rather than mandating skill development and learning practices. This is a constitutive step in the right direction for cultivating talent.”



Learning To Share The 'Control'

Democratising learning is not about giving up control, it is about sharing it. It is about adopting a new mindset, where tools and technology play a key role.

BY NISHATH USMANI

Nearly 2,500 years ago, in Athens, General Pericles, declared the birth of a new kind of governance. One in which the government is '*in the hands of the many and not the few*'. This was the birth of democracy. The process that transitions a nation state into a fullblown democracy is called *democratisation*. This term has been liberally used in different contexts. Apple democratised computers, by bringing computing power in the hands of many. Google democratised information by building a powerful search engine.

There has been a resurgence in organisational learning in the post COVID scenario, making the democratisation of organisational learning a reality! Let me explain why. Adam Przeworski, the famous political scientist theorised that democratisation encompasses three processes.

1. Breaking the old regime:

First, the old regime breaks down owing to a loss of legitimacy, or failure. While it is a bit harsh to conclude that organisational learning has 'failed', it is apt to say that since 1996, when Peters J wrote about '*the learning organization's syllabus*', Google and various other search engines have made it possible to access instant information and data on anything - from productivity hacks to strategies on emerging markets. More importantly, we can add our own voice, usually unmoderated, to these knowledge

discussions, or start a brand-new discussion of our own. This in many ways is the end of organisational learning as we know it. People are no longer waiting to congregate in a classroom to learn. They learn when they want, how they want. Just like how people are no longer keen to go to the movies. The movies are '*coming home*'. And like how Netflix is denting the business of multiplex, is Google killing organisational learning?

“Learning professionals are no longer ‘creators’ of content, but ‘curators’ of it. And from facilitating sessions in the earlier era, the learning professional is now managing communities of interest.”

2. The process of democratisation:

The second process of democratisation, according to Przeworski, involves the '*construction of a new liberal-democratic structure and process*'. In the case of organisational learning, a 'liberal' structure is emerging with the blurring of lines between the learner and teacher, more than ever before. Informal learning through YouTube and

Wiki, has meant that the only USP of formal learning is that it leads to a certification/accreditation. But often, the learner is not seeking one. Secondly, the 'flipped classroom' has made learners into teachers and teachers into learners, depending on the session being attended. The role of learning professionals has also changed. They are no longer 'creators' of content, but 'curators' of it. And from facilitating sessions in the earlier era, the learning professional is now managing communities of interest.

3. Democratic consolidation:

The third and final process of democratisation is 'democratic consolidation' with the new structures and processes becoming so embedded in everyone's minds that their removal becomes unthinkable. In the case of organisational learning, this new structure was created with the onset of the digital space. We are seeing an increasing rise in the development of the online communities of practice, where a community of learners come together. Such communities foster mutual engagement, have a shared repertoire of resources, and most importantly, are self-directed and learner-driven. Online communities like Khan Academy, edX, etc. have discussion boards, file sharing, social bookmarks and wikis all integrated into the community. This makes the whole learning process a thriving and collaborative process. This is very different from what

was offered by the erstwhile *avatars* of organisational learning - a 'one size fits all', top down approach.

Clearly, the three phases of democratisation of learning have already set in. So, is this the end of organisational learning? Actually, the truth points to the contrary. With the COVID-19 pandemic, we have witnessed an upsurge - a '*renaissance*' of organisational learning. Organisations want to upskill their people and individuals want to be future ready. Both entities are getting ready for an uncertain future. And learning is taking centre stage.

“With the COVID-19 pandemic, we have witnessed an upsurge - a '*renaissance*' of organisational learning. Organisations want to upskill their people and individuals want to get future ready.”

In many ways, this is a fertile ground for organisational learning professionals and for the function itself to reimagine their roles. However, it will require four important shifts in the way in which L&D operates.

1. From general content to contextualised mentoring:

While online learning has brought abundant knowledge resources, it cannot replace the importance of mentoring. Organisations need to invest in the role of a 'mentor/buddy' who can help the learner with the nuances of organisation guidelines and culture. Essentially the things that no online platform can teach. These mentors bring the 'context' to the content. They are also role models, which means that they embody the soft skills that can be learnt only on the shop floor, while dealing with real problems and real people. Skills like empathy, trust, critical thinking and what



NEVILLE POSTWALLA

Associate Vice President - Talent Manager, Harbinger Group

“Micro-learning and nudges have changed the way employees are learning. AI supported electronic nudges are sent to employees to understand what they are working on, and then it uses complex algorithms to predict what the learning need could be. These nudges recommend short learning nuggets, which encourages the employee to take a 5-15 minute module that equips them with relevant knowledge. These kinds of nudges are also integrated with platforms like Slack, Microsoft Teams, ZOOM, etc., which creates a 'working in the flow of work' experience. Therefore, employees are able to learn effectively and are more engaged with the organisation.”

they mean in that particular organisation's context are the kind of things that this mentor facilitates.

2. From controlling to letting go:

Sometimes, organisational learning practitioners have thrived because they had the power/control over the learning process. Today, they need to learn to 'let go' of that control. This does not mean that they do not need to own the process. They simply need to facilitate the outcomes differently. Consider what happens in 'learning circles' today. Learners create a group, they plan their learning and they leave when that learning is complete. This is the concept of the 'learning gig'! Of course, a strong digital system ensures continuous monitoring, and learners who excel get rewarded and passive 'bystanders' are weaned away. But, the monitoring is not on 'Presenteeism', but on actual learning!

3. From professor to teaching assistant:

Organisational learning professionals must assume the role of the teaching assistant. This is not a downgrade of any kind. It is in fact about developing into a role, where you are more in tune with the learner's need - providing just in time learning. Enabling the formation of a new habit or behaviour that is critical to your role, this is personalisation of learning in the most unassuming and simple way.

4. From filling the bus to making meaningful bus rides:

The final shift that organisational learning professionals must make is to truly believe that the objective of all learning interventions is to further the business objectives of the enterprise. It is not about filling seats or counting the learning hours. It is now about making the 'bus ride' (read the learning journey) more meaningful. People can board the bus when they want, get off the bus to explore a new destination, and hop back on the bus when they want to go to another destination.

Democratising learning is not about giving up control, it is about sharing it. It is about adopting a new mindset, where tools and technology play a key role. And learning professionals need to create this ecosystem with a more liberal view- by creating learning which is for the learner and by the learner! **HC**

About the Author

Nishath Usmani is responsible for leadership development of senior leaders at KPMG. She comes with an experience of more than 18 years in leadership development, learning strategy, talent management, facilitation, coaching & learning communications. She has worked previously worked in Capgemini's Corporate University and Deloitte Consulting. Nishath is presently pursuing Ph.D. in management (HR).

How UX Boosts EX

*As HR professionals, we often emphasise how EX (employee experience) is paramount to driving CX (customer experience) and creating effective organisations. And yet, while we continue to invest in technology to elevate EX, little attention is paid to how good UX (user experience) leads to exceptional engagement and productivity levels. In this exclusive interview with Human Capital, **Srinivas Konidena**, Vice President, Product Development, Asia Pacific, ADP discusses how investing in UX enhances EX and yields greater returns for businesses. He also shares pertinent insights into why empathy is king in designing compelling UX and how ADP creates intuitive, consumer-grade UX to meet the evolving business needs of clients, enhance tech adoption rates, and create next-generation experiences that employees long to be a part of.*

BY ANKITA SHARMA

Q While most HR and business leaders recognise the importance of HR technology, few pay attention to user experience (UX) and how it immensely benefits employees and organisations. Amid the COVID-19 crisis, simply deciding to digitise HR isn't enough. According to you, why should HR care about UX?

A We are in a fast-changing world, and today's HR leaders are typically those who drive changes across the organisation, be it the culture or the process. Any change in an organisation involves a lot of change management, and it challenges the current thought process among the employees. Successfully communicating the intent of the change to everyone adds to the challenge.

HR technology with well-designed UX can make the communication process to employees about changes much easier. With an intuitive UX, the focus remains on the purpose of the change, which can be defined and understood well. This will help increase the adoption rate among employees and decrease the support they need. UX has gained importance in the current COVID-19 crisis when physical connections are largely replaced by virtual communication.

Q About a decade ago, the end-users of HR technology were mostly HR specialists. However, today everyone in the organisation is a user of HR tech. What are some important considerations to keep in mind around UX when selecting a new enterprise technology?

A Yes, it's a changed world. Earlier, HR specialists used to be the receivers of data and information, and they managed and governed all employee-related information in HR enterprise systems. Today, every associate in an organisation is both a contributor as well as a consumer of this



information of HR tech. In this changed context, UX becomes very important when organisations move to a new platform or technology.

From a technology perspective, the following aspects are all important when selecting a new HR enterprise technology solution:

- Be sure the new technology enables self-service so data can be captured at the first source, and information is available to relevant stakeholders whenever needed to make the right decision.
- The UX needs to be intuitive enough to allow users to understand the data without multiple interpretations.
- The UX must be designed to enable access via multiple devices, including desktop, mobile, and tablet, allowing employees to log in from anywhere and at any time.
- Another important consideration is that your technology partner has a track record of continued investments in new products and UX design so that products can evolve with changing business needs.

“Using a mobile app, we can hire a taxi, order food, go shopping from the comfort of our home, and enjoy the convenience of digital payment wherever we are. Consumers today have many choices, and the use of technology is omnipresent. It is natural that employees expect enterprise solutions to provide a similar user experience in the workplace.”

Q Expectations of technology have changed dramatically. Just about everyone is used to a world of ubiquitous consumer-grade user experience. Employees now expect enterprise software to be on par with powerful consumer technologies and have little tolerance for clunky, complex, and confusing tech experiences. How is ADP bringing consumer-grade UX to its clients?

A This is a good question. We're now living in a world where technology is available at our fingertips. Using a mobile app, we can hire a taxi, order food, go shopping from the comfort of our home, and enjoy the convenience of digital payment wherever we are. Consumers today have many choices, and the use of technology is omnipresent. It is natural that employees expect enterprise solutions to provide a similar user experience in the workplace.

When you say “consumer-grade” user experience, it means that an untrained person in the domain can use the digital product seamlessly and frequently, just like anyone that has been trained would use it.

As a global leader in payroll, maintaining a consistent user experience across geographies, and user groups – for both HR practitioners and employees – is important. Wherever you are located, you will enjoy the same intuitive user experience that ADP provides. We have been able to provide this because we are putting together our learnings across multiple countries over multiple years to build this kind of intuitive experience. We've built a nomenclature architecture that people can easily relate to when looking at a particular element, whether it's a component in a payslip or a leave application.

Another important thing to note is that in the Asia Pacific region, we have made a decision to go with full-scale responsive UI so that UX design is responsive on all devices.

In some countries, we even make it compatible with local apps allowing people to view their payslips or apply for a leave. The intention here is to identify trends, and what our users in that particular country are most comfortable with, so we can design our products to match those expectations.

Q Mobile devices have impacted every facet of our lives. The accelerating shift to mobile platforms means that employees will expect to access more of HR tech through mobile devices. How has mobile technology impacted the expectations for enterprise tools? Also, how can organisations provide employees with a seamless mobile experience?

A Mobile has become the de facto device of choice for everything. Basically, if something can be done on their mobile, people won't go to their desktop. HR tech is no exception.

At ADP, we've made significant progress on this in the past few years. In fact, a “mobile-first” approach is an important focus area of our common design language. What also needs to be considered is the seamless experience between mobile and non-mobile devices. For example, if a person opens a portal on a mobile device and starts entering data, can the data be preserved so that when the person moves to the desktop, he or she can pick up from there? I'm very proud to say that we've taken all of those factors into consideration at ADP for the design of our solutions.

For example, the regulatory landscape is very complex in India, and we've worked out an intuitive solution to simplify the process for both employees and HR practitioners. Employees can now submit their annual declaration through our mobile-enabled solution, and HR professionals can also view the number of submissions via the dashboard on their mobile. To a



certain point, we've made complicated things easier through the intuitive mobile-driven user experience.

Q Design thinking is critical to digital success today. How does ADP apply design-thinking principles to create products that deeply resonate with users and enhance the digital employee experience at every touchpoint?

A One of the key elements of design thinking is building empathy when designing a solution.

When we develop a new feature, we work across the business to get stakeholders, implementation and service teams involved in the design and validation process. In some cases, we also involve clients and their employees to understand the end-users' experiences and perspectives.

We host business-wide hackathons, during which everyone brainstorms to ideate and build the solution. Business teams usually play a major role in the hackathons to ensure our solution will provide actual value to our clients.

In addition, we have a very methodical way to evaluate the product feedback that we receive on our system. We look at each feedback point and try to figure out why it comes and where it is possible, and we reach out to the user to find out what happened to

determine the root cause and address it on our system.

Finally, we conduct generative research among our clients and their employees to understand their pain areas and what they prefer to have against what we have today.

Q How else is ADP reimagining the user experience within its products to address the wants and needs of clients?

A The client user experience is never final. It transcends many layers and changes over time with evolving user preferences.

A primary consideration is about ease of use and personalisation. At ADP, we have an innovation lab that not only works on the next-generation products but also on next-generation experience.

The next thing is about how we develop our products. In the past few years, we have built a platform that delivers mass personalisation. Tagged as "HR your way", it provides an ecosystem of mini-apps, or small applications, that deliver slices of functionality that can be configured at a user level. These connect with each other and seamlessly deliver the value together.

We're currently working on making machine learning an integral part of our platform. Every data that comes in can be put through machine learning. One of

the examples is to understand the common errors and build features in our products to prevent those errors. We also have an HR connector that can help clients to move data seamlessly between the ADP system and their own systems.

Finally, we're working on making the payroll process more self-serviceable. This enables different levels of users from employees, managers, and HR professionals, to the leadership team and to input data, make approvals and generate reports on their own through self-service.

Q In closing, here's a fun question for you. India consumes more videos via mobile devices every day than any other country on the planet. Do you watch videos on your smartphone? If yes, what are you currently following?

A Yes, I do watch videos on my smartphones, and here are a few I follow:

Andrew Ng – a leader in Artificial Intelligence; Dr. Yuval Noah Harari – a historian and philosopher (I like his interpretation of our evolution); and Shekhar Gupta – from The Print. Apart from technology, I love watching videos to learn about macro and mini-farming out of personal interest. **HC**

People Analytics: One of the Top Workplace Skills in 2020!

BY NADEEM KHAN

A new study from LinkedIn shows that *people analytics* is one of the top workplace trends in 2020. However, 55% of the surveyed companies didn't have the basic skills to cover this gap! Does this ring any bells?

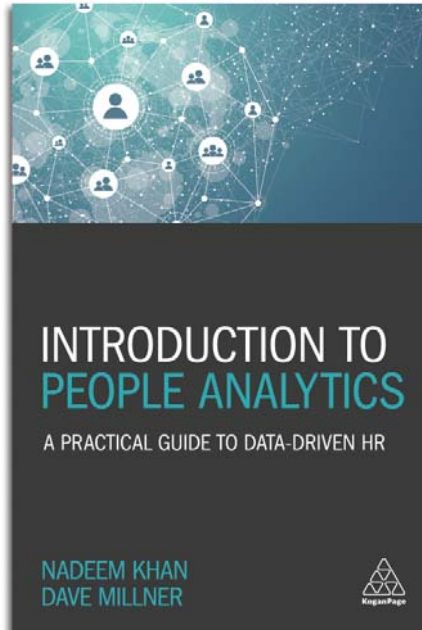
Organisations across the globe have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and had to rethink their organisational strategies to incorporate elements of digital technologies, which has brought forth both opportunities and challenges. Among the challenges are maintaining a positive employee experience, creating a digital collaborative culture and improving performance whilst working online. All this can only be done by analysing and acting on the data that is available to organisations. By data, I don't mean just the data from the HRM systems but also from across and outside the organisation.

But a question that arises is: Why HR? Why not Marketing or Finance? More than 80% of the business value has shifted off the balance sheet and into the intangibles (i.e., intellectual, social and human capital). This change has encouraged business leaders to actively look for measures to maximise the effectiveness of the intangibles and look at how these intangibles link to business outcomes. The HR leaders who are able to identify and analyse data to provide business insights are now in high demand and are the personification of people analytics leaders or, as they are now being dubbed, digital HR leaders!

In essence, people analytics and its enablement can assist you in measuring the organisational performance, developing a people strategy and aligning it with the organisational strategy.

People analytics improves the company's performance

According to a Deloitte survey, organisations that use people analytics to support business decisions achieve 82% higher three-year average profits than their counterparts. However, according to HBR, only 9% of organisations proactively use data to inform workforce decisions. It is certainly a burning question whether



this is due to the skills that HR possesses or whether organisations are just not interested in doing this. COVID-19 has busted this myth, as HR has been radically marginalised because of their skillset around this area. Unfortunately, HR personnel are sometimes the first ones to be let go when the business wants to reduce its costs because they still carry out operational tasks that have now been digitised. Building analytics skills will take your career to a whole new level.

Data is the new language of the business

LinkedIn has dubbed data as the “new corporate superpower.” Of course, data is only the starting point. The most important thing is what you can do with it. As one of my mentors rightly quoted, “*where the numbers finish, the art of executive wisdom begins.*”

People Analytics skills will guarantee you a seat in the boardroom

Our research showed that more than half of the newly appointed CHROs did not come from HR but from marketing, sales, operations, or finance. Unfortunately, the ones that are promoted through HR have a lower salary than their counterparts in finance and marketing. Why? Because HR lacks the skillset around data, business acumen, and commerciality.

In our book, we have provided expert guidance and practical advice on how to embed analytics into HR processes and adopt a data-driven approach to all workplace activities, with case studies from organisations that have leveraged people analytics to improve culture, employee experience, increase performance, and reduce costs – including NHS, Brompton Bikes, British Hearth Foundation, AstraZeneca, and Swarovski.

Would you prefer becoming a Digital HR Leader, or would you rather simply wait for things to get back to normal? 

Nadeem Khan is the lead author of 'Introduction to People Analytics'. He can be reached on LinkedIn @nadeemrkhan.



6 Lessons Flex-Learning Can Teach Us About Flex-Working

Democratisation of learning can teach us simple, powerful, and easily implementable lessons on flex-working.

BY SWARNA SUDHA SELVARAJ

COVID-19 has driven individuals, communities and even countries crazy with people fighting for lives on the one side and toilet paper on the other. Apart from driving this craziness, the virus has also become a burgeoning force for the responsive transformation of organisational cultures across the globe. Flex work is gaining steam these days, with “no more nine-to-five” being touted as a common feature of the post-COVID world.

Flex work is an umbrella term used for several work arrangements, such as flexible work hours and remote working, etc., wherein employees are given greater freedom to schedule their work obligations. As an L&D practitioner and a strong proponent of flexible working, I’ve noticed that the two share some common traits. On the surface, it might seem that the two would have nothing in common. But democratisation of learning can teach us simple, powerful, and easily implementable lessons on flex-working.

When learning moved from physical to digital, it became:

- Anytime
- Anywhere
- Any device
- Any content
- Anyone

Democratisation of learning through digital transformation has been happening in organisations

for some years now, and it is gaining high traction because of the current scenario. Here are some concepts that can be picked up directly from flex learning and applied to flex working.

1 Manage Less and Empower More

The physical classrooms for learning programs meant more coordination and managing by the L&D team, whether it be the resources required or the formalities that were repetitive and not scalable. When digital learning was introduced, L&D had to manage less. Also, the learners got empowered. Competency goals and role-based paths were made available in LMS with learning preferences for employees to upskill as relevant and preferred.

Similarly, as we move towards flex work, **more clarity in work goals** could help managers manage less and empower the employees in achieving goals with their flexible work styles.

2 Sharing Control

The control dilemma was a huge challenge to beat when the physical-to-digital transformation of learning happened. However, learning analytics enabled L&D teams to share control with users. It empowered employees at all levels to discover, analyse and act on the insights arising from

analytics through personalised and gamified Learning Management Systems (LMS).

On the flexible working front, a few **system controls** in terms of access to work analytics and their time spending patterns could empower employees. Ethical stalking is something that should be positioned in an acceptable and helpful manner to employees.

3 Maximum Variety with Single Door Entry

Why do people like Google? Because it brings together all content formats being searched, such as articles, videos, images or news. We can then choose what we want to see. LMS did that upfront for employees by enabling them to pick and choose how they wanted to learn. APIs were built to bring all learning resources under one umbrella for a one-stop experience. Also, global calendars provided a single view of all learning programmes for employees to choose from.

These days, with flex working, there are overwhelming invitations to multiple events on an employee’s calendar. Too many accepted invitations lead to calendar overload. Silos built through multiple initiatives can be brought under one umbrella, keeping in mind the employee journey and experience in the organisation. An **integrated employee engagement**



calendar, consisting of well-being, learning, coaching programmes and others, can be made available in this system for employees to decide on their engagement plan.

4 Resource Optimisation

From having the best of Subject Matter Experts deliver a session in a classroom of 25 to 100 employees, the possibility of covering thousands of employees across the globe became a great boon with digital and flexible learning.

The same approach applies to flex work, too. Townhalls and all-hands meetings that were held for a few employees can now be planned for many more, providing an opportunity for every employee to interact with the CXO-level executives.

5 Continuous Engagement

With digital learning, managing the attention span of learners was considered a challenge, and a solution was worked out in terms of doing an engaging activity, say every 20 minutes, in any session.

Also, faculty were specifically trained in managing learning programmes using digital tools to ensure the effectiveness was not compromised.

When it comes to flex working, **intentional engagement** can be done by teams and HR professionals at logical regular intervals to listen to the employees' voices. Throwback moments in meetings and calendared events are a great way to engage employees. Managers will certainly need specific awareness and training in managing virtual teams.

“COVID-19 has become a burgeoning force for the responsive transformation of organisational cultures across the globe. Flex work is gaining steam these days, with ‘no more nine-to-five’ being touted as a common feature of the post-COVID world.”

6 Learning and Sharing

From facilitating and training, L&D professionals have started managing communities where they can crowdsource ideas to enable learning and sharing. Part-time faculty and content contributors are on the rise through collaborative working.

Building employee networks and **leveraging crowdsourcing** can work out very well for flex work. By defining innovative, employee-friendly policies, part-time jobs can become a way of life with clear skill sets, time commitment and rewards. Collaborative, agile teams are the most effective way of optimising resources and getting the best results. **HC**

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.



A Shift Towards Wellness

While some consider the COVID-19 pandemic as a crisis, most leaders contemplate it as an opportunity to evolve and adapt to the emerging working trends.

BY MANDEEP KAUR

The COVID-19 Pandemic has proved to be a game-changer across industries, unfolding the way leaders think and behave in an organisational structure. While some consider it as a crisis, most leaders contemplate it as an opportunity to evolve and adapt to the emerging working trends. However, in both the circumstances, there is an essential need for leaders to step in and assume control, in order to ensure a continuous, stable and safe working environment for the employees. From empathy to motivation, communication to a futuristic vision, COVID-19 has completely altered and reestablished the role of the leaders.

In order to succeed, businesses need to figure out a way to work around this crisis. With social distancing emerging as the new normal, many organisations have adapted themselves to cope with extraordinary circumstances wherein the safety and wellbeing of employees and customers are now at the centre stage.

Strategies to aid during the pandemic

- **Redesign strategies:** There has been a shift in business requirements, and hence one needs to change his/her approach as well. This is the opportune moment to go back to the drawing board and realign strategies basis parameters such as geographical limitations, operational efficacy, expected cash flow centres or even the potential

impact on the industry. It is an opportunity for us to rethink our policies and organisational design for the long-term. Cross-functional projects, multi-tasking and team members relentlessly working round the clock to keep essential business services operational, truly proved to be beneficial for organisations to

identify key talent and think of innovative strategies to retain and develop them.

- **Help employees reskill:** As business practices change, employees will need to learn the roles all over again. During this period, organisations are required to revisit employees' core roles/responsibilities,



and map their current skillsets versus the skills required for the new normal. This will provide them with insights on some very critical skills needed to develop as we evolve to the new normal. Helping employees reskill and up-skill with virtual courses has been one of the key focus areas in addition to boosting their remote working capabilities, and ensure that they continue to be efficient, productive, and most of all motivated to succeed.

- **Demonstrate compassion and empathy:** Times are tough, and this has made way for uncertainty and the fear of the unknown. The need for open communication and transparency with the employees to understand their challenges and apprehensions is stronger at a time like this. While one may not have all the answers, the employees are bound to feel reassured and supported. Nurturing employees, being empathetic and giving them the confidence to face challenges head-on is truly one of the most important roles of the business leaders that have taken on a new meaning.

“The need for open communication and transparency with the employees to understand their challenges and apprehensions is stronger at a time like this since this is bound reassure the employees.”

- **Drive communication and transparency:** As we practice social distancing and other measures, it is important for leaders to communicate regularly with employees to minimise isolation within the office as also while they are working from home. Reaching out more frequently to colleagues, managers, and direct reports for one-on-one check-ins can replicate the water-cooler talk and ensure

that a fair degree of serendipitous interaction can still occur.

“Reaching out more frequently to colleagues, managers, and direct reports for one-on-one check-ins can replicate the water-cooler talk and ensure that a fair degree of serendipitous interaction can still occur.”

There are seemingly infinite ways to communicate with your colleagues, but virtual communication has emerged as the go-to-service for official meetings and informal gatherings.

Leaders should give utmost importance to health and wellness

The COVID-19 outbreak has prompted leaders to accelerate the implementation of wellness measures in their workplaces while introducing additional hygiene and health-related steps. Wellness programmes are win-win, and make good business sense. Many organisations have added a COVID-19 health insurance for employees and their families. In addition, they have also introduced regular testing for employees and their dependents at company cost to ensure the health and wellness of every member related to the company.

- **Manage individual and collective performance:** Engage, assess, and manage employee performance beyond the scope of functional responsibilities, where the sum of the part is greater than the whole. Provide them with the tools and training to move beyond their silos and contribute directly towards the organisational vision. Weave trust and accountability into the culture of the company.

- **Keep a futuristic view:** While this is not new to leaders, we are right now living in a time that requires immediate actions. Actions based on the right information and the right time will be critical. As a leader, our first priority should be safeguarding our people, ensuring their immediate health and safety, followed by economic wellbeing. Parallely, leaders today must also focus on the horizon and understand that new business opportunities could emerge. This will be a time to lead, respond and stay focused on the things that seems right and that matter the most. Leaders must find opportunities to move forward and create more value for the organisation. Your employees are your most critical asset, and their well-being should always be your number one priority. Other than workplace safety, drive business protocols that always keep human capital from harm's way.

Adversity provides the impetus for innovation and risk-taking. Give your highpotential (HIPO) employees the needed fillip for incremental innovation or process improvements. You never know when one small, meaningful change could snowball into the next game-changer!

It is vital to remember that every crisis, including a global pandemic, provides an opportunity to do things differently. As Rahm Emanuel, former Mayor of Chicago, says, *“You never let a serious crisis go to waste. And what I mean is that it's an opportunity to do things you think you could not do before.”* 

About the Author

Mandeep Kaur is Vice President-Human Resource, LOTS Wholesale Solutions (A Siam Makro Enterprise). A strategic leader with 17+ years of progressive experience in Mergers & Acquisitions, Organisation Development and Cultural Transformation with a focus on capability development, profitability, growth, and employee morale. Mandeep holds an MBA in Human Resources from Indraprastha University.

Scaling New Horizons

*Undoubtedly, HR leaders are continually being challenged to reimagine people strategies and take bold steps in driving their organisations forward, as disruptions come from all angles, and many proven paradigms are no longer applicable. In this exclusive interview, **Krish Shankar**, Executive Vice President and Group Head - HR, Infosys, talks about how the organisation has set into action a series of plans to stay ahead of the curve during these extraordinary times, and how it stays grounded on its human aspects while making the most of technology tools. Krish gives an equally exciting take on the evolving role of a CHRO, the areas where HR needs to be more courageous, and the changes he foresees in the talent landscape going forward.*

BY ANKITA SHARMA

Q With more than 2.4 lakh employees globally, how did Infosys pivot to working remotely en masse in such a short time? Also, how have you been building a productive and engaging culture for a dispersed workforce?

A This pandemic has been an unprecedented event for the entire world. However, at Infosys, we acted early, executed our business continuity plans, and enabled a large part of our workforce to operate remotely. We successfully enabled 93% of our employees to work remotely within a week through actions like transporting desktops to residences, deploying wireless broadband, and providing for backup power, as well as scaling up our network access and security infrastructure. This was possible by leveraging collaboration technologies for working as well as for staying connected with clients and colleagues.



Right at the start of the transition, we took many steps to mitigate the challenges of maintaining a remote workforce. We handled the two main concerns of connectivity and power by providing Wi-Fi dongles and UPS units to the employees who were facing issues in connectivity. In order to address the high percentage of people working from home, we upgraded our networks.

So far, the feedback from the employees has been positive. We have not seen any loss in productivity as people have got used to it. The feedback from our clients on the speed and agility with which we demonstrated resilience has been encouraging.

To help employees be more resilient during these unprecedented times, we have tweaked the courses on remote team management with specific modules and have also launched courses on stress management, among many others, to enable them to get the best out of the situation.

Q Recent data from LinkedIn reveals that employees are investing 130 percent more time on reskilling and upskilling themselves since the COVID-19 outbreak. Is a spike in employee learning being witnessed at Infosys? Also, how did your team bring rapid digital innovations to support remote employee learning?

A Continuous learning is the foundation on which Infosys has been built, and our focused investment in building digital learning platforms and nurturing the ecosystem has proved to be very handy in empowering our employees to upskill themselves and also in enabling the incoming talent to be onboarded effectively and get ready for their roles in the company.

We have two exceptionally useful platforms — a next-generation employee collaboration and services

platform, **InfyMe**, and a digital learning platform, **Lex**. These have a modular, mobile-first design and are rapidly scalable and accessible anytime, anywhere. They suggest appropriate learning paths based on employees' skills.

Our employees have been extensively leveraging Lex to upskill themselves and continue their reskilling journey even during the lockdown. Over 75,000 employees have used Lex in Q1FY21, averaging 40 minutes of learning during weekdays and over 50 minutes on weekends. Lex now has over 216,500 users. About 94,000 employees completed one or more training programmes in Q1FY21, and their average learning time was 6.2 days.

The number of people who obtained new skill certifications also doubled during the last quarter.

Our investment in **InfyTQ**, which is our next-gen learning and engagement platform for college students, has helped us engage and remotely train 1,000+ future hires by leveraging this platform and internal apps for engagement. This has ensured that they are continuously engaged in skilling themselves.

Q What are vital points that function as an imperative as Infosys moves on to gradually reopen its offices? What are your top business and talent priorities for the coming months?

A As we gradually repopulate our workspaces after the lockdown, we are incorporating the lessons learnt during this period to meet present needs and reimagine our future workspaces. Our view is that offices will become far more customisable, based on demand and usage. Greater flexibility will be incorporated into the design to accommodate a larger proportion of the remote workforce. We will use technology to populate available workspaces, to track usage, and to adjust individual

preferences. It is something akin to having a base workplace model that can be customised based on usage and reconfigured as needed. Flexibility and speed will be the key. Also, health and wellness will become prominent design considerations.

The coronavirus pandemic will have some long-term effects on the way each one of us readapts to working in an office. So, the office will have to be more purposeful to accommodate the specific needs of employees who are operating in a hybrid environment as well as meet the needs of people who would need to be present more regularly.

We have put together a framework that will reduce risk to employees considerably. This includes a protocol that has a hierarchy of controls — personal protection, perimeter checks, de-densifying workspaces, healthy buildings, and remote work options. We have focused on key parameters like air quality, humidity, temperature, furniture, collaboration spaces, etc.

To provide a safe work environment for our employees and partners, below are some of the actions we have taken:

- Implemented zoning of our campuses to restrict employee movement
- Increased cadence of sanitisation of our office facilities and transport vehicles
- Installed temperature checks at bus boarding and campus entry points.
- Provided sanitisers at employee access areas like buses, gates, building reception, ECC, etc.
- Ensured sanitisation of all transport vehicles (buses/cabs) before and after every trip
- Made masks, hygiene products, medicines, and medical facilities available at our offices
- Ensured closure of all recreation facilities at our campuses

- Restricted entry to campus based on prior approval and self-declaration of health status
- Ensured social distancing always—Seats demarcated in working areas, employees to use alternate cubicles
- Closed conference rooms and training rooms and encouraged employees to continue using virtual modes of collaboration
- Ensured that a 24/7 Medical Centre is operational and accessible to all employees
- Ensured that commonly touched surfaces are disinfected on an hourly basis
- Ensured that fumigation of the entire campus is done on a daily/weekly basis as required
- Ensured that food courts and associated areas are sanitised regularly
- Established processes for reporting, quarantining and supporting any person suspected of or confirmed as having tested positive for the disease
- Issued travel advisories to our employees and partners in line with government regulations and restricted their participation in events that have large gatherings.
- Made arrangements to ensure the safety and wellbeing of our employees who have travelled for business to locations outside their home country and are currently restricted from travelling back. We ensured travel back to India through Vande Bharat flights as well as on our own chartered flights

Our priorities in the short term are to focus on the wellbeing of our employees, skilling and deployment of talent where needed, and delivering to our client commitments. In the longer term, we would look at what we can learn from this pandemic and how we can move to a hybrid remote work environment.

Q How do you see the crisis and its impact on the IT sector in particular?

A Broadly, the IT sector can be divided into four broad buckets of companies. There are product companies, IT services companies, ITES or BPO organisations, and the captives of large organisations. The pandemic affects them differently depending on how much their business model is based on the physical presence of employees. However, overall, the sector has been used to remote working, and they have quickly transitioned into this probably more smoothly than other industries. There are also opportunities—we could see more digitisation, more opportunities to expand the talent pool, more seamless integration of onsite and offshore work, and more flexibility for employees.

Q The breadth, depth, and scale of the novel challenges being experienced by HR leaders are indeed astounding. According to you, how is COVID-19 changing the role of a CHRO?

A The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has accentuated many of the changes in the workplace and workforce that were expected to happen over a longer time frame as a part of the natural evolution toward models of the future. For instance, the widespread adoption of “work from home” has renewed emphasis on evolving work policies to support the existing workforce to cope with working from remotely distributed home offices.

To keep pace with these shifts, HR leaders need to upgrade themselves and quickly align with the skills and traits we envisioned “HR Leaders of the Future” to embody. In a recent survey by the NHRD on “The HR Function in India in 2030 and The Future CHRO” that I contributed to, we identified six broad shifts that HR leaders need to make, the core one

being human-centred, to be successful in the next decade, which, due to the current situation, is a more immediate necessity.

The changing roles and skill requirements for CHROs are:

i. Strengthen the Core of Business Acumen: A deeper understanding of the drivers of business strategy will be essential.

ii. Leverage Expanded Domain Boundaries: HR is expected to become less siloed, as integrating neuroscience to the existing body of behavioural sciences, behavioural economics, elements of consumer behaviour/marketing etc. will be critical to the increasing role of HR as an influencer across the business.

iii. Architecting the Culture Takes Centre Stage: Having an inclusive culture that enables employees to meet their purpose and feel included will become a business priority. Moreover, elements of culture that will differentiate a business (for instance, building a culture of continuous learning) will be critical deliverables from HR.

iv. Being a Transformation Catalyst: Businesses will need to change course rapidly and ramp up new capabilities with speed. Leading change and transformation will be a big ask, and HR leaders need to come up with mechanisms to enable transformations faster and smoother.

v. Building Technology and Analytics Mastery: A deeper appreciation of new technology, AI, and its impact on work and on how it can be leveraged for people decisions will be critical for a successful CHRO. In addition, they also need to develop mastery over data analytics and its use in decision-making.

vi. Being Authentic and Human-Centred: At the heart of everything is the need to bring a greater human focus into our organisational processes and

decisions, which will become even more critical given the steady march of technology and automation. People will look for more human-centric organisations. HR needs to lead this agenda, and who better than the CHRO to be a role model of authenticity and human centredness?

Q How do you see employee rewards and benefits changing in a post-COVID-19 world?

A According to an NHRD survey, employment relations have already witnessed a transition from the formal contract (job security, collective bargaining, and pay equity) to the psychological contract (employability, engagement, and rewarding human capital). The next phase, with an intensified emergence of the gig economy, is likely to see a shift from the psychological contract to the entrepreneurial contract (risk-sharing, curation, return on investment/value creation, and appropriation dynamics).

As we move partly towards an entrepreneurial contract, rewards need to change. We believe that organisations will place a premium on contribution and reward people much more in line with that rather than the job level. Increased variable components, linking value created to rewards, and paying a premium for key skills will be very much the future direction.

Q The pandemic's toll on mental health is a critical concern area that we cannot afford to ignore. There are silver linings, such as the conversations around mental health are normalising, and almost every virtual interaction begins with a wellbeing check-in. However, this clearly isn't enough. What is Infosys's approach to holistic employee wellbeing?

A We are doing all we can to be there for those employees and their



families that need our support the most while prioritising the safety and wellbeing of our entire global workforce. At Infosys, we are offering counselling services and courses to employees to tackle this sense of isolation.

We also have various wellness initiatives for our employees. We conceptualised a Health Assessment and Lifestyle Enrichment (HALE) plan at Infosys as a focused response to the rising concerns about the wellness of our employees and how it is affecting their families.

Health and wellness, safety, leisure, and emotional wellbeing are four key focus areas of our engagement strategy. Through our award-winning HALE program, we tackle concerns related to employee stress, health, and overall wellness through workshops, emails, health checks, online chats, fun quizzes, focused communication campaigns, etc.

Some of the initiatives that have worked well for us are:

- **Samaritans:** It is a peer-to-peer counselling network of Infosians who are trained in barefoot counselling and provide counselling to other employees. Employees use this platform to

discuss and cope with both professional and personal situations, and this has helped many.

- **Professional Counselling:**

HALE Hotline – It provides professional counselling help in times of crisis. A hotline facility has been made available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, whereby calling in, instant access is provided to a trained professional. Each location has a dedicated local number. Issues like cases of serious mental depression, substance abuse, attempted suicides, and relationship issues, etc. have been resolved through the hotline service.

- **Online Wellness Tools:**

HALE Tool – This online wellness survey ends with a professional debrief session that suggests changes to lifestyle, diet, and other interventions based on the analysis.

Stress Audit Tool – This online tool (questionnaire) created for self-awareness assists employees in identifying their stress levels and thereby to seek help or take appropriate measures to improve their mental health basis the result.

- **Expert Talks** are conducted by professional counsellors, external speakers, on topics ranging from

mental health at the workplace to depression to managing work-life balance. Employees can also chat online with the counsellors. A segmentation approach is followed, in which our objective is to have focused sessions for the target population—ours being millennials, family members, women, etc.

- **Manager Enablement:**

Awareness sessions and mailers are shared with the managers to enhance the team wellness quotient, thereby resulting in a reduction in the stress levels of the employees.

- **Mindfulness Focus:**

Practicing mindfulness through meditation or other techniques improves both mental and physical health. We are in times of a “mindful revolution”, and it has become increasingly important for everyone to be aware of one’s thoughts. Therefore, at Infosys, we promote mindful living to reduce stress and increase productivity.

- **Wellness Podcasts:**

Employees are provided with a range of sessions around emotional wellness that they can listen to at any point in time. Topics like managing work-life balance, coping with stress and anxiety, and the importance of mental health, etc. are covered in these podcasts.

- **Wellness Coach:** We have created a unified platform for employees to reach out to professional counsellors across various locations, giving them a more holistic wellness experience. Since the introduction of the wellness coach, the employee experience has been seamless, and employees have just one number to reach out to for their counselling needs.

- As mentioned earlier, we have updated our **Remote Team Management** courses with different modules and also launched **Stress Management** courses.

- Our **Family Matters forum** touches aspects of parenting, relationship, and emotional and

psychological wellbeing of parents and their children. It spans a wide range of topics, from spreading awareness on autism to understanding the learning style and multiple intelligences of children, food habits, stress management, and vipassana meditation.

- A specialised exercise regime, **Pregna-Care**, has been developed for women to cater to pre- and post-natal fitness.

- **InfyGold+:** We have tie-ups with over 20 health and wellness vendors that provide discounted offerings on health and fitness products exclusively to employees at Infosys. They also sponsor fitness products during our wellness-related events such as runs and sports competitions.

Q Even large organisations are evaluating alternative workforce strategies to cope with the rapidly changing business models and talent needs. How can businesses leverage this growing workforce segment?

A The future workplace model will be a more hybrid one, where a certain percentage of people will work from home and the rest from office, and the model will enable employees to switch seamlessly between working from office and working from home. As a result, we are witnessing trends around companies leveraging new options that have now become more viable to cater to evolving talent needs. This phenomenon will accelerate as better talent platforms get enabled, which will allow more on-demand models to function, giving people better opportunities to deploy their talent and get paid.

Companies are now much more used to having a virtual workforce, and the traditional boundaries between full-time employment and freelancing will blur. The future workplace will have teams that are

multi-locational and diverse in terms of education and backgrounds, as well as a combination of full-time and temporary workers. This is an opportunity for us to build a better future in terms of reskilling and upskilling, prioritising work, and improving the quality of jobs as well as bringing in a new approach to education and its linkage to jobs.

The feasibility of increased ‘work from home’ also means that companies will be able to look at previously underutilised talent pools. Women or others (for instance, people with physical disabilities) who wanted flexibility, and hence made choices of where and how they work, would now be talent pools that organisations could tap into. However, in the long term, work would be kind of “hybrid remote”—with people coming to offices for some time in a week—which is needed for collaboration, ideating, team bonding (for which sometimes physical meetings do much better), and also building a sense of connection. So, this new world definitely opens up many possibilities for women who require greater flexibility. We already have a programme called **“Restart Her”** to get women who had taken a career break to come back. This pandemic would probably further accelerate this programme.

Q What’s something outstanding Infosys has achieved during this period of extraordinary challenge?

A What gives us satisfaction is to see that everyone has come together across all levels and parts of the organisation with a single mission and that we have been able to keep employee wellbeing at the forefront and managed to exceed our customers’ expectations. Hats off to each and every employee of the company, who has gone out of the way to make a difference in the last few months. **HC**

Facebook Extends Work From Home Until July 2021

BY ANUSHRUTI SINGH

Amid the rising number of coronavirus cases, Facebook Inc has decided to allow employees to work from home until July 2021. The social media giant will also provide \$1,000 to employees for home office needs.

"Based on guidance from health and government experts, as well as decisions drawn from our internal discussions about these matters, we are allowing employees to continue voluntarily working from home until July 2021", a Facebook spokeswoman wrote in an emailed statement. "In addition, we are giving employees an additional \$1,000 for home office needs".

Facebook joins other big technology companies such as Google and Twitter that have also allowed employees to work remotely.



The company will also continue reopening offices in a restricted capacity wherever local government guidance permits. The tech giant said it was unlikely many locations will reopen in the US and Latin America before 2020 ends. **HC**

FICCI, OYO Launch Online Certification Course For Hospitality Industry

BY ANUSHRUTI SINGH

The Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce & Industry (FICCI) and OYO have joined hands to develop and design an online training and certification course for the hospitality industry.

The course will focus on redesigning the sanitisation protocols and minimising person-to-person contact for a hotel in line with the Standard Operating Procedures issued by the Ministry Of Tourism, Government of India. This course is available in Hindi and English.

The certification course will have a set of nine training modules built to help hotels and hospitality professionals implement key safety guidelines. These modules include hotel, staff, guest, front-office, F & B service, housekeeping, guest room cleaning and food production advisories. This will also include an advisory on how to handle suspected COVID or COVID-positive guests. **HC**



Google Rolls Out Virtual Visiting Card Feature

BY ANUSHRUTI SINGH

Google has rolled out a new feature called 'People Cards' that allows people to create their virtual visiting cards.

This new feature will help people to build their online presence and discover others.

"For the millions of influencers, entrepreneurs, prospective employees, self-employed individuals, freelancers, or anyone else out there who wants to be discovered, we hope this new Search feature will help the

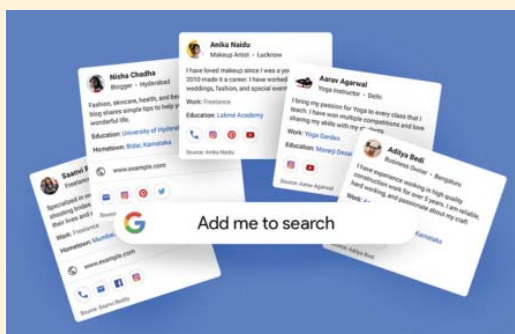
world find them" Google said in a blog post.

Only one people card is allowed per Google Account, and a phone

number is required to authenticate the account.

Users can create their virtual visiting card by searching their name after signing into Google account or "add me to Search" and tap the prompt that appears.

To make a people card, users will need to upload the image, add a description of themselves, their website or social profiles links, and a phone number or email address. **HC**





In the Beginning

Identifying the organisation's Training needs is a key task that should be done with the expertise of a detective.

BY **DIPANKAR DAS**

“Training is definitely a cure in many situations, but it is not the case every time. The trick is to be able to discern the situation when it is a solution and when it is not.”

Nagaraju Muniswamy was an ambitious man. Known as Muni to his colleagues, he headed the India operations of an organisation that was in the business of repair and service of electronics, and served some of the biggest computing and telecommunication brands worldwide. Every month, all the countries were evaluated on revenue growth and customer satisfaction. Muni's India operations never stood well on Customer Satisfaction (CSAT). And this made Muni to mull over the problem. Even though his Service Engineers were qualified and well-trained, they received average CSAT scores from customers.

Secret Sauce

What was the 'secret sauce' as he fondly said, which would get him good CSAT rankings? He hit upon the idea that the missing secret sauce was *Improved Training*. And hence, the Service Engineers (SEs) went through another extra week of soft skill training after their induction. The SEs became politer; they were all smiles most of the time, the resolution rates were not low too, yet the CSAT stubbornly remained as below par.

Muni felt lost. Even though he had hit upon the secret sauce, it would not yield the desired taste. As a person who never gave up easily, he decided to investigate further. He added additional columns to the CSAT feedback form which was received from the customers and started going about their verbatim comments. To

his surprise, he noticed they were all happy with his SEs - they were polite, friendly and willing to help. The resolution rates too were high, 96% agreed that they had received the expected resolution. But a problem that could be discerned was lurking somewhere within the lines of the form. Some of the problems with the laptops were serious, and they needed to be taken away to the service centre and took some time to fix, but some of the problems were not so complex.

If the SE was well-equipped with the right gadgets, he or she could fix the simple problems then and there. It is this sub-section of customers who seemed to be playing spoilsport and were constantly providing less than satisfactory ratings. Being the smart man that he was, Muni quickly added a new category to the list of problems so that the SEs were better equipped with gadgets to fix a larger number of problems on-the-spot. Quite predictably, the resolution became quicker and that sub-section of customers who assumed that the company was needlessly taking a lot of time turned around to provide the desired ratings.

Training is a Panacea

Muni was a clever man and was quick enough to manage to figure out that the gap in numbers was not due to lack of Training, and there was a challenge in the process itself. However, there are thousands of Managers out there, who attribute every performance gap to Training

- **Appraisals:** The Annual Appraisals. Invariably, employees fall short of expectations. Appraisals are the time of the year that employees are formally asked about the kind of Training they would like to undergo. Earlier, employees were mealy-mouthed and not very forthcoming about the kind of Training they wanted. Not so today. Today's employee instinctively understands that Training is the Ticket to success and demands as many types of Training as possible. Compiling this set of expectations is one of the primary tasks of the Training Manager.

- **Skill Matrix:** Some relatively advanced organisations have a Skill Matrix in place. They generally tend to be for behavioural skills, but functional skills also figure at times. If the organisation has an updated Skill Matrix then the competency gaps are there for everyone to see and fill. The one risk that organisations run with the Skill Matrix is that often they are not updated, and the data found are from the stone ages and may really be a red herring.

- **Surveys:** Companywide employee surveys are the most common way of finding out what the company is really looking for. Employees tend to produce a laundry list of wants, but no company has unlimited budgets and opportunity cost of employees needs to be considered before data from surveys can be accepted. Better still, have close ended questions and offer a limited range of options in the survey. If that is being stingy, add text boxes, which can be filled for those who do not see their options in the drop downs.

- **Focus Group Discussions (FGDs):** A lot of the way you do your TNI depends on the culture of the organisation. If it has a relatively free wheeling culture and people are comfortable airing their views, then FGDs are a wonderful source of information. The days of meeting and greeting in person and having a hearty chat over a hot cup of coffee are increasingly rare. We are all Zooming in ether, literally or

and then train employees *ad nauseam* hoping that the performance will improve.

Training is definitely a cure in many situations, but is not the case every time. The trick is to be able to discern the situation when it is a solution and when it is not. Part of the trick truly lies in the way Training Needs are Identified (TNI). There are many sources for finding out the competency gaps in any organisation. Some of these are:



otherwise. However, we do meet over virtual platforms and elicit learning gaps.

- **The Sherlock in You:**

Remember when you are identifying the learning gaps, you are a bit of a Sherlock Holmes. Apart from the above-mentioned modes of gathering information, keep your eyes and ears open. Look up performance data, do you see a gap anywhere, in any department, in any function. For example, I got a call from a Program Manager, who told me that his clients thought poorly about his Project Managers. Could the Training team

help? Such tip offs always help when you are putting your entire TNI together.

“Earlier, employees were not very forthcoming about the kind of Training they wanted. Today’s employee instinctively understands that Training is the Ticket to success and demands as many types of Training as possible.”

- **Performance Data Reviews:**

During the Appraisals not only should you go through the feedback and the employee requests but also areas which you feel can be improved significantly. Once due to the bell curve a few people did well in the Sales team, but the overall sales achievement in the company was nothing to write home about. What could be the reason, is it a recessive economy or a less than skilled sales team. Go figure.

- **TNI is the Key :** So, the TNI is a key upstream activity which decides what you are going to do in your L&D journey in the coming Quarters, Year and more.

Chances are if you have been using your magnifying glasses well, and your dear companion Watson has been by your side, you are on the right track. Until next month then, happy detecting! 

This is part of a 10 series article on Learning and Development

About the Author

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

Sami Sami Jessami!

Building a people-centric system is extremely critical. While it is important to make the organisation process-oriented, it is more important to make it people driven.

BY KESHAV SRIDHAR



Around Eleven PM, on a pitch-dark October night, the tired eyes and the fatigued bodies of the Gentleman Cadets (GCs), searching for a ray of rest to hold on to, fell-in behind their barracks in the Officers' Training Academy (OTA), Chennai. They were undergoing their usual hunching, front-back rolls and the bathroom touch-and-back *ragda* routine.

Everything in the Academy, like everywhere else in the Army, happens with proper planning and clockwork precision. Getting a periodic 'bamboo session' from the seniors, is a muchneeded Knowledge Transfer (KT) for the GCs to keep the quality and consistency of the pedigree that ensures excellent output of young Military Leaders, batch after batch. It also helps the soon-to-be Officers (Seniors) to observe and understand human psychology from close quarters, so that they are able to

coach and lead their men effectively under any circumstances.

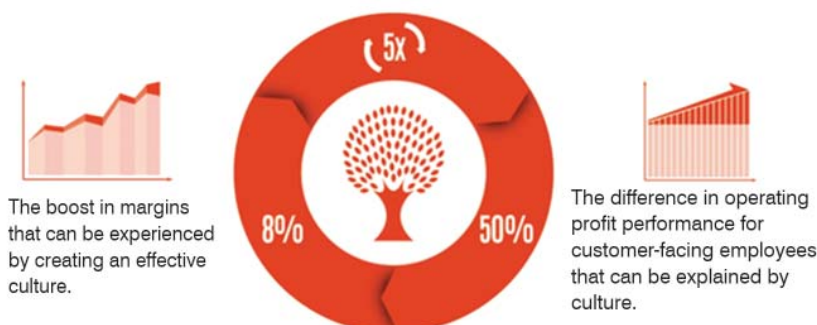
After almost 30 minutes of *ragdam patti*, a statement from a Senior brought a spark in the eyes of the GCs. He said, "If you want the stars on your shoulders, prove your worth to those heavenly stars up there, they seem to be unhappy with you."

With renewed zest, the GCs were now made to start the push-up activity, in sets of tens and the count reaching over a hundred. Just when most of them were on the verge of getting conked-off, another statement that brought a sudden surge of energy in the body of the GCs was, "Before you rest tonight, do one more push-up - for your parents, one for your course mates, one for your buddy, one for yourself. Now, how many for your company Jessami? How many for OTA? How many for the Indian Army? How many for your Mother land? Do you want to sleep now?"

Well, this made the budding blue warriors go on and on. And, the seniors smiled with great sense of amazement and pride in their eyes, with an unequivocal conviction in their mind that, 'we are forging the finest of steel of the Indian Army in this cradle of military Leadership'.

The icing on the cake was when a Senior GC roared the war cry of the company, "Sami... Sami..." and then there was a reverberation of, "Jessami... Sami Sami Jessami... Sami Sami Jessami..." by all the *Jaguar Jessamis*.

Character driven leaders and their teams deliver as much as 5x greater returns for their organizations.



source - theluckprinciple.com

The thumping echoes of the war cry in those silent nights of the Academy are still afresh in my memory, as if it was only yesterday. The *Josh-e-Junoon* of we *Jessamis* roaring our heart out, “*Sami Sami Jessami*”, was as if hundreds of *Sukhwinder Singhs* were ripping through the octaves on a highpowered loudspeaker with maximum volume and woofer.

Learnings from the OTA

Unfortunately, I could not finish my tenure at the OTA. However, the 3-odd months of training changed me forever. Initially, it was very difficult for me to come back to terms with the civilian world and I wondered then – How can a Training of only a couple of months be so effective that it transforms an Individual's mind and body to the core?

The obvious questions in my mind after becoming a corporate citizen were - Can you push people to that extent in corporate world? Is it really possible to instil such a strong sense of connect, loyalty and pride of affiliation as an Organisational culture in the Business world?

These questions inspired me further to study Human Resource management and take up Training & Development as part of my career. In my decade long stint as a Corporate

Trainer, I have not witnessed a single Training session that functions to reflect the effect I have witnessed at the OTA. However, I have come across few Leaders and their teams in the corporate world, who understand the value of Training in shaping up People, Process and the Organisation. And, trust me, they are as good as they come!

So, what is the specialty that we are referring to? What is it that ensures a special affiliation with a team / organisation wherein, there is minimum complaining and maximum trust and blind faith in the leadership? Is it actually possible to get such a loyalty from the ranks in the corporate world too? The answer is ‘YES’.

No place for ‘holy cows’

Well, it is observed that there is no place for holy cows either in war or in business. One needs to be swift, shrewd, tactful and decisive when it comes to running a company. However, there are certain fundamental things that one needs to be careful about while building a team/organisation. The bottom line, however, remains the same across sectors and companies, which is building a relationship based on ‘Trust’.

People look up to leaders and organisations who genuinely give

“People look up to leaders and organisations who genuinely give them a chance to learn and grow. As they say, people leave their reporting Manager and not the company.”

SAMI SAMI
JESSAMI



“It is apparent that those organisations that wonder as to how they can be people-centric hardly invest in Training and Organisational Development.”

them a chance to learn and grow. As they say, people leave their reporting Manager and not the company. It is extremely critical to be genuine and open to people, if one wants to cement a strong foundation for their Organisation. One cannot afford to be a trickster, that too, to their own folks.

Especially in case of start-ups, it is seen that many of the so-called Leaders make fake commitments to their people, in their urgency and immaturity to get things done ‘somehow’. You may think that people are unaware of your motives. But, just because people do not speak out, it does not mean that they do not understand such ulterior schemes.

Building a people-centric system is extremely critical. While it is important to make the organisation process-oriented, what is more important is making it people-driven. Majority of the organisations wonder - How can you be people centric?

You dig in a little deep into such companies and you will know that their investment on Training and Organisational Development is almost

zero. The attitude of – ‘I pay - you work’, does not augur in building a robust and resilient system.

Let us draw inspiration from the Armed forces in leadership. Here's the famous quote of Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw, *“Professional knowledge and professional competence are the main attributes of leadership. Unless you know, and the men you command know that you know your job, you will never be a leader.”*

Salute to all the *Faujis* and a special shout out to all the *Jaguars* 

Sami Sami Jessami

Jai Hind.

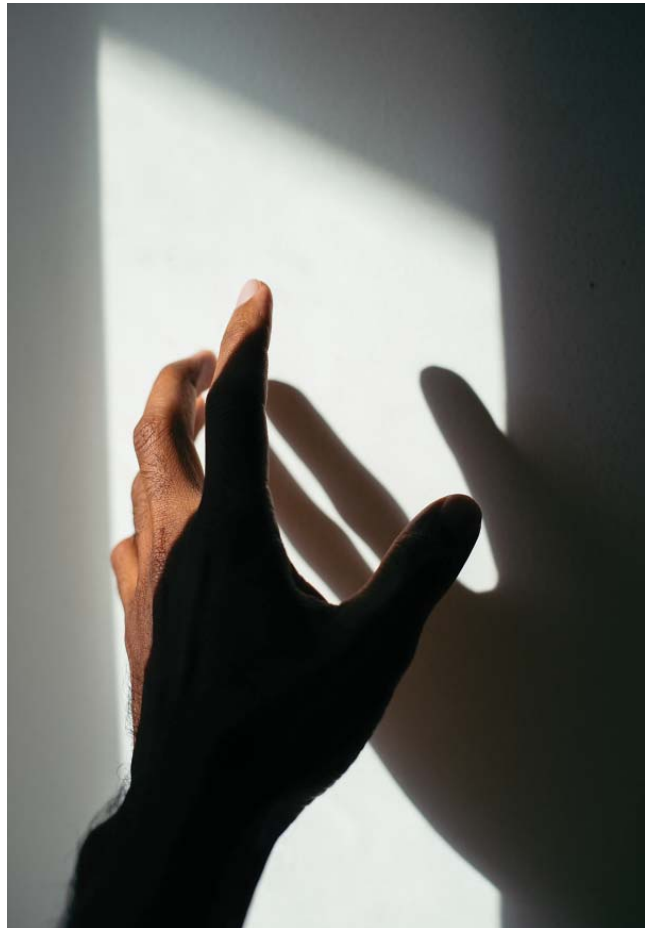
About the Author

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.

The Set Up To Fail Syndrome

Jean-François Manzoni and Jean-Louis Barsoux, in their book, The Set-Up-To-Fail Syndrome, write that when an employee underperforms, doubts are cast on his/her capabilities, while the manager and the organisation remain insulated. They further write that the Manager's impression of the employee does not change even after a good performance, and he/she is almost always assigned unimportant tasks. This gives way to enhanced frustration on both fronts, resulting in either the employee quitting or getting fired.

BY DR FARAH NAQVI



9th June 2019

It was 7:30 PM. Neil was seated at his desk that was located in a corner facing the glass window on the 9th floor of a tall building. The office was quiet and empty as all his colleagues had left, but the main road of Hyderabad Hitec city, lined up with a fleet of cars, was abuzz with life. Staring at the vehicles, he wondered how many were returning home happy and content with their job. When he received a notification from the tiffin service company indicating an hour's delay in the dinner delivery on his phone, he had a sudden realisation of time. He had been sitting despairingly for more than an hour with many questions running in his mind.

"What went wrong? Am I the only one experiencing this? Is this how work-life supposed to be? What should I do? Is it happening because

it is my first job? Am I not competent enough?"

Trying to figure out the root of his dissatisfaction, he was reminded of the words of his Professor, "Students when it comes to career, do what you love and love what you do!" He had diligently followed the advice of the Professor. Graduating from one of country's top B Schools, he chose to specialise in HR owing to his interest against the advice of many. He graduated with flying colours. Everybody, including his teachers and family, had high expectations from him. When he successfully cleared the interview at ICS, a premier HR consulting firm, he was determined to live up to their expectations. Neil was overjoyed that he had got his first opening with a reputed name in the industry where he could optimise and expand his skills.

Sipping the leftover coffee, his mind took him one year back in memory to the first day at work.

9th June 2018

Dressed immaculately, he had entered this very building to join as an Associate-Research with mixed feelings of excitement, enthusiasm and nervousness. After a three-day orientation programme, he was shown his office space where he met his colleagues, Shayla, Rakhi, David, Faisal and Raj. Shayla shared some information about the various projects that she was working on and Faisal divulged details about the company culture, implicit norms and practices. Everyone seemed quite friendly, and Neil happened to be the youngest of them all. With excellent infrastructure, pleasant work environment and friendly

colleagues, he felt comfortable in the new organisation.

Neil soon got the opportunity to meet his immediate boss and Team Lead- James. The first meeting went very well, where both shared their expectations and aspects of the job, role and responsibilities. A week passed by with no work being allotted to Neil. This turned to boredom for Neil who was looking forward to learning and be an actively contributing member of the organisation.

He could not stop himself from enquiring from Faisal, *'I wonder what to do. It has been more than ten days since I have joined, and James has not assigned me any work.'*

'Relax dear. When work eventually comes, then you will face the challenge of taking time out for self. This is the first time I am seeing someone so eager for work.' Faisal replied with a smile.

The following day James called Neil to his room and said casually, *'Hi Neil, I have some work.'* Neil's eyes lit up as he said, *'Yes, Sir, what is it?'*

'Can you get ten photocopies of this document?' James said, handing over the document while simultaneously arranging his cluttered desk.

Neil came back with the photocopies, looking expectantly for some meaningful assignment, only to be told to leave. A day later, James again called Neil asking for help in locating a copy of the proposed budget for G&T Associates misplaced in his room.

'Sure Sir!' Neil replied, trying to find the paper while thinking, *'Is this the work I am supposed to do after investing hours acquiring higher education in college?'*

Another week passed by with James not assigning any meaningful work to Neil. As Neil sat pondering over his excellent academic performance in college, laurels earned in his summer training with TATA, and wondering if he was impatient, the phone rang.

'Yes, Sir, I am coming.' Neil said, answering James over the phone.

'Come Neil. Sit down. This is a project we are doing for D&G company, diagnosing the fallacies in their current job evaluation system. Go through this file and update yourself. You will be working on it from today itself and coordinate with Mr Zubin too. Mr Zubin is my boss and the Senior Management Consultant of our company. You may regularly update me on the progress. This is a very significant project for us, and I hope you will work responsibly', James said, handing over a file.

'Thank you, Sir. I will put in my best'. Neil replied positively.

Keen on taking up the assigned task with full zeal, he got completely involved in it. Everything was going very smoothly. He was also given the additional responsibility of writing and compiling information across teams for the internal fortnightly journal of the company meant for its employees and relevant stakeholders. Neil used to mark a copy to James by the specified due date. There was an error in the data given in a report that got published. James was very busy with another project and had not been following it closely.

When Zubin opened his mailbox, he was taken aback by the negative messages from his boss and readers, pointing out a major data error in the publication.

'Please ask Neil to revisit the file. It has already been circulated with that glaring error. We need to issue a statement on the same. James, it appears that you are not taking your work seriously. Just because I forwarded the same without studying it in detail, the quality has been seriously compromised', Zubin reacted angrily over the phone.

This was the first time James had got a hearing from his boss. It was around 6:30 PM, and Neil was about to leave for home when James called him to his room immediately.

With the file open on his computer pointing at the mistake highlighted



in bold red, a deeply upset James retorted, *'Neil, how can you be so sloppy in your work? Before attaching any file and clicking the send button, you should check for its accuracy and completeness. You know, I got a call from the Mr Zubin from the head office for this. I did not expect this from you.'*

Neil was filled with regret as he stared at the error that had happened by mistake.

'Sir, I had checked it. Somehow, this missed my eye. I am so sorry. This is the first time it has happened like this. I will go and do the needful right away'.

'Neil, when it comes to carelessness there is no first or last time. The kind of work we do requires consistent precision and performing as per well-established quality standards. I cannot rely on you completely for any work now. It seems I will personally have to crosscheck all your work in future. You may leave now'.

Neil left the room heartbroken and disappointed. This was the first time that his boss had reprimanded him. The words of James, *'I can't rely on you now'* echoed in his ears.

On the way, he met Faisal with whom he shared everything.

'It's okay dear. You are in a job now. Get used to such things. Bosses are like this sometimes. You should not take such things to heart.' Faisal replied lightly while leaving for home.

Two days later, Neil got a call from James who asked him to work

on finalising a project report to be sent to their boss at the company headquarters in California. Neil put his heart and soul in the task to earn the confidence and appreciation of James and Zubin. He consulted other resource persons, worked overtime, and tried his level best.

However, this time he was a little befuddled by James's attitude of calling now and then, seeking feedback on the progress of the task. For the first time, someone was monitoring his work so closely. Being a sincere, hardworking employee with the requisite work competence, he did not like the change in James's behaviour, but chose to ignore it. When the project report got completed, Neil consulted a few reliable sources in his circle and got assuring feedback from them. This made him optimistic of receiving a highly favourable response when he handed the project report to James.

After examining each page slowly and carefully, James responded, *'It seems OK, Neil. I will again go through it later and rectify the probable errors you might have done'*. This response shook Neil, who had worked very hard on the project report and was expecting a very positive and encouraging review for the same.

James was known as a boss who put his team members at ease and value their efforts. His friendly disposition created a healthy work environment and people felt motivated to give their best. Neil had entered James's room with high expectations, owing to his initial positive interactions with him, coupled with the hard work he had put in this report and the positive feedback he had received from others. Somehow, he felt underappreciated. He was hoping that James would call him to give genuine feedback and discuss with him if he had identified any mistakes, but that never happened. The project report got rave reviews post-publication, but no appreciation came in Neil's way from James.

The change in James' behaviour after that error in the company journal was quite apparent. On many occasions, Neil felt as if the right to exercise his independent discretion had been limited, and his good performance went unnoticed. It made him reflect whether he had lost his managers' trust in his skill and abilities.

The project of D&G co. on which Neil was working with Mr Zubin was also in full swing. When this project was in its critical and concluding phase, James called David and Neil to his office cabin and said, *'David, I hope by now you are familiar with the project for D&G co. You can take the other files and updates from Neil and start working on it'*.

'Neil, David will be there to help you now. From now on before you forward anything to me or Mr Zubin, share and get it checked with David'.

David was also working as an Associate for the past two years with ICS. Neil was highly disappointed, yet nodded in approval.

'I have been working so hard on this project. I have done all the work on time, coordinating effectively with both James and Mr Zubin. What is the need to include David in this project when it is almost nearing its end? I don't need anyone to help me in this. I can handle it alone and that too, I need to seek approval from David when I am the one working on it since its inception stage. What does my boss think that I can't do anything by myself or I am good for nothing?' The project went on, and James started corresponding more with David. Neil would receive his orders and suggestions indirectly through David now.

Whenever Neil approached James to seek any clarification, he would get to hear, *'did you discuss it with David?'* Once he had a very bright idea on the intervention strategy for D&G co, and he spontaneously felt the urge to share it with James.

'Yes, it might work. Have you shared the same with David? First, both of you deliberate over it to see if it is worthwhile, then meet me.' James replied coldly without even making eye contact, adjusting his shot playing table tennis in the breakout area.

A frustrated Neil gradually started losing interest in the project. He felt as if nothing noteworthy was expected of him. He could see his performance declining as he was moving from a position of intrinsic motivation to forced involvement. While taking the last sip of coffee on his first work anniversary, he felt sad that his mind was occupied with thoughts of quitting instead of celebration. 

Note: This hypothetical case has been written to illustrate and examine real-world workplace issues for the sole purpose of learning and classroom discussion. The names of the company and people are entirely fictional.

The case study as well as the analyses are inspired by the book, *The Set-Up-To-Fail Syndrome* by Jean-François Manzoni and Jean-Louis Barsoux.

About the Author

Dr. Farah Naqvi is a writer, academician and behavioural scientist. She started her career with Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad and has worked with institutions like ICFAI Hyderabad, IBA Bangalore and Center for Organization Development, Hyderabad as Asst. Professor. Currently she is associated with the Indian Institute of Business Psychology (IIBP) as a Senior Researcher. Her website is <https://farahnaqvi.com>.

Analysis By **Kalpana Bansal**



Organisations and teams often operate in complex lattice structures, with parallel hierarchies based on personal relationships and political alignments. It is often difficult for the newcomers to “decipher the code” and find alignment. More often than not, the boss is usually less competent than the subordinate and uses his position as a lever to negate the new joiner’s experience.

Almost every other management trainee from a premium B-school would narrate a story similar to the one experienced by Neil, such as making copies for James. Lack of clarity on job roles and being asked to perform tasks that do not require critical thinking is quite a common narrative, as most of the large organisations take in a huge number of premium management graduates without having the foggiest notion of what they want to do with them. There is an acute imbalance in the number of roles in an organisation that demand superior thinking skills vis-à-vis the number of management graduates waiting to be absorbed, and some industry correction on this inequity would go a long way in setting some of these problems right.

James represents the best of the “tried and tested” in an organisation’s hierarchy. Very often, the senior suffers from an insecurity complex about the institution he has graduated from and believes that “showing the junior his place” is the only way to instil a sense of control and

obedience in him. Organisations rarely put in enough effort into building mechanisms to ensure that people management of premium cadre employees is at a level that is conducive to their positive employee experience and long-term retention.

The David angle represents the best of what is called a *wedge* between the boss and the subordinate to create a sense of alienation and insecurity in the employee. Very often, the “David” in the picture is an employee who is ambling along in the same role for a long time, is a peer to the new entrant, and has delivered work for the boss in the past. David is an ally for James in the sense that he is a backup and provides a sense of stability and approval for James. Neil is caught in a tricky situation without a clear path to exit. He could have an exploratory discussion with James, but it is unlikely that it would have an impact or yield an outcome. Befriending David is another route that could be taken by Neil, but that is a sticky path to tread.

Having been Neil many times over in her career, one has discovered that it is absolutely critical to understand the political landscape and learn to manoeuvre around critical stakeholders. It is also helpful to have a network beyond your boss and have enough people in the system whom one can talk to and exchange perspectives. It is useful to have a mentor, even when one is not officially assigned.

Another proven route is that of finding another leader in the system and taking on a stretch assignment. The other person may not be as biased and be more receptive of your capability and contribution and probably provide you with inroads and access to the leaders at the top. Once you start making a mark, there is very little that an incompetent boss could do to restrict your growth.

It is often said that the path to success is not paved with roses. Changing an organisation or a boss is usually a very ineffective way of sorting out a fundamentally systemic issue, which is that the person at the top is usually incompetent who has had the longest tenure. The smarter thing to do in Neil’s situation is to enhance your own Stakeholder management and conflict management skills, as it is something that would stand you in good stead in the long run. **HC**

About the Author

Kalpana 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. Kalpana has an MBA and has completed her Executive Masters in Consulting & Coaching for Change from Said Business School, Oxford University.



Analysis By **Sakshi Sood**

Our perceptions can create our reality! At a time when attrition is so detrimental, the thought that employers might actually be creating issues instead of solving them is indeed sobering. *Setting up to fail* is a no-win situation, designed in such a way that the person in the situation cannot succeed at the task which they have been assigned. It is considered a form of workplace bullying.

The process usually begins with a simple trigger - a missed deadline or a certain minor error that confirms a boss's preconception of a particular subordinate as an under performer. Such a perception causes the manager to focus greater attention on that employee's work. Although these actions are meant to help the worker improve his performance, they actually undermine his performance. Stripped of self-confidence, the employee loses his ability to make autonomous decisions. This passivity confirms the boss's assessment of the employee's abilities, leading him to be even more vigilant. This is known as the *Golem Effect*, a psychological phenomenon wherein lower expectations placed upon individuals either by supervisors or the individual themselves lead to poorer performance by the individual.

Costs involved

There are multiple costs involved including the emotional cost paid by the subordinate and the organisational cost associated with getting the best out of an employee.

Moreover, uneasy relationships often sap the boss's energy. Besides, the energy devoted to trying to fix these relationships or improving performance through increased supervision prevents the boss from attending to other activities. The syndrome also has serious consequences for any team as the team spirit suffers. A lack of faith in perceived weaker performers can tempt bosses to overload those whom they consider superior performers.

Differentiating winners and others

These categorisations often have less to do with performance than with personal biases. Once people have been judged in a certain way, most people are likely to focus on details that confirm their assessment and less likely to take into account new information.

Compounding the problem is that bosses tend to attribute the good things that happen to weaker performers to external factors rather than to their efforts and ability while the opposite is true for perceived high performers.

Prevention - Eternal Vigilance is the only answer. It is easier to prevent the process than to stop it once it has been set in motion.

Reversing the Set-up-to-fail syndrome

It is not irreversible but requires a lot of effort. The subordinate must consistently deliver superior results such that the boss is forced to change his opinion. But it is hard for subordinates to impress their

bosses when they must work on unchallenging tasks, with no autonomy and limited resources. It is also hard for them to persist and maintain high standards when they receive little encouragement from their bosses. Furthermore, even if the subordinate achieves better results, it may take some time for them to register with the boss because of his selective observation and recall.

Getting it Right

The set-up-to-fail syndrome is not an organisational *fait accompli*. It can be unwound. Reversing the syndrome requires managers to challenge their own assumptions. The boss must create the right context for the discussion. He and the subordinate must use the intervention process to come to an agreement on the symptoms of the problem and its causes. They must then agree about the expectations and deliverables. Finally, managers avoid the set-up-to-fail syndrome by creating an environment in which employees feel comfortable discussing their performance and their relationships with the boss. **HC**

Reference: <https://hbr.org/1998/03/the-set-up-to-fail-syndrome>

About the Author

Sakshi Sood is HR-Business Partner, Merck Sharp & Dohme. She has worked with reputed organisations across different sectors in the past. She is an Electronics Engineering graduate from NIT, Surat with MBA in HR from SIBM, Pune. Sakshi is an avid reader, she takes keen interest in the current happenings in HR world.

Work Alike, Pay Different- Myth or Reality?



According to the latest World Economic Forum's (WEF) Global Gender Gap Report 2018, India ranked 108th out of 149 countries on the gender gap index. According to the report by ILO (International Labour Organisation), women in India earn 65% less than their male counterparts in the same role. Due to the growing gender pay disparity in organisations, in spite of increasing economic growth, female workforce participation is on a declining rate of 23.6% as compared to 76.4% men.

BY **DR SHAMEEM S**



The Gender pay gap is a measure of the salaries drawn by women relative to men and is usually calculated by dividing women's wages by men's wages. The general methodology followed for such measurements involves year-round, full-time workers and a comparison in the annual wages of the median man with the median woman who form a part of the workforce.

The organised sector in India comprises almost 18 % of the total workforce. A large section of the working class is in the metros viz. Mumbai, Bengaluru, Chennai, Delhi and Kolkata. As per available data, of the top 500 companies in the NIFTY 500 index, it was found that men earn almost 1.33 times more than women in the private sector, and there was an even more pronounced difference in the

prevailing salaries in the public sector units. An interesting insight from this report is a pattern in terms of pay gap and years of experience. It is observed that the gender pay gap increased from 5% for employees with 3-5 years of experience to almost 10% for employees with experience in the range of 6-10 years. This gap continues to be on an increasing trend with an increase in skill-sets,

with a gap of almost 20% prevailing amongst highly specialised skill-sets.

According to the latest World Economic Forum's (WEF) Global Gender Gap Report 2018, India ranked 108th out of 149 countries on the gender gap index. The global list was topped by Iceland for the 10th consecutive year, having closed more than 85.8% of its overall gender gap. Gender pay equality also functions as a vehicle for motivation, and according to the report by ILO (International Labour Organisation), women in India earn 65% less than their male counterparts in the same role. Due to the growing gender pay disparity in organisations, in spite of increasing economic growth, female workforce participation is on a declining rate of 23.6% as compared to 76.4% men. However, if this data were to be compared with some of the developing countries around the globe, it will be apparent that the pay gap in India is gradually shrinking. According to the Monster Survey Index (2018), the gap percentage in IT services and the manufacturing sector is 24% and 26% respectively. But when it comes to the financial sector, the gap is drastically reduced to 2%. And certain surveys have also reported that the gender pay gap increases as the years of experience increases. For men and women, with more than 10 years of experience, the pay for men is significantly more than women. According to the survey reports, women executive directors have earned 45% less than the men directors.

The facts reveal an alarming sign. While we celebrate women in all deeds, it is high time that we truly appreciate and reward work irrespective of gender. Despite the fact that we acknowledge about equal opportunities to women in all sectors, we must also endorse the work rather the gender.

Bob joined a manufacturing unit as the HR Director. After

going through the initial joining formalities, he was eagerly waiting in his office to meet Nithin, the HR Manager, to get a brief about the company.

Time: 10.00 AM Location: Bob's office

Nithin: May I come in, sir?

Bob: Hello, Nithin, please come in.

Nithin: Sir, I have brought all the documents for your perusal.

Bob: Thanks, let me see and get back to you if I need any clarifications.

Nithin: Sure, see you later.

After Nithin left, Bob went through the documents. He was surprised when he went through the payrolls of male and female supervisors. He saw that the female employees were being paid less than male employees. He could not believe that gender pay disparity still existed. The place where he worked prior to joining this firm followed the principle of equal pay to all employees based on their skillset. He thought about this for a few hours and decided to call Nithin for clarification.

Time: 2.00 PM Location: Bob's office

Nithin: Yes sir, how can I help you?

Bob: Nithin, I went through the job evaluation reports and payroll, and I saw a clear disparity between male and female supervisors. Why is this so? Have none of our female supervisors ever asked for a pay revision? Did our management never think about revising the pay structure?

Nithin: I see no issues in the difference, sir. Female supervisors are usually paid less than the male supervisors.

Bob: No Nithin, we are wrong, this should not be the case. We must follow equal pay as long as the individuals have the same competency and skill sets. After all, everyone contributes the same

number of hours and everyone does similar work.

Nithin: Yes, you are right. We can seriously look at revising the pay package of the supervisors irrespective of the gender.

Bob: Absolutely, let's do that. I will discuss this with the management and we can put forth our action plan on how we can do this in the forthcoming meeting.

Nithin: Sure sir, we can do that.

Nithin left Bob's office. Bob could clearly feel a sense of satisfaction that he is going to change something in his organisation. He is also aware of the fact that this is not going to happen as simple as it appears to be. He is anticipating various questions from all the stakeholders of the organisation.

However, at the same time, at the back of his mind, there were many questions, "Pay disparity based on Gender? Is it real? Has it not changed over the years? Are we still practicing it? Is it because we see her as additional income support to the family? Are we assuming, she cannot engage in a job, taking care of her family and child, therefore less pay? Yes, we all may have these questions in our mind. The fact is yes, Gender pay disparity does exist...!" 

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 Göttingen, 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**



One must appreciate Bob's sensitivity as an HR professional over the issue of gender pay disparity on the very day he joined the new organisation. Such issues function to make a workplace more inclusive - where people have equal opportunity to perform and grow without any divide based on gender, race or age.

The issue needs to be analysed in a wholesome manner i.e. from the perspective of the organised and the unorganised sector. The sustainability and growth of every organisation depend upon the performance and quality of deliverables by individuals irrespective to gender. Hence, a sound organisation needs to value the meritocracy to prevail and always takes the upper hand. At times, we remain oblivious of the micro aspects and deep-dive to assess factors which are not apparent aka the iceberg theory. The reasons must be interpreted keeping in purview the context of a male-dominated society and social structure in our country compared to other countries, where gender based discrimination is minimum.

Even today, there are families where the female has to tend to her home and supervise all the domestic needs. This is a huge limitation for a female employee since she loses precious time to focus and devote time as compared to her male counterpart. In the Indian context, she cannot ignore her domestic responsibilities, and this works as an added advantage

to the male employees in terms of dedicated efforts at the workplace.

Working women in the metros can outsource many of these activities to support their focus not only on the current job but also preparing for their career growth and further education. As a professional organisation, equal opportunities and platforms need to be created where every employee can use his or her potential and deliverables. Female employees need to be supported, strengthened and made competitive so that they can claim their position and earn the same remuneration and respect as their male counterparts. One vividly recalls a female colleague who joined back after availing month-long maternity leave, refused to go back to tend to her infant eve when the management asked her to do so. On one occasion, during an informal conversation, she revealed that her female colleagues were unhappy with her since she did not utilise her complete maternal leave. It appeared as if she had established the wrong precedent for her female counterparts for the future.

Apparently, gender disparity is largely prevalent in the unorganised sector in India, where the pay discrimination is rampant. Even though the majority of the work demands physical labour, such pay gap has been forbidden by the Equal Remuneration Act, 1976. However, law enforcement agencies fail to curb such wrongdoings. One does not see an improvement

unless there is economic growth which in turn will reduce the gap between the demand and supply of labour to a minimum. Secondly, unless the government has a strong commitment with robust plans to regulate the industry, create job opportunities, put an end to systematic corruption, people will be left with no option apart from accepting discriminations in various forms to survive.

The data points published by several agencies from time to time are mere indicators, but are not very substantial in absolute terms. As a professional community, the onus is on the HR fraternity to adopt an approach like Bob, in order to make a difference. We will thereby create a better workplace where everyone gives their best and performs without any social discrimination based on gender.



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**

Gender pay disparity has always remained as a contentious issue for decades, and is a debatable issue among the global workforce even today. Hence, it would be unwise to brush aside the 'reality' of gender pay disparity as a 'myth'. In fact, a study carried out by the World Economic Forum this year predicts that it could take a whopping 257 years to close the gender pay gap which is still in existence in several organisations. One of the prime reasons behind such disparity is the maternity break taken by women and the societal belief that balancing the professional and parental duties is the responsibility of the mother. Often, it is apparent that women struggle to strike a balance because of lack of personal and professional support, and hence, their career takes a backseat. Women, as they say, have to pay the 'motherhood penalty' while men enjoy the 'fatherhood bonus'. Therefore, a mindset shift and policy reforms in form of a legislation is highly needed to bring about a change in the way we look at the role of a woman in a society if we want them to stop experiencing the glass ceiling.

As Bob has rightly pointed out, organisations should implement equal pay for equal work, irrespective of gender, so long as individuals have the same level of competency and skillsets. In fact, they should ensure that women are not merely paid at par with men for the same job, but are also given a level playing field when it comes to opportunities to excel.

Several new age organisations take longer while ensuring whether a woman candidate would be suitable for a role, given the need to balance household chores along with the demands of the job. However, once the decision is made, they rarely make a pay differentiation for a woman candidate on the basis of her gender. Hiring the right fit for the role and the organisation is the ethos being followed by companies that are gender agnostic. Below mentioned are some means by which organisations can bridge the gender pay gap:-

- 1.** Overcoming the legacy of last drawn CTC. While hiring a candidate, it is prudent for organisations to offer a salary as per their competence and the worth of the job. This helps in countering pay disparity which they might have experienced in their former jobs.
- 2.** Offering flexibility to returning mothers to adjust to the new regime of balancing maternal responsibilities along with that of their role is critical in enabling them to stay focused on their careers, rather than contemplating quitting. While this may have sounded audacious until a few months ago, where the concept of 'work from home' was kept at bay citing productivity and efficiency reasons, it does not hold ground any longer. Today, remote working is the new normal, and everything from sales and product pitches to engagement activities and appraisals is happening virtually with minimal impact on the desired outcomes.

- 3.** Subsidising child-care support is another step which can tremendously benefit this cause. If the childcare cost is picked up or shared by the organisations, then many stay-at-home mothers may be willing to get back to their full-time jobs. Offering benefits like child-care allowance and child-care facilities within or around the office premises helps in keeping new mothers less worried and more committed to their organisations and career journey.

A study by McKinsey said that companies in the top quartile for gender diversity are 15 percent more likely to earn higher profit. Being an equal opportunity employer has merits that one need not list, but experience to truly value them.



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.

Making Caste-Based Affirmation A Part Of DEI

Corporates, while devising their Diversity, Equity and Inclusion policies, must now consider caste as an important indicator for encouraging people from diverse castes to be able to apply for jobs.

BY MRINMOY MAJUMDER



I vividly remember the first time I was to teach a course on the fundamentals of HRM. Within the sessions, a module had to be done on diversity. I was a fresher, straight out of doctoral studies with world changing ideas and zeal, where we were encouraged to discuss/debate around caste. Somewhere during the session, one participant literally said it out loud, “As a guy, I’m okay with a girl sitting next to me in the class, but not somebody from a lower caste who was given a free seat.” That session proved to be a much needed brush-with-the reality-moment for me to realise that not everyone holds progressive views on caste. Probably, that was the reality of a space of comfort where affirmative action was merely taught from the lens of gender, sexuality, age and geographic differences. However, during this session, I had no intention to shock the participants by way of throwing words and concepts at them, like a *masterji*! What I merely did was to make everyone think about diversity from different quarters with ‘caste’ as an important element.

Now, as I set out to teach courses more often, I found that the conversation on caste within the diversity and inclusion module is more relevant than ever. This was largely due to the Cisco incident that came into the limelight a couple of months ago, where an executive belonging to the upper caste passed information to colleagues about

someone’s caste since he happened to belong to a lower caste (*The New York Times*, 2020). The California government has thereafter filed a civil rights lawsuit against the executive, his colleague and the company for unlawful practices. Castebased discrimination is perhaps a new issue in the US, but the timing of the case is significant since all of the US is apparently reeling under issues of racial discrimination. Although seemingly obvious to its stand, Cisco has denied the existence of caste-based discrimination at its premises.

Caste: An integral DEI indicator

Now that Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) is an integral part of HR policies, I seldom hear caste being viewed as one of the indicators to enhance DEI in the organisation. Around last year, when I attended a high profile annual conference with a few sessions dedicated to DEI, all that was heard was about making organisations gender and LGBTQI friendly, and no one touched upon on the topic of caste or castebased discrimination. So, has caste become invisible in the corporate space? Or is there zero caste-based discrimination at the workplace? While we assess DEI policies, it would be right to assume the former question since a utopian workplace is a myth. Hence, we can only strive to be improved versions of ourselves every time.

“Considering merit alone is a flawed idea to begin with, as merit can only be established through equity. Affirmative actions are less about economic mobility and more about social acceptance...”



Whenever caste-based affirmative action is remotely considered, the ‘myth of merit’ is strongly peddled, so much so that we come to think of it as some kind of a magicwand solution for the upliftment of the society. Merit may work if at all there are equitable measures in place, which is not the case even with developed countries. Hence, most of them have affirmative actions in place. For instance, any university accepting applications would invariably have a separate disclosure on diversity which explicitly mentions that people who are at the margins are welcomed to apply for respective positions. Similarly, Asians heading global tech companies and MNCs has also got to do with DEI policies of those companies. Contrarily so, what makes us believe that a white person is not equally qualified to head those companies with decorated Ivy League pedigree, as Asians heading those companies have primarily got to do with their performance, achievements, and career milestones, and yet, they

could navigate or were recruited for the position because of affirmative action.

Merit against social acceptance

While many believe that caste-based discriminations do not concerns cities where most companies are located owing to a cosmopolitan and a multi-cultural outlook. More importantly, companies adhere to strict assessment of performance and credentials above all diversity pointers. Hence, merit does matter for corporates, but considering merit alone is a flawed idea to begin with, as merit can only be established through equity. Affirmative actions are less about economic mobility, and are more about social acceptance, which cannot be achieved by merely getting employment in MNCs.

Caste-based discrimination can be erased through the intermingling of castes and religion. Caste hegemonies are prevalent practices even in cities.

The matrimonial section that appears in the classifieds in the newspapers on Sundays is proof, where everyone is seeking brides and grooms from their own caste, in spite of the irrelevant disclaimer 'caste no bar'. Similarly, one needs to unconsciously practice overlooking the issue of caste as we rarely would have friends, peers, and partners from a different caste. These simple observations say a lot about the invisible nature of caste in urban spaces, which is not organic but done deliberately. This is similar to the meritbased flawed logic that was internalised in us since childhood. In a recent column in *The Indian Express*, Varun Grover writes how confirmation bias works, "...if you do a google search of cases of medical negligence in India. Run a caste-study on these negligent doctors. Many, if not most, names that turn up are of private hospitals owned and populated by savarna doctors." He emphasises that in such cases of negligence, the upper caste (*savarna*) doctors are not considered incompetent, "But you have been constantly fed the idea that all Dalit doctors lack merit by anecdotally citing cases of incompetence by them" (*The Indian Express*, 2020).

Corporates: A long way ahead

Moving away from the societal instances, let us focus on how the corporates are faring in terms of caste-based diversity. In another article in *The Huffington Post*, Ms Dhanaraj and Prof. Bapuji cited a research paper titled, 'The role of caste for board membership, CEO, and interlocking' from the Indian context (HuffPost, 2020). The study revealed that the company board in India are not diverse and most directorial positions are dominated by one caste, and surprisingly, the CEO is also recruited from the same caste. To look at it from a theoretical lens, Herbert Simon, in his book, *Administrative Behavior*, talked about human cognition, where it is observed that while making decisions, corporate executives conduct themselves in the

same way as they do in their private life, hence it corroborates Simon's theory with the study on diversity among board members in the Indian Inc. We do not need algorithmic analysis for us to understand that there is hardly any caste-based diversity in the corporate sector.

Given the exploratory and observational instances, corporates, while devising their DEI policies, must now consider caste as an important indicator for encouraging people from diverse castes to be able to apply for jobs. While this may not be a fullfledged solution to a historical problem, affirmative actions, however, must be executed in every possible corporate decision-making process, because if not for diversity, there is no innovation and growth. Corporates should not consider castebased affirmation a matter of taboo, as the problem is largely prevalent, and a progressive deed can set a remarkable benchmark. Hopefully, in the coming days, when there are design thinking sketches floating online, it would be good to see castebased issues drawn upon and resolved for the greater good. 

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About the Author

Mrinmoy Majumder teaches courses on people strategy and industrial relations. He can be reached on mrinmoy.majumder@imi.edu.

“Corporates, while devising their DEI policies, must now consider caste as an important indicator for encouraging people from diverse castes to be able to apply for jobs.”



BY KALPANA BANSAL

Spotting Potential In A “Cognitive Talent” Era

In a rapidly changing environment, we need “situational” leaders who are not a result of vacant positions, but of opportunities that ultimately transpire into achievements.

Humanity’s rate of change in the next 20 years is going to be exponential, prompting organisations to also change at a rapid rate by adopting a more cognitive approach towards Talent. With cognitive talent management, organisations focus on predictability, performance and productivity for deriving value for the business (Grewal, 2019).

Research across organisations has indicated that the top 20% accounts for 80% of organisational output and the payoff from the vital few who account for the biggest chunk of organisational output increases as a function of job complexity. Talented employees are “force multipliers”;

raising the performance bar for their colleagues, and particularly for their direct reports, shaping high-performing cultures (Premuzic, Adler, Kaiser, 2017). It is imperative to determine what talent already exists in the organisation and which employees have the potential to be effective in larger roles.

Traditionally, Identification of High Potential (HiPo) has involved interventions focussed on individual career success; that fail to measure the ability to engage employees and turn their teams or organisations into high performing machines. The argument is that interventions should focus on simpler, AI-driven, high validity approaches based on

fundamental drivers that can predict the key driver to organisational performance (Premuzic, Adler, Kaiser, 2017). Also, there is a difference between identification of HiPo talent and predicting future success, and it is argued that there is a need to look at both Prediction and Assessment.

Assumptions

For the arguments to be meaningful, we would need to make a few upfront assumptions:

1. Difference between performance and potential: It is necessary to make a distinction between individuals with high performance and individuals with high potential (Silzer & Church, 2010).

2. Potential is a dynamic state, not an end state: The HiPo is a dynamic personality who will develop beyond her current skills and abilities. While there is disagreement on whether the potential factors themselves viz. learning ability or adaptability, can be developed (Rogers and Smith, 2007), potential skills and abilities may have both natural innate components and components that can be developed.

3. Identifying potential is different from assessing development needs: We currently use a variety of assessment tools and programmes to assess an individual's current leadership, skills and to determine the person's development needs. This assessment is based on a set of competencies (JARL) that try to capture what it takes to be effective in specific roles. This type of assessment measures the individual against end state competencies. However, the individual is dynamic and a work in "developmental progress." We do not evaluate the person against potential factors such as learning ability and do not identify the person's potential to grow further and develop.

4. Measuring potential for different careers vis-à-vis a specific future role: The future of cognitive talent explores talent moving in different dimensions or spheres with a personalised career path. Going

forward, job related competencies would be focused on performance in specific jobs, while the potential factors would be indicators of a person's capability to grow into a wide range of career opportunities.

5. Predicting Potential to

Develop: Current skills and abilities are different from potential and need to be considered separately. Accurately assessing a person's current knowledge, skills, and abilities is an important first step, but it should not be confused with determining the person's ability to grow, adapt, and develop enough to handle more complex future work challenges and responsibilities.

Definition of Potential

Potential refers to the promise or possibility of an individual becoming something more than what he is currently (Silzer & Church, 2010). The underlying definitional question that the organisation seeks to address is, "Potential for what?"

Most commonly, organisations have defined "potential" w.r.t. the ability to move

- **By Role:** The potential to move into top or senior management roles
- **By Level:** The ability to move two positions or levels above

The "cognitive talent" approach of the future encompasses more diversified movement that entails:

- **By Breadth:** The capability to take on broader scope leadership role
- **By Expertise:** A consistent track record of exceptional performance
- **By Strategic Position:** Key positions that may be at the core of the organisation's success at that point of time

Potential Assessment Measurement

Given the definition of a HiPo, as someone who is likely to become a key *driver* of organisational performance, we now need to identify key criteria which define a leader.

“Talented employees are ‘force multipliers’; raising the performance bar for their colleagues, and particularly for their direct reports, shaping high-performing cultures.”

“‘Ability’ encompasses key skills required for a leadership role. Assessment of individual proficiency on required skills, hence becomes a key parameter that can be facilitated through AI-enabled skills matching.”

In a rapidly changing environment, we need “situational” leaders who are not a result of vacant positions, but of opportunities that ultimately transpire into achievements. The cognitive future demands the deployment of the “outsight principle” that propagates acting like a leader, for thinking like a leader (*Ibarra, 2015*). The principle requires individuals to start acting like leaders by engaging in a multitude of projects beyond one’s core area, building robust dynamic networks and continuously redefining self.

Taking cue from the “Outsight Principle” and years of scientific research, it is proposed that the following 3 major factors be used for assessing the potential of an employee:

1.) Drive: Defines the will and motivation to work hard and achieve in the job. It can be assessed by standardised tests that measure conscientiousness, motivation and ambition. The past performance track record of an individual is a key factor reflecting his/her drive (This would tackle the predictive challenge).

2.) Ability: Indicates whether the individual is cognitively adept to perform in a job. IQ tests and cognitive ability tests are most often used for assessing individuals on this parameter. IQ or cognitive tests are easily available online these days.

“Ability”, however, goes beyond just intelligence, it encompasses key skills required for a leadership role. Assessment of individual proficiency on required skills, hence becomes a key parameter that can be facilitated through AI-enabled skills matching.

3.) Social Networking Skills: In the initial portion of the article, concerns were raised about HiPo identification being centred round individual career success, instead of the ability to take the team along. The networked arena of the future where skills are validated through endorsements (LinkedIn) coupled with the “outsight” principles indicate that a key leadership trait is the ability to connect/network and steer the team towards high performance.

Social skills involve two fundamental abilities: the ability to manage self and the ability to manage others. Emotional intelligence, Social quotient and strength of employee network (internally and externally) are factors that help assess an individual on this parameter. While assessing the strength of an individual’s social skills, the breadth of the network along with its dynamism need to be assessed (*Ibarra, 2015*).

The model therefore, proposes a combination of tools that can assess these three factors, coupled with predictive modelling using ML for estimating future success as below:

Drive	Ability	Social Networking Skills
• Defines the will and motivation to work hard, achieve, and do whatever it takes to get the job done • Drive can be assessed by standardized tests that measure conscientiousness, achievement, motivation, and ambition • The past performance track record of an individual is a key factor reflecting his/her drive • Can be easily converted into a digital tool for mapping skills but is comparatively less intuitive	• Indicates whether the individual is cognitively adept to perform a job • IQ tests and cognitive ability tests are most often used for assessing individuals on this parameter • “Ability”, however goes beyond just intelligence, it encompasses key skills requirement for a leadership role • Assessment of individual proficiency on required skills, hence becomes a key parameter	• A key leadership trait is the ability to connect/network and steer the team towards high performance • Social skills involve two fundamental abilities: the ability to manage self and the ability to manage others • Emotional intelligence and strength of employee network (internally and externally) are factors that help assess an individual on the same

- **Reliability & Validity:** Most of the assessment tools and techniques cited above can be used to reliably and validly assess specific skills, abilities, and characteristics. Structured approaches (BEI, personality instruments, ability tests, and individual psychological assessment) have higher validity and reliability components than less structured approaches (such as unstructured interviews, manager ratings and recommendations, senior manager reviews, and performance reviews, and lend themselves better to predictive modelling.

- **Prediction:** One of the challenges of identifying HiPo individuals is the inherent complexity of making predictions about how successful a person might be in the long-term future. One of the limitations of our existing model is that we do not adjust the definition of high potential as the business strategies and context changes.

It is important to distinguish between accurately assessing specific variables and predictors (data collection) and making predictions about future behaviour and performance (data evaluation). The HiPo identification process needs to effectively do both.

The key steps in this process are:

1. Identify predictor variables:

Selecting the best variables to include is the critical first step that can help or hinder the organisation's ability to successfully predict future behaviour. Of course, the most predictive variables will probably vary for different organizations, based on the strategic objectives, the desired organisational and individual capabilities, and the organisation's culture and values.

2. Assess for predictor variables:

In general, it is important to consider the reliability, validity, and usefulness of the data that are being used.

3. Predict future behaviour: The step that is currently overlooked in the highpotential identification process is how the data are combined to predict future behaviour. This suggests

an opportunity to improve the accuracy of identifying HiPo by using ML powered cognitive methods of combining data into overall predictions.

Questions to be addressed:

- What are we actually trying to predict?
- What are more effective measures of high potential?
- Is potential immutable or something that can be developed?
- How does the person's motivations and career aspiration affect potential?
- Are there different maturity levels of potential?
- What is the real impact of communicating high - potential status?
- What would be the criterion measure for potential in a predictive empirical study?
- How will we know if a person's potential ever pays off for the organization? 

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About the Author

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



VIVEK RAO
AGM- HR, Ashok Leyland

“It is imperative to develop generalists who can be plugged into multiple roles, leading to more efficiencies.”

Q With the economy in doldrums and a consequent decline in sales and freight volumes, the commercial vehicle (CV) industry, like many others, hasn't been spared the wrath of COVID-19. What, according to you, are the challenges and opportunities that the ongoing pandemic presents for the CV industry?

A The past few quarters have been difficult for the CV industry, and the pandemic-led lockdown could not have been more untimely. However, I believe that a concerted response, both in the short and mid-to-long term, will ensure a hockey-stick recovery. The CV industry must rapidly execute plans to ride the storm in the short term and establish long-term strategies to minimise the potential future impact. Businesses who use this crisis as an opportunity to restructure and reinvent themselves will emerge as winners. Companies also need greater situational leadership and creativity today to deftly navigate this crisis. Furthermore, there is a need to build differentiated capabilities for building data-driven, agile, and future-ready organisations that will help create long-term value. Automotive companies need to ensure and review business continuity planning by setting up instant response teams, defining and aligning leaders, building the right skills, reviewing co-working guidelines in critical roles, and measuring, maintaining and supporting supplier stability.

Q The breadth, depth, and scale of the novel challenges being experienced by HR managers are indeed astounding. What would you say are some of the biggest talent challenges for the CV industry right now? How do the same need to be tackled going forward?

A Being a CV manufacturer with a strong focus on productivity, the company always has a challenge of managing its operational cost. Some

of the ways in which we are tackling this challenge are:

- Moving to an agile work model to improve our efficiencies more speedily than what was planned earlier
- Focusing now on how to more effectively use flexible manpower in our manufacturing processes in an unstable market condition
- Identifying the increasing opportunities for low-cost automation for better productivity and quality

Q When it comes to addressing key concerns such as changing business needs and boosting employee morale, what are the vital points that function as an imperative for an organisation in your sector?

A The line between personal life and work-life has never been more blurred. The question which then arises is: How can employers help employees maintain work-life boundaries while also ensuring a productive working culture? We are working on redesigning the way business is done in the organisation. Some of the areas are as follows:

- We have used this crisis to review our Employee Value Proposition (EVP) offerings and to strengthen the organisation's caring/connected aspects. We have accordingly launched a virtual engagement framework to deal with the employees' mental and physical well-being and their re/upskilling.
- Learning has moved largely to e-platform, which is heartening. It is very useful as we are experiencing the shift to BS VI norms, and it is important to train all employees, customers, dealers, and third-party employees.
- Before, connecting with the customers had to be face-to-face. During the last few months, we have developed e-connect systems, which have helped us connect



more with our customers and design our offerings accordingly.

- We have shifted to a blended work environment that includes a work-from-home model and have created a digital framework that quickly adapts to the new situation, thereby taking care of business continuity, employee safety, and productivity.

“The past few quarters have been difficult for the CV industry, and the pandemic-led lockdown could not have been more untimely. However, a concerted response, both in the short and mid-to-long term, will ensure a hockey-stick recovery.”

Q Are there any skill gap concerns that COVID-19 has surfaced for the CV industry?

A In order to sustain our learning during the pandemic, we have adapted to newer learning tools. The L&D function across companies in the CV

industry is adapting to lead with innovative and rapid digital solutions to engage a dispersed workforce.

The key focus is a multi-skilled and multitasking workforce. No one should be irreplaceable, and in the COVID situation, we have had cases of employees pitching in for colleagues who could not be physically present on the shop floor. Therefore, it is imperative for the business to develop generalists who can be plugged into multiple roles, leading to more efficiencies.

Q Many organisations plan to adopt a hybrid working model or move at least a chunk of their workforce to permanent remote positions post COVID-19. How viable is continued remote work for employees in the CV industry?

A Blended working is the way forward in any industry, and the following points need to be addressed in order to make this successful:

- Management training for a blended working model, such that there is objectivity in the assessment of work, dignity and respect in the dealings and interactions, and clarity in communication and expectations, has to be an imperative, considering such a model offers flexibility in the workplace.
- Aggressive talent development strategies have to be put in place to ensure that professionals who are at the 90th percentile and above and those who possess the competencies to thrive in an uncertain environment are occupying the key roles to be able to do the catching-up game and leapfrog into the future faster than the others.
- Compensation strategy has to help in the aggression expected to be displayed in the market. This strategy has to help retain the right talent, attract the right talent, and get more and more discretionary efforts by the employees. **HC**



BY MEENAA SHARMA

Aligning Engagement Around Hot Desking

Much before COVID-19 disrupted every economic activity, employers were looking for ways to change their workspaces to reinforce greater efficiency and meet the needs of their evolving employee population.

Much before COVID-19 disrupted every economic activity, employers were looking for ways to change their workspaces to reinforce greater efficiency and meet the needs of their evolving employee population. Transitioning to cloud storage or adding consultants or freelance employees with more flexible work schedules were some of the solutions that were being contemplated. Post the pandemic, the most common strategy adopted by organisations was the rationalisation of office space and renegotiation of rents. This was consistent across India where demand for office space was booming until COVID-19 struck earlier this year.

Hot desking to rationalise infrastructure

In order to rationalise the infrastructure and expenditure associated with the high-cost of office space, many businesses have chosen to reduce the number of workspaces and allow employees to select a new desk each day — a practice known as hot desking.

Hot desking is a scenario wherein an employee is not allocated a dedicated workstation. This is the best solution where we opt for WFH, while at the same time, employees come to the office on a rotational basis with some decided periodicity, say for instance, once a fortnight or a month. It provides employees with

the flexibility to Work from Home, while at the same time come to the office in a periodic manner.

As companies rethink the office of the future, hot desking or flexi workspace will emerge as an office trend that is set to get hotter in the post COVID-19 era. With companies globally configuring a higher WFH component in future business plans, hot desking is now emerging as a serious workplace trend. With changing mindsets and companies looking to make optimum utilisation of space while they cut down on infrastructure cost, the trend will catch on in India as well. This will also enable businesses to retain less space by encouraging staff to work remotely.

Understanding the benefits

The first step to getting multiple departments to work together is in understanding why hot desking is a beneficial option. These are departments that are responsible for supporting employees through most of their day-to-day operations. Once hot desking is implemented, we can anticipate a steep drop in employee engagement over a period of time. HR can help find ways to better engage employees by way of seeking feedback and inputs, and create strategies which ensure that the employees do not feel isolated from their workspace. Studies have shown that engaged employees are more productive, innovative and loyal, and yet many organisations are failing to address the broad range of factors that can influence engagements—including workplace design.

An employee may be sceptical about losing out on bonding with colleagues due to the diminishing social aspect of working from home and not coming to office for a longer period. This is where hot desking works wonders. It is extremely critical for HR to guide and educate employees on Hot Desking by circulating well-guided policies where different departments can follow rosters. In this manner, employees who are otherwise working from home get the opportunity to come to the office

periodically. This helps in bonding among the employees which is otherwise missing due to WFH.

A study by Gallup shows that employees who own personal workspaces are 1.4 times more likely to be engaged. However, this does not imply that employees require a dedicated desk. Instead, employees simply need an ongoing connect from the organisation which is enough to help improve engagements. By working closely with the HR department, businesses can ensure that this is evolved as a culture and managers need to hone the skillset to make an employee feel that they are still connected with their colleagues, manager and the leadership team. HR plays a key role in facilitating programmes which lead to a greater connect for these employees. At the same time, ensure that programmes which helps them keep the spirits high and gradually makes them feel vibrant to rejoice the culture and help evolve a hot desking strategy which will benefit the employees. Besides that, managers also need to find the new ways to re-define productivity by way of regular conversations with their teams to resolve unclear expectations and confusion about priorities.

COVID-19 crisis is an opportunity for organisations to elevate their corporate culture and make it mutually beneficial. At this point, it is important that organisations and managers display trust in their team and ensure effective team bonding which may otherwise be lacking due to WFH or hot desking. A simple replication of office working style and effective team building can help employees to feel trusted, and thereby, relieve them of stress and enhance their work efficiency and well-being. 

About the Author

Meenaa Sharma is Chief Human Resource Officer, Reliance Smart Money. She is a seasoned professional with over 20 years of experience in various HR functions across sectors which include Telecom, Oil & Gas & financial Services. She has worked in organisations such as Reliance Infocomm, Reliance Petroleum, Birla Global and Finance. Meenaa is an MBA in Human Resources.

“Studies have shown that engaged employees are more productive, innovative and loyal, and yet many organisations are failing to address the broad range of factors that can influence engagements – including workplace design.”

Remote Working Environment

BY ANSHUL PRAKASH, VINAY JOY, ABHISEK CHOUDHURY AND LUV MOHAN SAGGI

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has compelled employers to look at alternative ways which permit its employees to function effectively. Consequently, this has resulted in many industries allowing their employees to work from home. The concept of remote working has been further accelerated by the introduction of new technologies - from mobile devices to cloud computing and this has transformed almost any location into a virtual workplace. This has enabled employers to grant their employees flexibility, in terms of their working hours and the location from where they may be able to work.

Considering the need of the hour and the absence of any specific provisions in the prevailing labour laws relating to remote working and its impact on working hours, overtime hours and leave, the employers may, subject to applicable laws, consider

formulating internal guidelines covering these aspects. There are several factors that must be kept in mind when revising existing policies regarding remote working to ensure smooth functioning of business activities and the below mentioned aspects cover some of them.

Working hours and overtime hours

While the provisions of the relevant Shops and Establishments Acts govern working hours of employees, this aspect is difficult to monitor for most employers in a work from home environment. However, to provide for some certainty, it is important to mandate time periods between which the employees are expected to be working or to be available for communication with their respective work teams.

In order to address this, employers may consider using software/technology which requires employees to log hours into their system or even mandate time sheets to be filled. This would allow employers to implement a mechanism which monitors the productivity of employees. Given that such practices are not the norm in many industries, it may need to be assessed whether the inclusion of such steps would affect employee morale detrimentally.

The management may also include guidelines that require its employees to take prior permission from their supervisor before logging in any overtime hours. Combined with a process to assess the employee's work hours, this would assist the employer in keeping track of the employee's productivity as well.





Monitoring Productivity of Employees

Working from home is not an easy transition for most employees to make as they need to balance the needs of their households and those of office. Therefore, it has become important for employers to assess their employees' productivity when working from home. Several remote working and tracking solutions are available today which can aid employers in discerning the amount of work that their employees are able to do on a relative basis and the most productive hours or timings for employees. Discussions with employees on basis such data may assist employers in understanding the kind of tools or assistance employees may require, to improve their productivity.

Ensuring Effective Communication

The emergence of online tools and platforms, such as Zoom, Skype, Microsoft Teams, has become the norm and has helped many employers streamline and manage communications with little disruption. Employers need to realise that maintaining regular communications amongst employees is necessary to

boost the morale and keep the team spirit high. Many employers have issued internal directives to the different teams in the organisation, to communicate and collaborate as often as possible when working from home.

Equipment and Reimbursement

With the continued lockdown in place in India, many employers have realised that their employees are not equipped with facilities or equipment to be able to work from home effectively. To facilitate a seamless work from home environment, many employers have now started providing their employees with various allowances or reimbursements to purchase items like furniture (desks or chairs), broadband connections, wide screen monitors etc. To this extent, employers may consider amending their wage policies or salary structures to provide for such allowances/reimbursements.

Employers have also had to make provision for laptops to be provided to employees so that they may be able to work remotely. In such instances, it would be wise for the employer to have in place an IT equipment policy which clearly establishes that office equipment should only be used for work-related purposes and that the employer would have the ability to scrutinise or review any and all data present on such laptops.

Maintaining confidentiality and ensuring data protection

As most data that employees work on is confidential in nature, it is important for employers to ensure that any work carried out by the employees is only carried out on company provided laptops and on virtual private networks. Given the ease with which data may be leaked or hacked today, appropriate precautions must be taken to protect such data. Employers may prohibit employees from storing any sensitive and confidential information of the company on their personal devices



Anshul Prakash is a Partner with the Corporate and Commercial Practice Group in Khaitan and Co's Mumbai office. He specialises in Employment and Labour laws and heads the Firm's Employment, Labour and Benefits (ELB) Practice. Anshul has advised various prominent domestic and international clients on issues related to employment in respect of labour laws compliance, labour audits, transfer and relocation of employees pursuant to business transfers and asset sale and purchase, social security and employee incentive schemes, maternity benefits, drafting of employment contracts across levels etc.

and may also consider disabling the use of pen drives on their computers. Further, use of cloud storage sites or backups on a company provided or encrypted storage device may also be mandated, to avoid loss of company data. Moreover, employers may consider providing online training to their employees to identify phishing emails so that appropriate precautions are taken by them when receiving emails from outsiders.

Leave

In these challenging times, maintaining the health, safety and welfare of employees is of prime importance. Employers are expected to support their staff when they need sick leave. Furthermore, employees can also avail their casual or earned leaves as per their requirements in accordance with the state specific Shops and Establishments Act. While some states have mandated the grant of paid leave to employees who test positive for COVID-19 for certain durations, this is not applicable to employees in all states. To that extent, employers may consider implementing guidelines to

ensure the grant of additional leave in such instances.

To ensure that employees are also able to take care of their mental health, employers may consider encouraging employees to avail leaves in accordance with their entitlements even if they are at home and have some personal matter to attend to. In case an employee is not able to work during the dedicated working hours on a particular day, he/she should be encouraged to avail leave on such days. The application requirements for different types of leaves should be clearly laid down in the employer's leave or work from home policies.

The rapid onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the imposition of the lockdown in India has warranted many employers to rapidly adapt their working models to shift to a work from home environment. Given the likelihood of such a scenario prevailing in the near future, employers will need to ensure that they implement policies that are sensitive to the employees' needs and ensure an efficient and productive work from home set-up. 



Vinay Joy is a Partner in the Corporate and Commercial practice group in Khaitan and Co's Bengaluru office. He is also a member of the Firm's Employment, Labour and Benefits practice and specialises in all aspects of contentious and non-contentious employment law matters including those arising as a consequence of business transfers and integration of acquired businesses.



Abhisek Choudhury is a Principal Associate in the Employment, Labour and Benefits (ELB) Practice in Khaitan and Co's Mumbai office.



Luv Mohan Saggi is an Associate in the Employment, Labour and Benefits (ELB) Practice in the Khaitan and Co's Bengaluru office.



Teleworking: Impact On Contract Workers

BY VINAY JOY, ABHISEK CHOUDHURY AND LUV MOHAN SAGGI

Q What is the difference between contract labourers and out-workers?

A In India, engagement of contract workers is governed by Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act 1970 (“**CLRA**”). As regards the aspect of determining the applicability of CLRA on workers engaged through third party contractors by the company, the company shall be required to categorise its workers as ‘contract workers’ and ‘out-workers’. To illustrate, if Company ‘A’ has engaged workers from Contractor ‘B’ and such workers are deployed on Company ‘A’ premises to produce a given result for them, such workers will be regarded as contract workers and will be governed as per CLRA. However, on the contrary, if Company ‘A’ has engaged workers from Contractor ‘C’ and they are rendering services from another place not owned or controlled by Company ‘A’, such workers of Company ‘C’ will be regarded as out-workers and will not be governed under CLRA.

Q What is the liability of the principal employer vis-à-vis out-workers?

A As provided under CLRA, any activity which is outsourced to someone and carried outside the premises of the principal employer, will not be considered as contract labour under CLRA.

Accordingly, basis the illustration mentioned in query 1 above, Company ‘A’ will not have any liability towards workers of Company ‘C’ as per CLRA. The responsibility will only be on Company ‘C’ in its capacity as the employer of such workers to make statutory and contractual payments.

Q What is the liability of the principal employer vis-à-vis contract workers?

A Many contract workers (*such as housekeeping and security staff*) are unable to perform their duties. In such cases, subject to any minimum service charges and payment requirements under the manpower services agreements executed with the contractors, the principal employer will only be liable for the contract workers who worked from the premises of the principal employer.

Accordingly, as per our illustration in query 1 above, if the workers of Company ‘B’ are unable to perform their duties and render services to Company ‘A’, Company ‘A’ will not be liable for wage payments to the workers deployed by Contractor ‘B’ for the period of its non-operations due to the imposition of lockdown from a legal standpoint, unless the contrary has been contractually agreed to between Company ‘A’ and Company ‘B’.

Q What are the key clauses to be factored in while executing manpower services agreements?

A Many companies are dealing with demands for salary payments by the contractors for the contract workers who were unable to perform their services. While there is no legal obligation on the principal employer to pay any service fee to the contractor in the absence of the services rendered by them, going forward, it would be useful to expressly agree and incorporate this understanding in the service agreement. This would safeguard the interests of the principal employer and minimise the risk of any dispute with the contractor should such situations arise.

Accordingly, as per our illustration mentioned above, it is advisable that service agreements to be executed between Company ‘A’ and Company ‘B’ should provide and clarify that no service fee including contract worker wages shall be payable by Company ‘A’ in the absence of any service rendered by the contract workers of Company ‘B’.

Q What is the impact on the applicability of CLRA due to Covid-19?

A In the near future, it is likely that many establishments will reduce their dependency on contract labourers to the maximum extent possible. The services sector in particular may witness a decline in staffing for ancillary services because of the staff working from home and premises remaining largely vacant. The question of applicability of CLRA, would be subject to further discussions and potential judicial consideration, especially in cases where workers were previously deputed on premises to perform business support functions and are now working remotely. It needs to be seen how the courts would consider such unprecedented transition of contract workers to out-worker in terms of their relationship with the contractor i.e. the immediate employer and the principal employer. **HC**



5 Things To Review

While COVID-19 has not prevented us from living our lives or doing business, it has changed the way we think, act, and interact. It has altered our way of life and the way we do business.

BY **HARJEET KHANDUJA**

In the month of March this year, most HR professionals were focused on performance and reward management cycles. Growth areas were being discussed for Annual Operating plans. Offsite location booking was underway to hold an annual meeting. There was an urgency to complete face to face feedback and expectation setting meetings.

Suddenly everything changed. Face to face meetings became online

meetings. Discussions on growth areas drifted towards survival strategies. Focus shifted from performance management to health and safety. One invisible virus changed the world on a drastic scale.

While COVID-19 has not been able to prevent us from living our lives or from doing business, it still has changed the way we think, the way we act, the way we interact, the way we live our lives and the way we do business.

“Work from home looks good. However, this is only the honeymoon period. For the long run you need to review your policies in context of the new normal.”

Need to Review

After working in the lockdown for a few months, businesses have accepted that work can happen from home. There are bright chances that part of the workforce for most organisations will continue to work from home post COVID-19. One reason will be cost, another will be accessibility to better talent across geography, and the third, possibly, will be flexibility to use various engagement models.

Work from home looks good. However, this is only the honeymoon period. If you want it to work for you in the long run, then you need to review your policies in context of the new normal. Here are the top 5 policies (areas) which I would strongly recommend that you review in the context of your business.

1. Work From Home (Remote Work) Policy

Figure out some of the elements of work from home to avoid confusion and conflicts in future.

a. Location: Be on the same page with the employees, where the employees can work from. Will you be comfortable with your employees working from their home, or rather, their hometown? If an employee works from her hometown (which is different from your business location), just check that you are ensuring compliances based on the right location. Compliances may include professional tax, ESIC, holiday calendar, leaves etc.

b. Infrastructure: Infrastructure is a tricky issue. Any employee operating remotely would need at least a computing device (laptop, phone, etc.), an internet connection and power backup.

First, answer these three questions (in terms of employer OR employee)

- i. Who will acquire the assets in question?
- ii. Who will maintain said assets?
- iii. Who will pay the utility bills for the employee's internet and electricity?

Secondly, you need to decide who will pay for it. There are several options.

- i. Employee (the same way employee pays for transportation to work at many companies)
- ii. Company (Cost of doing business)
- iii. Part company (up to a certain amount), Part employee
- iv. Initially paid for by the employee, reimbursed over a period of time by company

c. Confidentiality: Set clear expectations with the employee to decide whether the employee has to set up a home office (designated place in the house) OR if the employee can operate from a coffee shop (depending on the information being handled by your employees). It will be a good idea to introduce Non-Disclosure Agreements and social media guidelines, clearly articulating what is acceptable and what is not. However, merely endorsing a policy does not serve the purpose. Ensure pointers are communicated in your induction programmes and are emphasised by front line managers.

2. Leave and Attendance Policy

a. Monitor Time or Monitor work:

Scope of Leave and Attendance policy is a lot wider than it seems. If a part of your workforce is working remotely, then think carefully whether you still want to monitor time for a job role or you want to shift to monitoring productivity instead.

b. How to monitor time: If you choose to monitor time, you need to define the method to capture time. It can be a simple tool to mark in and out time. You may choose to use geofencing for it. Same can be achieved by monitoring login and logout time on the system of work, so that no attendance system is required. You can be as creative as you want.

c. Dealing with down time: In case you have made your choices regarding a “work from home” infrastructure, you need to be on the same page with the employee on one

“Many companies convey their warmth through joining kits, and it will be interesting to see how companies manifest their warmth in the digital equivalent of the same.”

crucial point. For instance, if the employee is not available due to any infrastructural issues (power, connectivity or device breakdown), will you be asking the employee to apply for leave or pay full wages for the period.

3. Recruitment and On-boarding Policy

a. Talent Pool: Review recruitment guidelines, considering that work can be done from anywhere. Sensitize recruiters and managers to go beyond geographical boundaries. You may end up hiring better talent, and at the same time cost of living in smaller towns can improve the bottom line.

b. Pre-Employment Medical and Background Verification: Review your pre-employment medical checks, whether you need to add a few checks or rationalize. You must review the checks you are conducting for background verification.

c. Digital on-boarding Definition: If you are not hung on to a location, you might consider digital on-boarding. All the paperwork can be digital. However, make up your mind, when you will call a person digitally on-boarded. It can be any of the following or a combination:

- i. When the person is available to work
- ii. When the person is enabled to work
- iii. When the person is allocated work

The definition alone will give you return on investment. You may review various aspects of on-boarding. These can be simple things like whether you want to do their induction before or after joining. Or perhaps, is there a need to provide a physical Identity card to the employee? Many companies convey their warmth through joining kits, and it will be interesting to see how companies manifest their warmth in the digital equivalent of the same.

4. Engagement Policy

a. Feel the pulse: Engagement is a bigger challenge in a digital environment because you cannot walk the floor and feel the pulse anymore. To avoid surprises, figure out a method. There are multiple ways available including digital surveys and people behaviour analytics. You need to invest in some digital tools and establish methods and practices to be on top of it.

b. Team Building: Review the engagement budgets and team outing policies. Think how you want to spend that money judiciously. Do not try to save money here, rather try to invest money to derive the same outcome in a virtual environment.

5. Health and Safety Policy

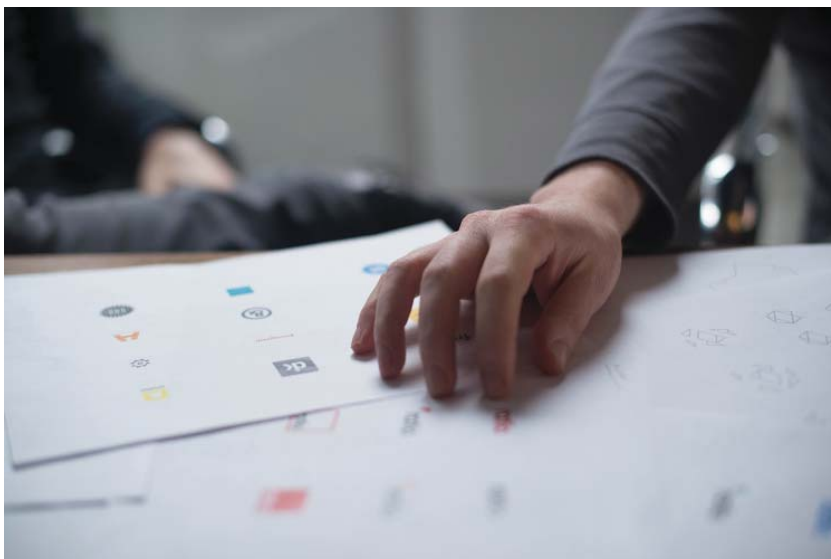
COVID-19 may not be that dangerous, but the treatment is expensive.

Review your health and safety policy for adequate coverage of employees. Also plan for programmes through your insurance service provider on mental health, you will not regret it!



About the Author

Harjeet Khanduja is an international speaker, author, poet, visionary, influencer and a HR Leader and is currently working with Reliance Jio. He has 2 published patents. Harjeet has been a LinkedIn Power Profile, Chicken Soup Writer, TEDx speaker, Guest Faculty at IIM Ahmedabad and member of CII HR IR committee. Harjeet is an alumnus of IIT Roorkee and INSEAD.





Meetings Revisited

Through meetings, an organisation, which is a microcosmic representation of the genius of human organisation, forges a common agenda amongst the denizens of the corporate jungle to meet the survival of-the-fittest world of Business.

BY **ASHISH PRADHAN**

Meetings have been one of the driving forces behind mankind's emergence as the dominant species on Earth. As Yuval Harari expostulates in his seminal work "Sapiens", humans as such have emerged mainly on account of their unique ability to organise themselves into families, clans, bands, tribes, and nations. Meetings – when two or more people come together to discuss a topic – is a vital cog in the wheel of

this organisation of humankind. Business, in general, and corporate life, in particular, revolves around meetings. It is through meetings that the Organisation, which is a microcosmic representation of the genius of human organisation, forges a common agenda amongst the denizens of the corporate jungle which enables them to meet the survival-of-the-fittest world of Business.

“The COVID-19 crisis has ensured that the boundaries between office and home have reduced to the couple of steps that it takes us to move from our office at home to the living room.”

It is difficult to imagine a scenario where any business can be transacted without any meetings, least of all, corporate functioning. It is then expected that meeting, as a topic of research – is a well-worn one.

Today, we live in virtual times more than any other time in our history. The COVID19 crisis has ensured that the boundaries between office and home have all but disappeared – in most cases, reduced to a couple of steps that it takes us to move from our office at home to the living room. Our people contact is now limited to virtual meetings – Zoom, Teams, Webex, etc. These virtual meetings have added a new dimension to the way we manage meetings. Here are a few things that have changed –

1. It is difficult to retain participant interest over a long period. Opportunities provided by the virtual platform to switch-off without being noticed also add to the temptation of distractions.
2. The computer screen places an increased strain on the eyes and also on the brain of the participant. Many currently used virtual meeting platforms do not easily allow participants to see a PowerPoint presentation, the presenter and the other participants, all simultaneously in full view. It is not possible to see the body language of all meeting participants in a virtual set up.
3. Since these virtual meetings today often replace all forms of interpersonal contact, a simple coffee machine conversation transforms into a virtual meeting. This results in blocked calendars and back-to-back meetings. Working for global organisations means operating in different time zones that add another level of difficulty that we have often not previously experienced.

While acknowledging these challenges, one must try and find some means to manage these. This is imperative to be able to emerge as winners in the post-COVID world which, as most acknowledge now, would enforce much more intense

virtual business interactions than earlier.

In the past few months, one has seen improvements in the virtual meetings that one has been a part of, in terms of seamless conduct and efficiency. The conduct of these meetings has changed, and I have tried to observe these changes, reflect, and distil what I believe are some pointers to make our virtual meetings more productive.

It is important at the beginning to find ways to connect emotionally with the participants. Checking in with them in terms of where they are in their mind, heart, and body goes a long way to get people feeling connected. It declutters the mind and promotes mindfulness. This is a great way to start a virtual meeting. A few minutes invested at the outset goes a long way to ensure sustained engagement through the rest of the meeting.

1. Professional facilitation for important meetings is an investment well made.
2. Clearly, understand the purpose of the meeting – is it to report the progress of a project or to brainstorm a new concept? I have experienced that trying to do both in one meeting could result in some amount of cognitive dissonance that detracts from the effectiveness of the meeting related to the quality of the output. If both the objectives are a must to include then splitting the meeting into two sections with a 5-minute break in between certainly helps.
3. Given that meeting spans need to be kept shorter given the challenges of the virtual format, pre-reads are very important. Participants need to be given a chance to pre-read for the meeting, which ensures that the limited meeting time available can be productively used for pushing the agenda forward through value-added discussions, rather than going through what has already been achieved.
4. Meetings are normally scheduled with half-hour time blocks. It is



output drops significantly. A half an hour gap between meetings is ideal to capture the take-aways from the earlier meeting, reflect, organise to-dos and then prepare for the next meeting. I, personally, find this very refreshing and helps me centre myself for the next engagement.

“Meetings are essential because they provide us with the opportunity to connect with people, share thoughts, engage in energising conversations, and, of course, align on a common steering course.”

Clearly, meetings are essential because they provide us with the opportunity to connect with people, share thoughts, engage in energising conversations, and, of course, align on a common steering course. The question to deliberate is whether we want the meeting to be a part of “good sangha” or “bad sangha”. Sangha is a Sanskrit word that means an association, assembly, company, or community. Good sangha nourishes us with noteworthy dialogues and helps to make progress. It energises us. Bad sangha strains us and depletes our energy levels. Meetings have the potential to lift our spirits – we need to adapt ourselves with agility to ensure that this potential is realised. **HC**

important to keep in mind that the meeting time blocked is the outer time limit and one can close the meeting early if the objectives are achieved. A one-hour meeting can finish by the 43rd minute, if the objectives are met. One would be surprised to see the smiles on faces when this happens and further, gives a message that the organiser appreciates the efforts and time of the participants which further motivates enthusiastic participation in the next meetings.

5. Finally, I would strongly avoid back to back meetings as they tend to drain one and the quality of one's

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.

Embracing Curiosity

***Michael Bungay Stanier**, an Oxford scholar, sought-after coach, bestselling author, speaker, and founder of Box of Crayons, is at the forefront of shaping how organisations worldwide make being "coach-like" an everyday leadership behaviour. Thinkers50, "the Oscars of management thinking," has recognised him as the #1 thought leader in coaching. He was also the first-ever Canadian Coach of the Year. Despite his phenomenal successes, Michael is not afraid to poke fun at himself or to share his stumbles, believing that these are what make us human. We all screw up. He frequently talks about how he knocked himself unconscious as a labourer by hitting himself on the head with a shovel and about the time he was sued by one of his Law School lecturers for defamation. In this exclusive interaction with Human Capital, the global coaching guru shares unique insights into how advice-giving can be counterproductive, why we must stay curious longer, and how leaders can become more coach-like.*

BY ANKITA SHARMA

Q We must begin on a congratulatory note with well-merited kudos to you on your new book *The Advice Trap*, which is a follow-up to your Wall Street Journal bestseller *The Coaching Habit*. To the conventional mind, Your book's theme seems counterintuitive. It casts a critical eye on advice-giving. When could giving advice turn into a trap, and what are its hidden downsides?

A Thanks for the good wishes! There's actually nothing wrong with advice itself. In fact, the ongoing transmission of knowledge is one thing that allows community and civilisation to evolve, so I'm definitely **not** against advice. What I'm wary of is the Advice Trap, which is when our first, instinctive response in most situations is to jump in with advice, opinions, ideas and suggestions. That's when things go off the rails.

There are three ways leaping into advice-giving gets you into trouble:

i. You are trying to solve the wrong problem



It's a rookie mistake to think that the first thing put on the table is the real issue. It very rarely is. But if you start solving that, you're working hard to fix the wrong thing.

ii. Your advice isn't as good as you think it is

For the sake of argument, let's assume you're clear on the real challenge. You know *exactly* what the real issue is. The second way advice-giving goes wrong is overrating our own advice. We're wired with a number of cognitive biases that make us believe our advice is better than it actually is. If you doubt me, take a look at all the advice you are given on a regular basis and how not-quite-right it is. Well, that's how people feel about your advice.

iii. Poor leadership

Again, for the sake of argument, let's say you both know the problem and you have a fabulous solution. The third trap with advice-giving is that it might not be the right leadership act. Enabling someone else to figure out a solution is an empowering act. They become more confident, competent, and autonomous. And even if their idea isn't quite as good as yours, you're probably winning a bigger prize with that outcome.

Rapid Fire

- **Favourite quote:** *Curiosity is insubordination in its purest form.* - Nabakov
- **Complete these sentences:**
Life is... not to be half-lived.
I strongly believe that... we are here to serve.
- **What comes to your mind when you hear these words?**
Resilience: Remembering to keep breathing
Curiosity: The humility to not know
Inclusion: Muhammad Ali's short and brilliant poem: Me. We

“Staying curious a little bit longer empowers others and lifts a burden from your shoulder.”

Q Your book is enlivened throughout by the metaphor of the “Advice Monster.” What is the Advice Monster? Also, can you share the distinct personas it takes on?

A The Advice Monster is an embodiment of that desire we have to leap in and “add value” by offering a solution.

We all have an Advice Monster. It has three different personas. Each persona reflects a different way to manage anxiety, and while it can cause some short term relief, it wears you down over the long term.

“Tell-It” is motivated by making sure you have all the answers to all the problems. This is how you add value. Trying to have all the answers is exhausting and impossible.

“Save-It” is motivated by rescuing everyone. According to Save-It, your job is to ensure no one ever stumbles, struggles or fails. You need to leap and save the day. Trying to save everyone is exhausting and impossible.

“Control-It” is motivating by never letting go of control. You're holding on to everything for dear life because if you give up control, who knows what chaos will ensue? Trying to control everything is exhausting and impossible.

Q How, then, can we break out from the hold of our inner advice monster?

A It's simple but difficult. It's about staying curious a little bit longer, not just for the sake of being curious, but for seeing what happens when you don't provide the answer, when you don't rescue the person or when you don't

control everything. You'll be anxious that disaster will strike. But what you'll find is that staying curious a little bit longer empowers others and lifts a burden from your shoulder.

Up-Close and Personal

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

A Most obviously, I'm travelling less. But the big picture is that I'm in a fallow period right now, dreaming of what my next big projects will be. So the pandemic has ensured I've spent the time wisely, rather than frittering it away.

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

A That America is currently a broken country.

Q What would we be surprised to learn about you?

A I finished Law School being sued for defamation by one of my professors.

“If, as a leader, you reframe your role as being the person who ensures we're working on the real problem, not the person who comes up with the fast (and often wrong) answers, your value to all around you increases immeasurably.”

Q In today's uncertain business environment, where teams have to face new and unexpected challenges as a result of COVID-19, the case



for being a coach-like leader is stronger than ever. However, one of the things leaders might be thinking about right now is, “How do I fit coaching into an already busy schedule?” Your book has a startling thought: *Coaching is no longer an event. It is a way of being with each other.* Could you elaborate on this?

A Behind the question, “How do I fit it in?” is a more disruptive thought: Why would I bother?

Let’s start by defining coaching. Stay curious a little longer, and rush to action and advice-giving a little more slowly. It’s a practical, behaviour-based definition. And let’s call it “being more coach-like” rather than coaching because we’re not trying to turn leaders into coaches but to have them add coaching to their leadership repertoire.

Next, realise that it’s not about fitting it in or adding it to your schedule. Your schedule is already full, and there’s no chance of this feeling important and urgent enough to change what’s already there. So think instead of being more coach-like – staying curious longer – in everything that you already do. Now,

coaching is becoming an everyday behaviour, rather than an occasional, formal interaction.

And then understand the goal of being more coach-like is not only to help your organisation and the people that you lead but to help you as well. If you support people to become more competent, confident and self-sufficient, and if you help them to be focused on solving the real problems, then you’ll end up working less hard but having more impact.

“Coaching is becoming an everyday behaviour, rather than an occasional, formal interaction.”

Q What are some of the powerful questions that could help leaders transform from being advice-driven to becoming curiosity-led?

A In my book *The Coaching Habit*, I share seven questions that I think are the “primary colours” of questioning. Here they are:

- (1) The Kick Start Question: *What’s on your mind?*
- (2) The AWE Question: *And what else?*
- (3) The Focus Question: *What is the real challenge here for you?*
- (4) The Foundation Question: *What do you want?*
- (5) The Lazy Question: *How can I help?*
- (6) The Strategic Question: *If you are saying yes to this, what are you saying no to?*
- (7) The Learning Question: *What was most useful for you?*

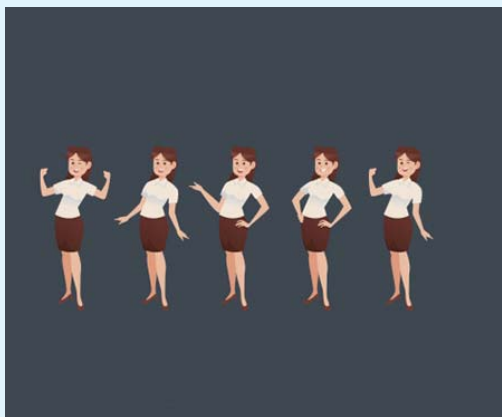
With these seven questions, you’ll go far.

The question I delved deeply into in *The Advice Trap* is The Focus Question: *What’s the real challenge here for you?* If, as a leader, you reframe your role as being the person who ensures we’re working on the real problem, not the person who comes up with the fast (and often wrong) answers, your value to all around you increases immeasurably. **HC**

To know more about Michael, visit www.mbs.works

Tata Starbucks Opens All-Women Employee Stores In India

BY ANUSHRUTI SINGH



Tata Starbucks Private Limited has opened two new stores in India operated entirely by women, with the number of all female led stores to double by the end of 2020.

The first store is located in Delhi at Shivaji Stadium, while the second, Commerz II, Mumbai, is located along the Western Express Highway in Goregaon.

The stores reaffirm company's ongoing commitment to promoting an inclusive and diverse workforce by empowering women leaders.

Both stores are managed by female employees, and will deliver a premium Starbucks Experience that celebrates connections through coffee - a key pillar of Tata Starbucks business strategy.

"Tata Starbucks remains focused on creating and strengthening opportunities for women and fostering diversity across our organization," said Navin Gurnaney, CEO, Tata Starbucks Private Limited.

"We are proud to open these all-women stores that will increase our commitment to diversity and inclusion in India and empower our female partners in new and meaningful ways." 

Zomato Introduces Period Leave For Women & Transgender Employees

BY ANUSHRUTI SINGH

India's largest food-delivery companies, Zomato has announced new paid period leave policy for women and transgender employees.

The policy allows up to 10 days of period leave a year. The company's CEO Deepinder Goyal said that the move is to "foster a culture of trust, truth and acceptance".

"There shouldn't be any shame or stigma attached to applying for a period leave. You should feel free to tell people on internal groups, or emails that you are on your period leave for the day."

"A note for men - our female colleagues expressing that they are on their period leave shouldn't be uncomfortable for us. This is a part of life, and while we don't fully understand what women go through, we need to trust them when they say they need to rest this out. I know that menstrual cramps are very painful for a lot of women - and we have to support them through it if we want to build a truly collaborative culture at Zomato," Goyal added. 



OYO Announces Employee Wellbeing & Work-Life-Balance Initiatives

BY ANUSHRUTI SINGH

In a bid to foster growth, happiness and holistic development of employees, OYO has launched several well-being and work-life balance related initiatives.

The company has announced that all employees across teams will have a 5-day work week starting August 2020. There will be no scheduling of work calls and meetings, or sending emails or Slack messages on weekends and holidays, ensuring complete 'weekend curfew', unless it's an emergency.

Taking a step towards wellbeing of employees OYO has partnered with Cure.fit to offer its 12 month-membership at specially negotiated rates, where OYO will bear 50% of the fee.

OYO has also rolled out Data Science Academy & Young Turks programme.

Employees in India will continue to follow the 'Hybrid Workplace model', which gives them the flexibility of 'working from anywhere'. 



Pondering Ways To Generate Value



Success in the marketplace demands, insights and innovations in HR outcomes of talent, leadership and organisation that deliver value to employees, customers, investors and communities.

BY NAGARAJ NAYAK

These are times when organisations, particularly the start-ups, are left pondering on the ways of generating maximum value from the 'People Function'. Most start-ups are clueless over how their "People Function" can bring value. Most are looking at the administrative part of crisis management - communication, providing assurance, engaging employees, mental health, work from home practices and so on.

Large companies have the resources and the required specialisation to derive the way over their recovery. On the other hand, small and mid-sized companies are confronted with the

burning issue of cash flow. If such a company faces a cash problem, the depth of that problem will determine the way the HR teams are being used since HR strategies must be woven around the available cash.

Companies with less than 6 months leeway

If the runway available is less than 6 months, it will be required to take certain tough decisions. The intensity is really high, and if the HR is not up to the mark, the CEO or the Founder needs to introspect upon the given situation. The Founder needs to drive the HR function to run the following smoothly:-

“Most start-ups are clueless over how their ‘People Function’ can bring value. Most are looking at the administrative part of crisis management- communication, providing assurance, engaging employees, mental health, work from home practices and so on.”

- Shaping the people's minds to be frugal and bringing a sense to the cost. HR needs to be in the driver's seat in convincing the top management to take pay cuts (as they are the heaviest paid). Also, it would be a good idea to bring employees together to brainstorm on what needs to be done and allowing every employee to decide their take-home salary and designing a reduced pay cut basis their inputs.
- During this period, it is essential to maintain sustained communication with all the employees. The communication must be so that it reassures those who need to be reassured, leaving no room for confusion.
- It is absolutely necessary to ensure exits are done in as humane a manner as possible, since exits are inevitable. But it is also important to identify those positions without whom the company cannot scale. HR needs to ponder: How do you handle/ manage them? Can such employees be retained as consultants? Can their expertise be shared with other known companies, affected in a similar way? Can they be a part of a collaboration with another company?

Companies that can sustain for 12 to 18 months

If the company can sustain for 12 to 18 months, it is a great opportunity to test the mettle of the HR function. This is the best the HR team could hope for. The market is low, there are no jobs outside, and people will not be twisting arms with the threat to exit.

While companies will always be mulling on the ways to increase the revenue, the HR is required to be in the driver's seat:-

- To bring the leadership team together - to solicit ideas, to open their minds to experiment, to generate new leads, new products, to instil a sense of urgency, to drive the leaders to think long-term, to forecast on how the landscape will change and so on
- To revisit the culture as a founder since this is the best opportunity. The

HR should shape and get the culture of the company back on track. The practices which were needed, but were put on hold, must be implemented. It would be futile to have a culture based on values unless they are creating value for the customers and investors. HR needs to instil the mindset of a value boundary. The focus then is not tied to work from home or office, but to the value created for customers.

- Performance development needs to be tightened and people must be held accountable. While the dollar maybe stretched, it needs to be invested on grooming the people. This is also the best time to reassign non-performance in a humane way.
- Implement succession structures, re-skill and upskill. One of the focus areas of the board or investors will be towards succession planning, as leaders get sick and replacements are needed quickly across operations. Succession planning will go much deeper than the C-suite. 'Identify, coach & groom your deputies' will be part of the regular drill. HR must get these practices to stick, making for better management and more flexible workforces.
- Building relationships with other companies, to collaborate, to take advantage of when the market opens up.

Companies with a leeway of 18 to 24 months

A leeway of 18 to 24 months leaves sufficient amount of breathing space for a company. However, sticking the HR to administrative or support roles would be tantamount to wasting a crisis.

The competitors are facing difficult times and such situations help them to learn a lot more than what is available to you. They have learnt to manage frugally, how to stretch the dollar, how to experiment, how to negotiate with the clients and the vendors. They have experimented, innovated and built relationships because the crisis forced them to think in ways which can never

“Organisations need to pay greater attention to customised services, to unique customer requirements and personalise work, to fit the needs of individual employees. Work from Home has just proved that “one size fits all” approach is far and few.”

confront on a normal day. They become capable and when the market opens, they are hungry and able.

You are denied of the experience of what your competitors have learnt in this crisis, as you have the funds, a longer leeway in place and that makes your team complacent. If we assume that the market opens up in 2 years, you are merely tiding over.

By identifying and gaining knowledge, one needs to drive the HR function to generate value -

- The need of the hour is to be radical, transformatory, be a visionary over the ways of shaping the market of the future. One must question the validity of setting up the organisation. The external threat must be used as an opportunity to build a strong culture. And it is HR that must enable the leader to pivot the company.
- Today, only a few companies are selling in the market today (besides essentials & enablers), and hence it is farcical to carry out a Performance Management exercise. Kill that exercise and push your HR to focus on what matters most to the company, for the future - rewarding innovations, risk taking behaviours, and out of the box thinking. Innovation must be an essential part of the organisational growth model and future success—not a vague hope, fall-back option, or a happy accident.
- Focusing on business continuity will lead to failed investments in innovation until the path forward is clear. It may also be short-sighted to play it safe in this situation. The core capabilities that made the organisation distinctive may suddenly be less differentiating, as businesses adapt to new market realities. The past crises may show that innovation-led growth is long-lasting.
- HR should be working on opening the minds of the leaders - pushing them to identify those problems the company had in the pre-COVID-19 times. And HR should push your leaders to fix those. Organisations need to pay greater attention to customised services, to unique customer requirements and personalise

work, to fit needs of individual employees. Work from Home has just proved that “one size fits all” approach is far and few.

- One must make the organisation ready to scale exponentially – This may be the right time to go in for automation or get hold of a customer management software since it is possible to negotiate a better deal.
- HR needs to focus on systems, processes and people. People must be trained with the relevant skills and the inline systems must be made ready for scale. While the competitors might have built a relation, and learnt their lessons to keep things lean, one needs to be agile and be better-positioned to scale quickly. The ability to develop, deliver, and scale new products, services, processes, and business models rapidly will determine the future.

The one thing expected from a Leader is to present the employees with an organisation that succeeds in the marketplace. Without that success in the marketplace, there is no workplace. Success in the marketplace demands, insights and innovations in HR outcomes of talent, leadership and organisation that deliver value to employees, customers, investors and communities. 

About the Author

Nagaraj Nayak comes with 20+ years of experience in agile & high growth start-ups. He has experience as a Board Director, Delivery Head, Customer connect. In the last 5 years, Nagaraj has been an advisor to numerous young entrepreneurs and start-ups. Nagaraj's write-ups also have been published in the amazon Top Seller book, “Bounce back now”.

Appointments



CBRE Appoints Parimal Galvankar As HR Head For India

CBRE South Asia Pvt. Ltd. has appointed Parimal Galvankar as the Head of People (HR) for India. With more than 22 years of experience spanning across geographies and cultures, Galvankar has extensive domain knowledge, strong focus on client outcomes and broad operational experience to his new role.



HT Media Appoints Paras Kaushik As CHRO

HT Media has appointed Paras Kaushik as the Chief Human Resource Officer (CHRO). He has more than 18 years of experience in the industry. Most recently, Kaushik was the Head of Group Human Resources of Samvardhan Motherson Group. He has pursued his bachelor's from Himachal Pradesh University and Master's in HR from Symbiosis International University



Pine Labs Appoints Gayatri Rath As Chief Marketing & Communications Officer

Pine Labs has appointed Gayatri Rath as Chief Marketing & Communications Officer. Over her 25 years of professional experience, Gayatri has helped 20+ global and regional brands grow in South Asia. Between 2013 and 2018 she led storytelling at Microsoft in India and was part of the Microsoft India leadership team. Before this, she led Communications at GE Capital India and worked at Oracle.



Major League Baseball (MLB) Appoints Michele Meyer-Shipp As Chief People & Culture Officer

Major League Baseball (MLB) has appointed Michele Meyer-Shipp as its new Chief People and Culture Officer. She is responsible for all the human resources activities, including talent processes and programs, workplace culture, and diversity and inclusion. Prior to joining MLB, Meyer-Shipp served as the Chief Diversity Officer at accounting firm KPMG. She was also associated with Prudential Financial and law firm Akin Gump Strauss Hauer and Feld.



MongoDB Appoints Harsha Jalihal As Chief People Officer

MongoDB, Inc. has appointed Harsha Jalihal as Chief People Officer (CPO). She has more than two decades of experience. Most recently, Jalihal was Vice President of HR at Unilever and was responsible for delivering the end-to-end HR strategy and operations for the US business. She co-created Unilever's strategy to build a sustainable future of work across its multinational business in partnership with the Global CHRO.



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