

HumanCapital

REALISING BUSINESS STRATEGY THROUGH PEOPLE

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EMPLOYEE WELLNESS

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From The Publisher's Desk



Sushant Singh Rajput's untimely death has jolted the entire nation and has opened a Pandora's box on the issue of nepotism in the entertainment industry. It is indeed ironic that this has come about when the country is already reeling under massive disruptions owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the entertainment industry in particular has been left high and dry owing to issues such as closed theatres and production work being halted mid-way. This has also brought into focus issues such as financial upheavals, job losses and working within the limited confines of one's home leading to depression, domestic abuse, and in the worst-case scenario, suicidal tendencies.

Human Capital, in its July edition, has therefore come about with the crucial issue of "Employee Wellness". A Gartner

study, which has revealed that 68% of organisations have brought in at least one wellness initiative by March 2020 truly comes about as heartening. With unlock being underway, offices preparing to open up, not only need to adhere to social distancing protocols to ensure physical safety, also need to pay heed to the employees' mental health. Vikas Dua writes that HR professionals must act as mentors, counsellors and guides until the world invents a vaccine for COVID-19. Amarpreet Bhamra writes that even though employee wellness has emerged as one of the important parameters for an organisation, they had thus far ignored the fact that wellness has a direct impact on productivity.

In an exclusive conversation with Human Capital, Dr. Steven Rogelberg, Chancellor's Professor, University of North Carolina Charlotte, reveals how science can help fix bad meetings. Backed with evidence, Dr. Steven provides tips on effective management of inclusive meetings and practical advice on how leaders and HR professionals are positioned to ensure success in meetings. In an interview with Human Capital, Paul Gibbons, best selling author and speaker, speaks about change agility, digital transformation, behavioural science, and the fascinating surprises that the pandemic has uncovered.

Persona features Rahul Goyal, Managing Director and General Manager, ADP India & South East Asia. Rahul is a proponent of the outside-in approach to business and enjoys working on ambitious greenfield projects. He strongly believes in making things happen rather than waiting for them to happen. Case Study presents the ignominious predicament confronting today's professionals from various sectors in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Carpe Diem!

Neha Jain

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

Technology At Work: New Challenges

Managers looking for a quick-fix that reduces the need for human employees are indulging in wishful thinking. And HR managers should point this out at every opportunity.

BY GAUTAM BRAHMA

During the ongoing pandemic, it has been reported in the media that companies will extensively switch to work-from-home solutions and computer-based operations using AI, to counter the risks of infection to employees and the expense of social distancing at work. While working from home has its own limitations, discussed earlier in this column, machine-learning based AI, the most common variety, poses even bigger challenges.

A couple of years ago, an autonomous Uber car controlled by Artificial Intelligence (AI), ran over and killed a lady walking across a poorly-lit road with a bicycle loaded with plastic bags. The following detail is important. The car identified the combination of lady-bicycle-bags as an unknown object, because this combination had not been presented to the AI software when it was 'trained' with images and videos of what it might encounter on the roads. It did not know how to react. On coming closer, it recognised the bicycle. It had been trained to expect a bicycle to move out of the way at a certain speed so it slowed down to avoid the collision. It had not been trained to deal with a bicycle that was being pulled along by a walking human being, so this speed reduction proved to be insufficient. Just before the collision, the car identified the human being behind the pile of bags. By then, it was too late.

Common AI software, of the machine learning sort, is 'trained' by presenting it with patterns of inputs that it is expected to handle, with classifications or labels, so that in the future, when working autonomously, it can recognise similar patterns and act appropriately. Depending on the intended application, these training inputs could consist of the winning and losing positions of pieces on a chessboard, X-Ray images of lungs of healthy and unhealthy people, or resumes of suitable and unsuitable candidates for a vacancy. In other words, the quality of the software depends entirely on the quantity, variety, and the labelling of the training inputs. Once trained, it can work round the clock at great speed, and not make any mistakes induced by fatigue or inattention.

When human beings compile training inputs for AI, they go by the records of past situations and how they were handled. This way they transfer their biases without necessarily meaning to do so. For instance, in the case of resumes being sifted to predict success at work, the AI engine will throw up male candidates from certain regions and linguistic groups, if only such people have been doing well in the past in that organisation. The best of female candidates will be ranked lower because their resumes do not match the current templates of success in the company. The only way this can be corrected is by providing constructed hypothetical resumes of 'successful' candidates drawn from other groups not currently present in the company. This immediately raises the complexity and the cost of the training phase.

“When human beings compile training inputs for AI, they go by the records of past situations and how they were handled. This way they transfer their biases without necessarily meaning to do so.”



The current pandemic has exposed another weakness of machine-learning based AI, trained on inputs drawn from routine everyday work. For instance, in the US, there was an abnormally high volume of demand for certain products like toilet-paper rolls, hand sanitizers, masks etc. The AI systems did not know what to do with them, and either flagged them as errors or ended up disrupting the predictive inventory management system. Human beings had to intervene to set matters right. Indian companies have been adopting AI in some business operations and are facing similar challenges. A supplier of sauces and condiments faced similar problems here while handling the demand surge at the start of the pandemic.

Yet another challenge comes from unintended inclusion of items in the training inputs. An AI system trained to recognise cancerous lesions in lung X-Ray images was found to behave erratically, 'clearing' obviously ill patients. On analysis, it was found that in the XRay scans used to train it, most of the images of cancerous lungs had come from a particular hospital whose XRay machine placed a mark in the corner, identifying the company that had made the scanner. The AI software had learnt to associate that mark with cancerous lungs. If this mark was absent, the image was classified as one from a healthy lung.

Adopting AI requires skilled and expensive workforce and large and expensive computing resources. That in itself is a deterrent to adoption. Now that other limitations are getting exposed, the corrections will require additional effort and expense. As the abnormal consumer behaviour during the pandemic has shown, no amount of training can truly ensure that the AI software will respond appropriately to unusual situations, like when a person buying one bottle of sanitizer every month suddenly places an order for twenty bottles.

The dependence on complex technology solutions also increases risks of disruptions from malicious hackers in many ways. One very popular route is through ransomware which denies access to the organisation's computing resources unless an amount of money is paid to the attackers. This has significant costs as even a casual survey of literature on past attacks will confirm. Also, the costs made public are just the tip of the iceberg. Most companies try to play down the impact of data theft and the amount of money paid to ransomware attackers. This is done to prevent loss of confidence in their consumers and investors. In just a three-day period during the end of June, NHA1 was hit by ransomware in India as was the University of California in the US. It is not known what the attack cost NHA1, but the university ended up paying more than a million dollars to free its computers.

“HR managers should point out at every opportunity that there is no getting away from right hiring, fair compensation, regular training, and thoughtful care for building a community of engaged and productive employees.”

Since AI solutions involve significant expense, companies will draw the attention of hackers who will make AI deployment a basis for estimating the capacity to pay a ransom. Preventing such attacks comes at a cost because it involves hiring skilled staff and signing up support with expensive service providers. With a larger-than-before share of employees working

from home, where their systems are physically accessible to others and where the Wi-Fi environment may not be as secure as inside a company premises, the challenge of malware prevention multiplies manifold.

Does this mean that technology deployment will pause during or after the pandemic? Certainly not. It does mean though that managers looking for a quick-fix that reduces the need for human employees are indulging in wishful thinking. HR managers should point this out at every opportunity. There is no getting away from right hiring, fair compensation, regular training, and thoughtful care for building a community of engaged and productive employees. 

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EMPLOYEE WELLNESS

The Need To Gear Up

Until the world of medicine can provide the protective shield in the form of a vaccine against COVID-19, HR professionals must don the hat of mentors, counsellors, guides, all rolled into one.

BY VIKAS DUA



The motley group stays confined within the walls of the house. Tasks are shared amongst the constituents, almost in an un-documented but predefined manner, based on each individual's age, gender, predilections, authority and other factors. There are windows to look out at the sparse streets and screens to look at and interact with other solitary souls.

No, this is not an upgraded version of the popular television show, Big Brother (or Big Boss, as it is titled here in India). This is just a screengrab from the life of an urban professional, who could be in any one of the cities across the globe today. Any resemblance to the aforementioned television show is purely coincidental. Only this time, there is no booming voice emerging out of the woodworks, outlining the next task or issuing punishment orders! And of course, it does bear mentioning that thankfully, it is not a group of random strangers handpicked and airdropped into the house, but family members.

“With no vaccine available currently, avoidance of the infection is the only weapon that humanity has to safeguard itself. This has led to the guidance and adherence to ‘social distancing’ from others.”

The COVID-19 pandemic has indeed ushered in unprecedented changes in the way we are supposed to conduct ourselves,



in the interest of safety. With no vaccine available currently, avoidance of the infection is the only weapon that humanity has to safeguard itself. This has led to the guidance and adherence to ‘social distancing’ from others. In effect, this has led to the germination of these mini, imitation ‘Big Brother houses’.

The fact is that since 1999, when this Dutch reality television show was launched, it has sprouted 448 seasons across 54 countries! In the interim 20 years, many psychologists and psychiatrists have studied the inmates, more granularly than the armchair viewers watching them in a voyeuristic manner. Unsurprisingly, research over the years has shown that the inmates in the ‘Big Brother house’ face many adverse physiological and psychological effects, including increased emotional sensitivity and dysphoria (a mood or state of uneasiness or discontentment) on account of being in the isolated confines of the house. Millions of working professionals who today are confined to their homes, with the requirement to adhere to social distancing under the




PRIYA VASUDEVAN

President- Human Resources,
Liberty General Insurance Limited

“At the workplace, employees experience multiple emotions - achievement, satisfaction, joy, envy, fear, anxiety, sadness, guilt. This cannot be controlled or modified easily, however, how these emotions drive the employee and cause cascading effects in the organisation can be changed. Mindfulness practice is gaining ground as an approach that connects people to their core self, allowing them to observe self from a neutral position - thus deepening awareness and bringing about conscious choices. These positive choices impact the larger ecosystem, thus leading to wholistic wellness.”

‘lockdown’ guidelines, are unknowingly, in a similar state. A state in which their wellness stands severely compromised.

The Global Wellness Institute defines wellness as the active pursuit of activities, choices, and lifestyles that lead to a state of holistic health. Now, one can argue that the onus of ensuring one’s well-being should lie on the individual himself or herself. However, in the world of business, this could be one of the most fatal mistakes that an organisation’s leader could make. After all, the success of an organisation is, more often than not, directly dependent on the quality of its people.

HR leaders across the globe, therefore, are facing a unique predicament. While employee engagement has always been a vital part of their job roles, addressing the well-being needs of their staff has become an equal, if not more, critical responsibility. This is compounded by the fact that a large number of their workforce is not even in the workplace.

In the words of Dr Aastha Sachdeva, Counselling Psychologist and Founder, CounSoul, “The biggest fear being faced by the employees in these unprecedented times is the fear of uncertainty and the fear of the unknown. Physical absence from the workplace not only creates a sense of social isolation, but heightened feelings of insecurity about their personal and professional lives, both, in the present and the future.”

This requires HR practitioners to build a fresh approach to address employee well-being across every dimension of wellness - physical, emotional, environmental, financial, intellectual, occupational, physical, social, and spiritual.

So, below mentioned are the primers to kick off on some levers


SAHIBA SINGH

Chief People Officer, Acuver
Consulting

“As businesses contend with the after effects of this pandemic, it is of utmost importance that companies step up to take employee wellness as their first approach; the role of Human Resource becomes broader in keeping the employees, and their passion and motivation high. The line between work and life is blurring, businesses will have to consistently and empathetically understand each of their employees’ state of mind at multiple levels. They should hence focus on providing a robust suite of wellness program that will include flexible work arrangements, yoga practice sessions for mindfulness, motivational webinars with thought leaders from diverse backgrounds etc. so that the employees log out happy and log in happier.”

**AKASH SANGOLE**

Head-Human Resource and General Administration, Panasonic Life Solutions India Pvt. Ltd.

“Wellness is not just a word but a state of different dimensions like occupational, emotional, spiritual, environmental, financial, physical, social, and intellectual. I firmly believe that employee wellness propels performance. Maintaining personal connect with employees, paying them on-time, no pay-cuts, and job security in these unprecedented situations like COVID-19, provide a major boost to employee morale. Focus on programs such as Yoga, ergonomics promotes a healthy lifestyle in difficult situations. I think that employees should invest their time in passions of interest, self-developmental and extracurricular activities which would largely keep them engaged and motivated. Wellness promotes happiness, which keeps people in best of their health.”

that HR practitioners need to focus on -

1. Driving Remote Productivity:

For a culture that is largely based on the ‘boss-subordinate’ relationship, physical proximity has been an integral part of our environment. For the longest time, only a negligible percentage of employees were permitted to work outside of the office premises. Consequently, operational approaches and performance monitoring processes have always been centred around the largely in-house office workers. Engagement has been measured by the daily ‘attendance’ in the office and efficiency has been measured by the shift duty ‘clock’. The revised

approach in line with the ‘new normal’ will be to design systems that reward productivity, innovation, task completion and customer satisfaction.

“The revised approach in line with the ‘new normal’ will be to design systems that reward productivity, innovation, task completion and customer satisfaction.”

2. Enabling Stress

Management: Today, ‘stress’ has become almost synonymous with corporate life. This is caused by diverse dimensions ranging from the daily commute the professional has had to undertake to his or her workplace, to the competition one has to face during the upward ascent to the corner office. With the economy getting disrupted extensively as a fall out of the pandemic, organisations have sped up their re-organisation efforts, amongst which job cuts have not been left behind. This has, in turn, led to insecurity amongst professionals, many of whom have already been facing the disruption of job roles by technology in the digital world. By summoning up all the empathy within themselves, HR leaders will need to assist their colleagues to reduce their stress levels, something that can be debilitating if left unchecked.

3. Encouraging Physical

Activity: In recent years, leaders have encouraged employees to focus on their health. Off-sites involving some amount of physical activities designed to increase collaboration and build teamwork have been very common. To convert this from a sporadic activity to an ongoing lifestyle approach, some organisations have even integrated distribution of fitness trackers into

their wellness programmes and created a competitive environment based on hitting the minimum recommended daily target of 10,000 steps. With our homesteads in our urban centres being constrained in terms of the physical footprint for many forms of exercise, employees will have to be guided with innovating and following practices like Yoga and Pilates, which can be practised even in relatively smaller spaces.

4. Assisting Coping with

Social Isolation: Our workplaces are usually a humdrum of activity with interactions and conversations which tend to transcend the professional space and enter into the personal space as well. It is an

**SURENDER JEET RAJ**

Senior Vice President - HR Operations, Newgen Software.

“An organisation’s wellness and prosperity are directly proportional to the wellbeing of its employees. The challenging scenario of modern times has created an overwhelming need for employee wellbeing - both physical as well as mental. When it comes to wellbeing, we often think about how to support the individual: five years ago, wellbeing was about fresh fruits and yoga classes, and being physically fit. Now we have fortunately evolved beyond that to counselling and mental health services. To improve the productivity of employees and to retain them, employee wellbeing should be the pivot of every organisation. An employee having a positive emotional state of mind forms the basis of a healthy and wealthy organisation, especially in today’s day and age.”

aspect that many amongst us revel, unless of course, this has happened in bad faith or an unethical manner. In the current scenario, social isolation has been forced, for the most part. Colleagues who were used to some light banter, junior team members who were used to some guidance from their supervisors and many others, have suddenly found themselves impaired. Replicating the social aspect of the workplace is probably the most difficult to do. However, by strategically building in casual interaction sessions with colleagues or training sessions by experts over video conferencing, HR teams can ensure that employees get some breaks in between their work schedules.

5. Guiding with Technology taming: One of the fallouts of



RITU KOCHHAR

Head-Human Resources, Perfetti Van Melle, India

“Building strategies to nurture physical and mental wellbeing of employees is key to creating a differentiating experience leading to superior business results. With employees working remotely during extended lockdowns and stricter social distancing guidelines, protecting their wellbeing - both physical and emotional - has become more important than before. In the given circumstances, it is imperative to bring constant and transparent communication to the fore not only to ensure seamless execution of the work but to also support employees' mental health. Lastly, ensuring open channels of communication to hear how employees are feeling will help build resilience to tide the time together!”

remote environments is that not only is the screen an interface for official work, it is also the go-between your friends, family and entertainment. Consequently, this has led to a dramatic rise in the 'screen time' that individuals are exposing themselves to in the current period. As per a survey done by Ericsson, for an average Indian, this has increased by almost 2 hours daily post the initiation of the lockdown in India. Moving a step beyond 'Work-life balance', HR professionals will need to think creatively to encourage employees to bring in the 'Screen & Off-Screen' balance. Promoting podcasts, reading or even the humble, voice call, can be some of the suggested mechanisms to this end.

Thankfully, while the basic tenets of wellness can be traced back to ancient civilizations in India, China, Greece and Rome, the study has been expanded greatly in the 19th century across the globe, and we have reached this heightened level of understanding of the subject today.

The tentacles of technology have also not spared this domain. According to the U.S. headquartered Limeade, that has developed a proprietary technology platform for enhancing employee well-being and employee engagement, when employees see their organisations care for them, multiple benefits accrue, such that employees are -

- 10 times more likely to recommend their company as a great place to work
- 4 times less likely to suffer from stress and burnout
- 2 times more likely to be engaged with the organisation and their work

Dr. Sachdeva, therefore, further guides, “At this time HR professionals need to play the role of change makers by supporting their community of people, keeping in touch with them, answering

their queries while giving hope to them for a positive future. An organisational framework with access to counselling services and employee assistance programs needs to be developed in every workplace as a policy to ensure that we enter the post COVID era with a resilient workforce.”

Given this guidance, it is easy to absorb that there are multiple advantages of driving an active wellness programme, especially at a time like this. It is expected that HR professionals will seek to further the wellness agenda in their organisations with enthusiasm. Beyond the financial benefits that a healthy and motivated workforce provides, such efforts would also be a catalyst in ensuring that our society remains stable and strong. Till the time that the world of medicine is able to provide the protective shield in the form of a much needed vaccine against this invisible enemy, our HR professionals must don the hat of mentors, counsellors, guides, all rolled into one. This will be their single most valuable contribution in the war against the coronavirus.



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Switching The Wellness Gears

The need to adopt wellness and care for employees' well-being is now on a war footing by a majority of the enterprises. That ROIs in employee wellness programmes have a direct impact on productivity has seldom been acknowledged in the past.

BY AMARPREET BHAMRA

My memory flashes back to the eighties when I would hear my father (a radiologist) occasionally sharing stories with us on certain individuals failing the health test. In those days, public enterprises like SAIL (Steel Authority of India Limited) mandated a health check-up for any new hire in their own hospitals. If the new hires failed the test, they would stand to forfeit their offer letter. The rationale was simple – a healthy workforce would be more productive and also lower the healthcare costs incurred by the enterprise.

Over the years, enterprises have oscillated in their focus on the health and wellness of employees

and have largely been centred on reducing cost, increasing market share, and reaping profits. Now that we are in the midst of a severe, long-drawn and contagious pandemic, enterprises have woken up to switch on the spotlight on employee wellness programmes. Employees all across the globe are trying their best to cope up with the new realities of social distancing, remote work, managing household chores, and attending to the family including the children and the elderly.

Lessons from the past

However, it is interesting to note that wellness has its roots in history and is not a recent coinage.

The Ayurveda rooted in the Indian tradition focusses on nutritional, exercise, social interaction and hygiene needs to be combined with Yoga and meditation and dates back to 1500 BC, while the traditional Chinese Medicine in 2000 BC, influenced by Taoism and Buddhism, lays emphasis on a holistic perspective to achieving health and wellbeing by cultivating acupuncture, herbal medicine, and *qi gong*. The Greek physician, Hippocrates mentioned that disease is a product of diet, lifestyle, and environmental factors, while the ancient Romans developed a public health system to prevent the spreading of germs and maintain a healthy population.

In 1817, the Welsh social reformer, Robert Marcus Owen was the first to recommend an eight-hour workday, coining the phrase “eight hours labour, eight hours recreation, eight hours rest.”

Moving on, the physician Halbert L. Dunn presented his idea of “high level wellness” in the 1960s, and Dr. John Travis, influenced by Dunn, opened the world’s first wellness centre in California in the 1970s. He also published a wellness assessment tool - *The Wellness Inventory* (1975) and *The Wellness Workbook* (1977) which are in use today. Corporate wellness programmes have its origin in Henry Kaiser



NIHARIKA MOHAN

Head - Human Resources & CSR,
Luminous Power Technologies

“As the line between work and personal life blurs in the new normal, employee wellness programs have become a norm. Employers need to understand that wellness is not just about physical wellbeing, but needs to be holistic and include other elements of emotional, mental, and social wellbeing. Organizations can step up their wellness programmes through flexible work schedules to help prevent burnout, breaks for fitness and wellness activities, broadening medical cover to include counselling, therapy and stress management courses. Practicing Gratitude and giving back to the community brings in a sense of fulfilment and joy that is unmatched. The true success of these wellness programme will be measured by the positive impact it has on the health, happiness and productivity of the employees.”

who built a hospital for his construction employees in 1933, while the first Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs) were launched in the 1950s to combat the growing problems of alcoholism and mental illness.

Shortcomings in wellness initiatives

Even prior to the pandemic, many global enterprises invested and offered wellness programmes in conjunction with reputed wellness providers. While employees were absorbing these offerings there were noticeable shortcomings in the design and implementation of these programmes.

- Low and uninspiring communication on wellness programmes
- Limited offerings in the packages – E.g how to cope with anxiety or hypertension may not find a mention
- Missing culture to openly talk and address ailments related to stress, depression etc.
- Poor change management with HR functions busy with routine administrative tasks
- Budgetary pressures to accommodate wellness programmes
- Limited coverage on critical ailments affecting employees (according to MetLife research released in April 2020, 65% of workers say that they do not feel that their employer offers benefits or programmes that help support or improve their mental wellbeing)
- Low usage by employees for wellness programmes (E.g. significant reminders need to be sent to employees about enrolment in EAPs. As per 2019 data from the Society for Human Resource Management, only 10% of employees use EAPs)
- Non-availability of channels for employees to speak up about their wellness challenges



ANUSHREE SINGH

Country HR Director, India Sub-continent- AkzoNobel India

“Recognition of mental health issues and wellness is taking a front seat. Such challenging times have reinforced that mental wellbeing will assume an importance equal to personal safety. Besides employee's physical wellness, HR will have to play a significant role in addressing, creating awareness and providing support to the employees in terms of mental health issues. HR function needs to leverage employee assistance programs to enable employees to cope with stress, be resilient and embrace change. This cultural shift requires concerted efforts to advocate significance of such investments and its impact on employee productivity and morale.”

- Minuscule share for financial, nutritional and emotional offerings
- Absence of coaches and training programmes for managers to support employees on wellness

With the spread of the pandemic and substantial casualties, most of the enterprises have been compelled to hop on to the bandwagon of employee wellness programmes. Some of the underlying reasons include stress, work pressure, isolation, minimal social interactions, physical and behavioural disorders and low immunity. A CNN report mentioned that the Disaster Distress Helpline operated by the Federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration recorded a 338% increase in call volume in March

2020 as compared to February 2020. The World Health Organisation has estimated that depression and anxiety bled the global economy up to \$1 trillion in 2019. In their study in Gallup conducted in 2018 on 75000 full-time employees, Ben Wigert and Sangeeta Agrawal mentioned that 23% employees reported feeling burned out at work very often or always, while an additional 44% reported feeling burned out sometimes costing employer's money in lost productivity, low engagement, and increased errors.

To overcome these anomalies, enterprises have started talking about developing and strengthening resilience, demonstrating empathy, and

offering care to their employees. For instance,

- 53% of 256 employers surveyed by the National Alliance of Healthcare Purchaser Coalitions reported providing special emotional and mental health programmes for their workforce owing to the pandemic.
- Target has added online resources to help employees improve their wellbeing
- Starbucks rolled out therapy benefits for its workers in April 2020.
- Price Waterhouse Coopers has launched wellbeing coaching sessions where employees can reach out to a professional coach to discuss anything that may be causing them stress.

The Indian context

From an Indian context, there is an uptick in enterprises revisiting their wellness programmes and expanding the reach and variety of wellness offerings to the employees. Lijee Philip, in a report published in *The Economic Times* (April 3 2020), shares the example of Johnson & Johnson who have implemented a telemedicine programme to help employees and their families deal with concerns related to mental and physical health.

“With global supply chains broken and financial uncertainty looming, enterprises have a high stake in embracing employee wellness programmes and embed them with a strategic priority.”

With global supply chains broken and financial uncertainty looming, enterprises have a high stake in embracing employee



AMRIT JAIDKA ARORA

Head-Human Resource, Digit Insurance

“Employee Wellness in times of a pandemic is an important strategic decision that can help companies increase efficiency and productivity, especially in this existing global crisis. While technology can be acquired and ideas can be replicated, it's time for organisations to identify and look after its most important asset - the employees. Keeping employees happy and engaged is crucial. Along with the need to be physically fit, this is also the time to ensure that companies keep a check on the employees mental wellbeing, especially for those who are working remotely. So organizing regular connects with teams and managers, wellness workshops, having a counsellor or doctor available and building an atmosphere of empathy and trust, is what companies should look at to drive employee wellness.”

wellness programmes and embed them with a strategic priority. Leaders in enterprises need to take the big leap and talk more openly and frequently about employee wellness. They can change the workplace culture by including details on wellness in their presentations or annual reports which are shared with the employees and the shareholders. The analytics and the data on wellness which is currently low-key has to be brought in the forefront.

Stephanie Johnson from Tableau in a blog titled, *Measuring Employee Wellness during Covid-19 – What business Leaders need Know (April 2020)*, states that



SHOBHA TAHILRAMANI

Head HR, Siegwark India

“As we are settling and adapting to the newer ways of working, every aspect of our lives - health, families, careers, and finances have been impacted. Though physical wellbeing is easier to address, the invisible emotional imbalance can harm the workforce in multiple ways, hence, addressing it appropriately is necessary. This is more pertinent in the current time when uncertainty is looming large around us. Therefore, the employer has to be more empathetic towards the employees and support them appropriately to play a value creation role as they may face numerous unprecedented challenges going forward. The companies will have to seriously start initiating regular counselling sessions for employees to keep them emotionally fit along with their physical wellbeing.”

31% of companies are not using any data analytics to inform and drive corporate health and well-being strategy. She emphasises the importance of measuring basic biometric data, health habits (exercise, diet, sleep, weight, alcohol and tobacco use), absenteeism data, sentiment analysis and pulse survey data which will morph into robust wellness programmes. In the same blog, she cites a reference to



HARISH MAHADEVAN

Vice President, Human Resource, CredR

“As the economy now opens up and several companies are aiming to stay afloat and return to normalcy, there is a lot that needs to be done on the employee well-being front. Wellness is subjective to people and a company needs to make its measures very specific towards various employee cohorts. For instance, front line sales personnel have different anxiety triggers compared to work from home team members. It's also important to manage high performers as they may be inherently inclined towards results and may not be able to anticipate burnout levels of their team members and may end up creating pressure which can be counter-productive in these times. Conversations on empathy and sensitizing managers on the impact of their behaviour are extremely critical. Nobody is free in these demanding times. All are working for office or home, irrespective of gender. A simple practice such as setting up a time for conversations instead of labelling someone as unresponsive would help build positive culture and well-being.”

Prudential Financial which conducts Health Risk Assessments (HRA) together with employee engagement surveys, to improve healthcare offerings, point employees to existing resources, and create benchmarks for future follow-ups.

“Leaders in enterprises need to talk more openly and frequently about employee wellness. They can change the workplace culture by including details on wellness in their presentations shared with the employees and the shareholders.”

The offerings in wellness programmes could be broadened with inclusion of nutrition, sleep, personalised wellness etc. to make them attractive for the employees. Redesigning workplaces, conducting virtual workout sessions, building wellness apps, strengthening ventilation systems, monitoring air quality and air conditioning by establishing thresholds, developing ergonomics guidelines, onsite health clinics and advocating use of non-pollutant sanitation products would be the other essential components to usher in meaningful employee wellness programmes. Nicole Dunn in an article titled, *The Future of Workplace Wellness* in Forbes, states that the corporate wellness market alone is projected to be worth \$97.4 billion by 2027 growing at a compounding annual growth rate of 6.8%.

The need to adopt wellness and care for employees' well-being is now on a war footing by a majority of the enterprises. The masked fact that returns on investment in



R NANDA

Chief Human Resource Officer, Tata Chemicals

“In the current situation, a significant majority of the workforce tend to become stressed due to issues relating to either work or personal and family situations and compounded by the fear of the pandemic. It is, therefore, necessary for the organisations to prioritise employees' mental, as well as physical health, and to enable them to find solutions to address their issues and contribute to their well-being. Having a highly motivated and productive workforce is critical to business success in this competitive environment, where remote working becomes the new normal.”

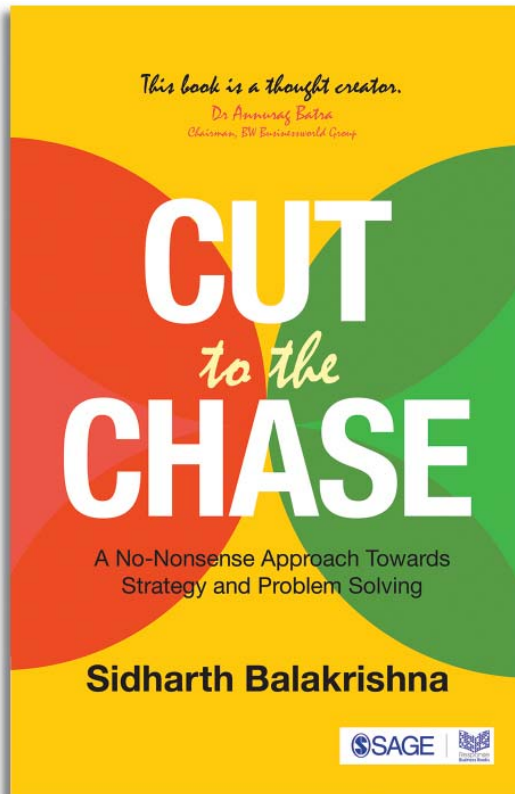
employee wellness programmes have direct impact on productivity and revenue has seldom been acknowledged in the past. The pandemic has woken up enterprises to reset their business priorities on their most valuable and strategic asset – employees and their wellness. **HC**

About the Author

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

Cutting The Chase!

BY SIDHARTH BALAKRISHNA



Do you ever wonder what Steve Jobs got right that Tata did not? Or, what can the corporate strategist learn from an illiterate man who sits in front of a temple? Or even, what do Artificial Intelligence practitioners and companies need to keep in mind while leading and marketing? How can Mahatma Gandhi and Donald Trump help you innovate? Why is true Strategy like going into battle, while Operational Excellence is like going on a diet? Why is it so important to separate problems from their symptoms? How can employees lead, ideate, and innovate? What are some effective ideation techniques?

If such questions often plague your mind, whether as an individual or a professional and if you are looking to reinvent, then **Cut To The Chase** is a stepping stone to your success! In this book, the author brings in new perspectives and approaches towards Strategy and problem solving, while also discussing techniques to help readers ideate and bring an entrepreneurial approach to their work and management. The book covers important aspects of devising successful strategies and implementing innovation through novel concepts and approaches, including through human resources. It stresses on a practical approach based on the author's learnings from heading Corporate Strategy at large Indian conglomerates such as the Vedanta and the Essel (Zee) Groups. He outlines how structured problem solving can help both established firms as well as start-ups. He provides unique perspectives on how senior executives can learn from historical characters such as Birbal, as well as from other successful entrepreneurs such as Steve Jobs and Baba Ramdev; also discussing how to get aspects such as marketing right. The book has much for established firms, NGOs as well as start-ups; being rich in anecdotes and practical examples of what successful companies and individuals have done. **HC**



Sidharth Balakrishna is the Former Chief Strategy and Innovation Officer at Essel (Zee) Group and has worked with both top Management Consulting firms and Corporates, as well as startups in over three countries; all this while writing six books and regularly teaching at the country's top management institutes including the IIMs.

The Science Behind Productive Meetings

*Human Capital interacted with **Dr. Steven Rogelberg**, Chancellor's Professor at the University of North Carolina Charlotte, bestselling author and the world's leading expert on meetings, to understand how science can help fix bad meetings. He gives evidence-based tips on running effective and inclusive meetings and also offers practical advice on how leaders and HR professionals are uniquely positioned to ensure meeting success within their organisations.*

BY ANKITA SHARMA



If you spend copious amounts of time on meetings every day and feel that most of them are, at best, inefficient and, at worst, detrimental to your productivity, your plight is no different from what millions of others are also experiencing, especially during these challenging times when remote meetings have become a greater burden than ever before. We need meetings. But we also need them to be done well.

Q Interestingly, one of the many hats you wear is that of a meeting scientist. Your recent highly acclaimed book, *The Surprising Science of Meetings*, comes out of the vast amount of research you have conducted over the past two decades. What does science reveal about meetings that might surprise us?

A What surprises people the most is that there is a robust science, which demonstrates that while bad meetings take a toll on people and teams, meetings done well promotes employee engagement, inclusion, innovation, and team success. Science helps identify an evidence-based path forward, around the key drivers of meeting success. At the same time, it also helps us understand which practices don't have the value that conventional wisdom seems to suggest.



For example, the research on having a meeting agenda in and of itself shows a little actual direct benefit on meeting performance. But, if we stop and reflect, this should not surprise us. What matters most is what is on the agenda, its relevance to attendees, and how the meeting is facilitated.

Here is something to consider with agendas. As opposed to a set of topics to be discussed, try organising the agenda as a set of questions that need answers. This creates focus and clarity for the purpose of the meeting. Invite only those relevant to the questions at hand. By framing agenda items as questions, you know when to end the meeting. The meeting has been successful when or if the questions have been answered.

“Large meetings are fake inclusion.”

Q Running inclusive meetings is difficult. It can be even more challenging to run remote meetings that engage all team members in brainstorming and give them a sense of belonging. How can leaders make meetings more inclusive for all participants?

A One should always strive to be an active meeting facilitator, regardless of who the attendees are. Draw people in (e.g., ‘Sandy, please share your thoughts’) to keep attendees engaged. Consider maintaining a tally to be sure that all voices are heard. Instead of saying ‘any questions or comments’, call on people by name to share their thoughts. Also, don’t let people go off track; interrupt and redirect them if necessary. After all, that is your job as a meeting leader.

Also, remember that large meetings are fake inclusion. Only invite people that truly need to be

there. It is not hard for us to identify ‘must-have’ attendees versus ‘nice-to-have’ attendees. Let’s just focus on the ‘must-haves’ when we call the meeting together.

Remote meetings decrease in quality with size. Instead of over-inviting, consider recording your virtual meeting. Give non-essential members a break and just share the recording with them. To avoid uninvited team members from feeling marginalised, provide them with the opportunity to attend future meetings on the topic. It is rare that they will take you up on the offer, but the option will be appreciated.

As for innovation, research supports the benefits of leveraging silence in meetings as a way of gathering more ideas, perspectives, and insights from attendees. For example, if you compare groups brainstorming in silence (e.g., typing into a shared document) versus those brainstorming with

their mouths, silent brainstorming groups produce nearly twice as many ideas. Those ideas also tend to be more creative. Why would silent brainstorming result in more and better ideas? When communicating via writing, all can “speak” at the same time. There is no waiting for your turn. Plus, there is less filtering of ideas given the simultaneous generation of thoughts. Fortunately, silence can be done very easily in a virtual meeting. Just share a Google doc with attendees during the actual meeting and ask folks to mute themselves as they contribute.

“As for innovation, research supports the benefits of leveraging silence in meetings as a way of gathering more ideas, perspectives, and insights from attendees.”

Q Meeting fatigue is on the rise, especially among those with a schedule packed with back-to-back meetings throughout the day. What are your tips for warding off mental and physical exhaustion from attending so many meetings?

A There are three key strategies. One, block off time on your calendar so you can take breaks away from meetings. Two, between meetings, be sure to get up, move around, stretch, etc. Three, when asked to attend a meeting via video, ask whether a video meeting is really needed. Perhaps a phone call would work just fine, and you can even take a walk during it.

Q How can HR lead the efforts to increase meeting quality and experience within their organisations?

A HR can lead the efforts to recapture wasted time and

frustration. They are uniquely positioned and skilled to solve the meetings problem. Although there are many paths, here are three that would certainly help:

(1) Impactful Training:

Research suggests that only around 20% of leaders receive training around meetings. Given how many meetings there are, this is a crazy statistic. This is clearly a low-hanging fruit opportunity. However, training has to move beyond teaching basic meeting tactics. For example, research shows that agendas, in and of themselves, do little to improve meetings. Instead, their importance rests on how we build and structure these agendas, and most importantly, how leaders conduct discussion around agenda topics. We need to provide meaningful meeting skills and facilitation training as part of onboarding, high-potential and leadership development efforts.

(2) Feedback and

Accountability: Our research suggests that leaders have overly positive assessments of the meetings they run. Clearly, this belief is not helpful to self-development. Organisations must assess meeting quality/culture as part of their pulse and engagement surveys. Given the frequency of meetings and their fundamentality to team and unit success, a simple meeting metrics dashboard should be created. Leaders desperately need feedback and must be held accountable if things are to be made better.

(3) Influence Cultural

Practices: HR can help in the following ways:

- Change default norms around meetings and introduce new meeting approaches.
- Introduce alternative meeting structures, such as huddles and “magic time.”
- Introduce alternative meeting formats, like walking meetings, and determine when they are most appropriate.

- Promote meeting-free time periods, given that all employees can benefit from some amount of “makers’ time”.
- Introduce guidelines/practices for managing meeting size and stopping a knee-jerk tendency to default to a one-hour meeting.

“Only around 20% of leaders receive training around meetings. Given how many meetings there are, this is a crazy statistic. This is clearly a low-hanging fruit opportunity.”

Q In closing, what further advice would you give leaders about how they can become better at running meetings?

A The best way to improve your team meetings is to ask attendees how the meetings are going – the ultimate act of stewardship. Send out a quick survey through which folks can share what is going well or not-so-well and provide ideas for improvement. Then learn, reflect, and try some new things based on the feedback. Now that we have been meeting remotely for some time – and may continue to do so for the foreseeable future – the timing may be ideal for this step.

Virtual meetings are incredibly hard to lead. Success can be elusive. However, careful thought can turn your remote meetings into efficient and engaging events. Take the challenge of being the type of meeting leader you would want to see in others. Take the challenge of fixing meetings – one meeting at a time. And hopefully, over time, your stewardship choices will become the norm we see in all meeting leaders. **HC**

To know more about the science of meetings and Steven, visit stevenroegelberg.com.

Fidelity Announces 26 Weeks Parental Leave For Employees

BY ANUSHRUTI SINGH

Fidelity International has announced 26 weeks paid parental leave for all its employees. With the introduction of a companywide Enhanced Parental Leave policy now fathers and secondary carers will be able to take the same amount of paid leave as mothers and primary carers.

The new policy will come into effect for children who are born (including via surrogacy) or placed for adoption on or after 1 September 2020 and will offer up to 26 weeks of paid leave for each parent employed by the company within the first 12 months of a child's birth.

Anne Richards, CEO, Fidelity International, said "We want to be a market leader and offer an inclusive culture where all our people may spend time caring



for their children and thrive in their careers. We are therefore delighted to be announcing our new parental leave policy and are especially proud to be offering this globally to all our employees." 

Genpact Launches Internal Learning Program To Foster Professional Resilience

BY ANUSHRUTI SINGH

Genpact has launch Adapt and Rise, a role-based online learning platform for people who wants to upgrade their professional skills.



The new program is in partnership with EdCast and will offer free courses to help professionals upskill in 13 roles including business analyst, digital program manager, finance and accounting professional, human resources professional, project manager, risk and compliance professional, and more.

Each role-based channel features approximately 100 hours of bite-sized learning content, including videos, articles, blogs, podcasts, and more. The content is categorized into 14 skills that are common across roles, including artificial intelligence basics, change management, digital business strategy, people leadership, and storytelling.

The course material is available in both web and mobile application. 

IBM Unveils Watson Works To Address The Return-To-Workplace Challenge

BY ANUSHRUTI SINGH

IBM has announced Watson Works, a curated set of products that embeds Watson artificial intelligence (AI) models and applications to help companies navigate many aspects of the return-to-workplace challenge due to the ongoing COVID-19 crisis as effectively as possible.

Watson Works provides data-driven insights to help employers make informed decisions on workplace re-entry, facilities management, space allocation and other COVID-related priorities.

The AI based platform is designed to help companies manage facilities and optimize space allocation by using real-time data provided by the

employer including wifi, cameras, bluetooth and smartphones, monitor employee health, and maximize the effectiveness of contact tracing, among others.

Subram Natarajan, Chief Technology Officer, IBM India, said "It cannot be overstated just how disruptive the COVID-19 pandemic has been to businesses worldwide. As most of the global economies and

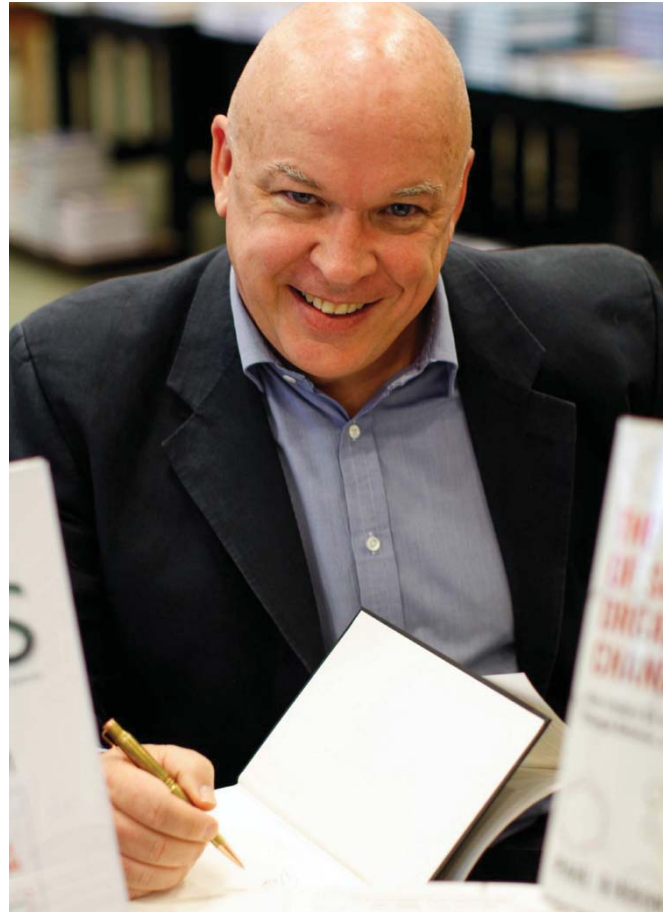


businesses reopen, organizations are facing the complex challenge of returning people to workplaces in a way that prioritizes the health, safety and productivity of employees. Watson Works has been made available to enable companies to leverage AI for reinventing themselves to adapt to the new normal and emerge smarter." 

At the Nexus of Science, Philosophy, and Business

Paul Gibbons isn't here to just inspire you; he's here to challenge you. A scientist by background, Paul isn't a fan of empty platitudes and management doublespeak. As a public intellectual, bestselling author and global expert on change, strategy and leadership, he is successfully steering an effort to use contemporary science and philosophy as provocations for busting myths, debunking pseudoscience, making better strategic decisions, implementing 21st-century change, and creating organisations where talent flourishes. In this exclusive interaction with Human Capital, Paul talks about change agility, digital transformation, behavioural science, and the fascinating surprises the pandemic has uncovered.

BY ANKITA SHARMA



Q You have charted an unusual career path to becoming what you are today. In what ways have your varied experience in the fields of science and math, economics, neuroscience, psychology, and philosophy helped bring new perspectives to the business arena?

A I must be honest; I find most business books trivial. I cannot remember the last one I read (oh yes, it was *Switch*, an excellent book), although, in the 1990s and 2000s, I probably read 50 a year! What I really enjoy is bringing thinking into business from

disciplines that business professors simply overlook: evolutionary biology, philosophy, neuroscience, spirituality, economics, behavioural science, and even math! My niche is translating the latest research and thinking into business ideas.

My study is in philosophy, history, other humanities, economics, and anthropology. I'm a scientist by background, and I read three science magazines a week on top of four to five philosophy and economics publications.

However, one exception is neuroscience. This was a fad a few years ago. Many coaches and

consultants talk about oxytocin and *substantia nigra* and so forth, but that is like figuring out how a car works by studying the chemical formula for octane. Good luck with that! A great example is a couple in marriage counselling talking about their serotonin receptors – is that really helping? It's like saying, "Darling, when we argue, my 5HT receptors in my ventromedial prefrontal cortex can't cope." Get real! But gurus leapt so quickly onto the bandwagon trying to sound clever, throwing around words that are mostly unhelpful when it comes to running businesses.

My mission, because I read so widely, is to create better leadership for better businesses and a better world. I try to do that by bringing perspectives well outside what business school professors and consultants discuss. I think business thinkers need to read more widely – the worlds of science and philosophy have so much that can be made practical!

Q From small start-ups to multi-national corporations, no one has been spared the wrath of COVID-19. The pandemic has forced organisations of all sizes to adapt and evolve quickly. Could you share your reflections around the ongoing crisis?

A First, I'm humbled by how humans have reacted – except a few leaders. We've found new depths of altruism and sacrifice for the greater good.

Most interesting is how quickly change has been able to happen. If you had said to a bank CEO in December 2019 that 100% of her non-frontline staff were to be working from home, she would have laughed. For decades, the world has been inching towards more virtual enterprises – then in March, poof! It was a reality.

In a second black swan event, the death of a not-famous black man in a small US city sparked global uproar against racism. We again witnessed a rapid, empathetic human response: a tiny event in the grand scheme of things alighting new commitments to social change. I'm inspired.

What is interesting is that the change literature focuses on how non-adaptable humans are – how much they resist. However, we have seen huge untapped reserves of resilience, commitment, and change capability.

My great passion now is how ancient spiritual ideas from philosophy and Eastern and

Rapid Fire

Favourite quote: *True glory consists in doing what deserves to be written, in writing what deserves to be read, and in so living as to make the world happier and better for our living in it.* — Pliny the Elder

You strongly believe in... philosophy. The great revolutions of the world have started as revolutions in thinking, be it democracy, universal suffrage, the scientific revolution, the declaration of human rights, religious tolerance, sustainability, or environmentalism.

Describe today's change leaders in one line: Professional change agents need to develop their critical thinking skills and throw out all the garbage models from the 1990s that never worked very well, even then.

What comes to your mind when you hear these words?

COVID-19: It is the greatest medical and economic challenge of the last 100 years. Our response will define our capability for collaboration as a global species.

Science and business: While business loves exploiting science to make cool useful tech, it is terrible at using science to run itself. The same is true in society – we love gizmos, but (especially in the US) reject science when it doesn't fit our worldview. More science, less fluff!

The future of work: What is our competitive advantage as humans? Machines will soon think faster and better about many things – so if we aren't to become redundant, what are the things we can do that make us special?

Western spiritual traditions can be harnessed to make workplaces better for humans. My new book is called *Spirituality, Work, and Capitalism* – perhaps out in September this year.

Q Getting started is often the most difficult part to move along the path of digital transformation. Where and how can companies begin to make digital changes to their business? Also, are there any pitfalls to look out for?

A Now you are going to drag me back to talking about business. Okay! The problem with digital transformation was unlikely to be whether companies could capitalise on the opportunities it presents. We've seen discontinuous changes as shopping, teaching, exercise, medicine, and communications moved to digital formats – seemingly overnight.

The bigger problem was always whether societies and companies

could adapt workforces to the substantial shift in manpower requirements – whether we could handle the fact that by 2030, perhaps as many as 50% of jobs will have changed or ceased.

Now, thanks to COVID, the problem is greater – because it comes not on top of full employment in the West but double-digit unemployment. This societal challenge is the biggest pitfall. Western companies were never good at protecting workers from downsizing, or outsourcing, or technological change. The challenge is greater today, and I worry that we will not rise to it.

Q You often say that digital changes are paradoxical in several ways. Could you elucidate this point of view?

A Technology is racing ahead faster than we can keep up. Data are being mined and crunched faster than strategists can adapt business models and more quickly

than humans can adapt to perform their roles in the techno-human system, be that medicine, commerce, or government.

Weirdly, humans are a bottleneck. Two hundred years ago, data moved as fast as the matter (paper) it was printed on. One hundred years ago, analogue electronic communications meant voice could travel at the speed of light but only as fast as I could speak. Today, I can transmit the whole US Library of Congress in an hour (digitised). However, our brains don't work any faster than they did 10,000 years ago! That is partly why we feel so inundated.

Another paradox is that even though the change looks like a technological challenge, at the bottom, it is a human one. It leaves us with the questions: What is our superpower? What are the unique challenges that the machine-species (robots or AI) cannot solve?

Q In one of your books, you write: *Creating change-agile businesses will eliminate the need for what we today call change management*. What do you mean by that, and how can organisations shift from a change management paradigm to a change-agile paradigm?

A The change paradigm has forever been to strategise the change top-down, and then align people as needs require. It has never worked well. We get change failure and change fatigue. I've often said that change management is a Band-Aid on the wound of bad leadership. Were our leaders up to sharing vision, cascading objectives, sharing the big picture why, resolving conflict, helping their staff adapt – then we would not need change managers putting out change fires. That is change agility, or one dimension of it – an organisation with change capable leaders at every level.

Q In what ways could behavioural science help

leaders wield new tools to step up their organisational change efforts?

A We used to think, change hearts, minds, and values, then behaviours will follow – except they don't. So, to effect behavioural change, we would train, teach, inspire, and persuade – all of which produce the change inside people's heads. Then, we'd shake our heads, thinking, why are people still doing what they always did?

Behavioural science is a new frontier in business. The specifics of that take three chapters in two books! But, in short, we focus first on helping people design new behaviours, and then on using behavioural science to support that. The paradigm shift is from “think your way into a new way of acting” to “act your way into a new way of thinking.”

Q As a highly regarded author, speaker, educator, and thought leader, you are an inspiration for many. Who currently inspires you, and why?

A First, a joke. I once asked a famous actor, “Who inspires you?” and he said, “Me!” After I rolled around the floor laughing, I asked again. “No – I mean, who else?” He thought very pensively and said, “Nobody, really.” I still laugh remembering that. And I'm still not sure whether he was joking!

There is still no better book on change than *The Fifth Discipline* (1996) – and Peter Senge has inspired me since I first read that (and have since read it three times.) He has faded from public view but is still, to my mind, a great thinker on the human side of the business, the ecosystem, and sustainability.

The thinkers I admire? The “who do you want to be when you grow up” people are Daniel Kahnemann (author of *Thinking, Fast and Slow*) and Steven Pinker (author of *Enlightenment Now*).

Elon Musk is a business leader I admire – whatever his quirks. He is singular in that all his businesses are dedicated to a better future for humankind: Tesla, SpaceX, The Boring Company, and SolarCity. It seems to me that he chooses his entrepreneurial activity at the sweet spot between lucre and social value. He is also prepared, unlike many leaders, to take on projects that most people think impossible and that will take decades to realise. He was ridiculed for taking on the space establishment behemoths, Boeing, Raytheon, and Lockheed Martin with SpaceX, and it seemed even more ridiculous to take on Toyota, General Motors, and BMW – yet Tesla has.

As for political leaders, my choice has to be Angela Merkel, who sets an incredibly high standard for moral leadership. Think of how many scandals have plagued Trump in three years compared to Merkel in fifteen. And Greta Thunberg – the world needs more inspiring people like her – she gives me hope for humanity.

Q What would we be surprised to learn about you?

A As a teenager, I used to be called “Disco Paul” because I loved going out dancing so much. Shh! That's a secret. And I was 20 kilos lighter – which helped. In my 20s, I taught myself four languages (all European, no Hindi or Mandarin sadly) – so I can give talks, in theory, all over Europe. (The problem is I live in a tiny town in the mountains of Colorado where even English is rare.)

Today, I compete at mind sports at the highest levels – world championships. Backgammon when I was young, then Bridge, and now Poker – I'd love to win the world poker championship. I also love computer games like *Civilisation* and *League of Legends*. I suppose, in short, I'm the purest of nerds. In my downtime, I watch Netflix and anything sci-fi. 



A Great Place To Work

Humans are increasingly becoming the fulcrum around which organisations are being built. And if we are building a "People First" organisation, it would mean creating a very strong and consistent culture for employees to thrive in.

BY **RAJESH MEHROTRA**

Let me put it straight up. Coming to work every day with a smile on my face is a result of my emotional wellbeing. 8-10 hours at work can either contribute to it or break that smile! Today, more and more companies are moving away from shareholders, profits, or growth as the primary purpose of the organisation. Humans are increasingly becoming the fulcrum around which organisations are being built. And if we are building a

"People First" organisation, it would mean creating a very strong and consistent culture for employees to thrive in.

A culture is no longer determined merely by facilities, perks, and payouts or a great looking office. Talent now seek a strong culture that makes for a happy and fulfilling work environment. And a happy, challenging, and fulfilling work environment would mean a clear purpose to which all the employees are aligned, and

“A happy, challenging, and fulfilling work environment would mean a clear purpose to which all the employees are aligned, and the work making a positive impact on a life spectrum.”

the work making a positive impact on a life spectrum.

The role of the leaders

Then there is the role of the leaders. While we propagate co-creation for culture which has proved to be successful, I believe that the leader's effort at culture is far-reaching. And it starts with self. It is as easy as asking ourselves:-

- What would make me happy to be at work?
- What are those initiatives I have to take to include everyone in this happiness?
- How would I feel if someone were to communicate and behave in the manner I was?

Using self as a filter for an action can help us to be empathetic and look at the deeper needs of an employee. Leaders can no longer separate the personal from the professional. And above all this, being vulnerable. Vulnerability is no longer a leadership curse. It is what makes us human, makes us look inward, be empathetic, and be open to change.

Consistency in character

Consistency in character and behaviour, in good and difficult times, is truly the hard part. 'Strength of character' is a term that has been heard by many of us during our childhood. And this phrase

carried an important lesson for life. To my mind, the strength of character would imply authenticity and commitment; the ability to be true to values, despite the hardship that may transpire from following it through. I mention this because the commitment to follow through is the main challenge. And to my mind, the 'strength of the character' supports the culture that we promote within and how true we are to the values that build that culture.

Hence, a strong culture needs leaders who are

- Vulnerable
- Knowledgeable
- Lead by example
- Make a concerted effort to evolve
- Can make difficult decisions
- Live the values that are co-created within the organisation

I regularly swap stories with my friends in leadership positions across the globe on various things that our companies are doing to create an attractive workplace. On one hand, the question is how do we make the work motivating and exciting for our people. On the other is fun at work-from camping, office beer parties, fun office spaces to ensure that employees enjoy their time at work. There is a strong affinity towards a culture that promotes exciting work and fun. However, many Indian companies are diverse in age, region, religion, gender etc. and hence, what works for one may not work for another. The solution lies in spotting the common grounds of human behaviour and targeting them. These common grounds will vary across organisations and cultures. One such common ground is the celebration of successes. That may not equate to fun, but creating opportunities to provide fame to employees, celebrating their efforts, and their successes is important to create energy and positivity.

There are many identified values that create a strong foundation like collaboration, transparency, empowerment, agility, innovation,

“Culture is a constant effort. Every member of an organisation is working at it with every word he speaks and every action he takes.”

trust, respect, equality to name a few. But it is not what you say but what you visibly and actually do around these - constantly and consistently - that defines the work environment and help make an employee a cheerleader for your brand.

So, in a nutshell, what should brands do to emerge as a great place to work? There are definitely some golden rules to that. Yours truly would like to share those in which one reposes blind faith.

- **Co-creation:** Most organisations talk about the top down approach for culture. I endorse the fact that a culture that is both bottom up and top down is easier to maintain. Leaders are not perfect or infallible. Creating a culture that is owned by everyone allows space for open conversations, and a frequent check on the followed path. Collective conscience also allows for staying true to the values and reduction of disappointment or disillusion in an organisation.

- **Empowerment :** Empowerment, can undoubtedly, not emerge without trust, respect, and fairness. Fairness would be an important aspect to maintain respect and trust. Having established processes for people decisions help, but it is equally important to consider the emotional element. They need to be also SEEN & FELT as fair to be respected and trusted by employees. Coaching and mentoring is an important pillar for empowerment. Coaching and mentoring helps employees develop skills, evolve and enables them to increase the impact of their contribution to the organisation. An employee's incentive is - to grow, progress, capitalise on potential, and have a meaningful impact.

- **Communication:** My 'strength of character' is constantly tested in various situations when it comes to open and consistent communication. Sharing challenges, taking feedback for improvement, being open to criticism or unpleasant opinion, it is hard for many to overcome the baser instincts of avoiding or waiting for

matters to blow over, or at times to one's utter dismay, complete denial. A consistent, dedicated communication effort is imperative for creating a workplace that employees trust and respect. I put the responsibility on Leaders more than anyone to be upfront, constantly share information, and be transparent and open in the decisions they take, admit mistakes, and communicate clearly on rectification.

- **Hiring with care:** Culture is a constant effort. Every member of an organisation is working at it with every word he speaks and every action he takes. In a living, breathing culture that is prominent within an organisation, every person who joins must contribute to it. Therefore, hiring 'a right fit' is critical. Sometimes, a highly skilled and talented employee who is culturally unfit is detrimental to an organisation, than an average worker who is a perfect fit.

- **Care & Empathy:** Empathy, understanding, and care is not inherent. Every person, organisation, and society must work at it. It has to be felt, be constantly reminded, practised, encouraged and appreciated. Most of the times, having empathy at the core of decisions leads us to make the right ones. Leaders must lead with it, employees must follow it and organisation must reflect it. It is interesting on how stories of organisation going out of their way for employees create a narrative that further encourages employees to play out their role in daily work within that.

And these are what makes a strong culture in an organisation. Makes it a great place to work for. 

About the Author

Rajesh Mehrotra is the Chief Human Resource Officer, Godfrey Phillips India Limited. He has an experience of over two decades in people's process and practices. He is leading the best practices and driving cultural changes within GPI.



With The End In Mind

The Learning journey in an organisation begins with an L&D strategy. And when strategising, apart from the coverage or the modules, it is essential to focus on the business outcomes sought by the leadership.

BY **DIPANKAR DAS**

Saloni was a friendly and effusive Head of Learning and Development at a Billion-dollar outsourcing company. Almost a quarter before the financial year came to an end, she would religiously send out L&D updates to the Business Heads seeking their inputs for the coming year. And with Saloni's recurrent push, they would share their department's Learning requirements. This would serve as a Training Needs Identification (TNI) of sorts, which Saloni would then collate, budget, and present in the Annual Operating Plan (AoP) Council meeting for the next year. Hard work and diligence, would go into the L&D strategy for the year.

The Country Head, an astute Industry veteran, for some reason, however, did not seem to be too impressed by Saloni's style of strategy development. And soon, he rolled the L&D department, so far reporting directly to the CHRO, under a VP heading Strategic HR, who until then had been Saloni's peer.

Saloni was distraught and sought a meeting with the Country Head, who obliged. The Country Head sat Saloni down and patiently explained a few observations, about what she could have done differently.

- The company was on a growth trajectory, with new initiatives and capabilities identified to support the spurt in revenue, but the L&D TNI focused on existing businesses

- The focus on the mission, vision, values and cultural pillars of the organisation, which was essential for a growing organisation, was not a priority for the L&D department.
- Learning deepens organisational capability, but Development stands for future-readiness, which is ensured by L&D. This point was not being addressed by the department.
- L&D departments need to embed inside the business and not remain a parallel function. They need to develop co-ownership targets in designing and delivery of modules.
- There was no effort to go beyond the HoDs. The rank and file had a slew of expectations which were not being addressed.

Becoming Critical

Traditionally, L&D has been a good-to-have department, rarely a critical department. But increasingly, with the quick obsolescence of skills and an ever-changing environment, it is L&D which can cushion the impact of changes, and even help prepare the organisation to stay ahead of the Learning Curve necessary to survive and thrive.

When strategising for a robust L&D presence in an organisation, it is important to keep a few points in mind:

- All Learning should be aligned to the Mission, Vision and Values

of the organisation. In fact, not just aligned, the initiatives should be built around them. If Innovation and the Entrepreneurial values are priority areas, then modules such as Design Thinking and Business Execution should figure prominently in the roster of programmes.

- All L&D is entwined with Talent Management. The core purpose of L&D should be to retain the High Potential employees and further develop their skills. This honing of skills is often a greater retention strategy than the annual bonus.



“All Learning should be aligned to the Mission, Vision and Values of the organisation. In fact, not just aligned, the initiatives should be built around them.”

A Powerful and Positive Influence

Remember the Hawthorne Experiments. Albeit indirectly, L&D is one of the influences which help differentiate an organisation in the eyes of its employees. A grateful and happy employee base is always more engaged; an engaged employee is more productive.

When strategising, do not think of coverage or the kind of modules that would do justice. Think instead of the business outcomes that would be sought by the leadership and how L&D can enable them. As Uber Guru Steven Covey had said, start with the end in mind. While keeping the end in mind, it would be good to map L&D not just as learning, but a spectrum of experiences that employees are likely to go through. If well designed, it will be a sought after journey that every employee would like to be a part of. It would enthuse and motivate.

Design for Application

As the ADDIE model suggests, the Design element comes next. From experience, this author would like to suggest to be humble and bite as much as can be chewed with ease. Too often, L&D planners make an ambitious land grab, which remains unfulfilled at the end of the year. Think Application. Do what can be done well and with relative ease. Let the Astronauts seek the moon, L&D professionals would do well to remain grounded. There have been instances wherein

comprehensive programmes have been rolled out for particular profiles such as Managers, which comprise more than 100 hours of Learning in a year, and by the year-end, only a fraction of the target group could achieve it, due to the extensive prior occupation. Such unrealistic planning results in L&D initiatives losing credibility in the organisation.

Sustain the Momentum

Learning is good, but sustaining it is another story. The key is not to structure it as a series of individual events, but as a process, which involves Training Delivery in Classrooms, through virtual platforms, embedding it in the PMS, recognising Learners with X number of hours, and most of all, enmeshing it in on-the-job Learning, where it becomes unavoidable.

“When strategising Learning, we often suffer from the oversight that Learning is about Learning. It is, but it needs to be aligned to and embedded in the organisational context.”

Socialise

Socialisation of learning is the surest way to ensure seamless sustenance. There has been a spectacular rise in the number of Learning sessions being attended by people during the Lockdown, thanks also to the meteoric rise of EdTech platforms such as Zoom, Google Hangouts, etc. This has made Learning possible, anytime and from anywhere. More importantly, Learning is available in short, convenient capsules, rather than elaborately planned events.

Measure and Celebrate

And now, Drucker springs eternal, what gets measured, gets done. The impact of Learning is, of course, notoriously difficult to enumerate. In an age where advanced Analytics is ruling the roost, not being able to flick a number capturing the rupees saved, additional revenue earned or the degree of organisational capability enhanced, is a bit of a dampener. While, of course, one can go the full length of the Kirkpatrick Model and churn out numbers, it is never too easy and depends a lot on help from other departments and stakeholders. Instead, try to capture the impact of Learning. Put up anecdotal inputs, ask the Leaders to speak up in support, organise Learning Road Shows in the organisation, publish your own e-Newsletter. In short, make a splash, create an aspirational value, which employees appreciate and seek out.

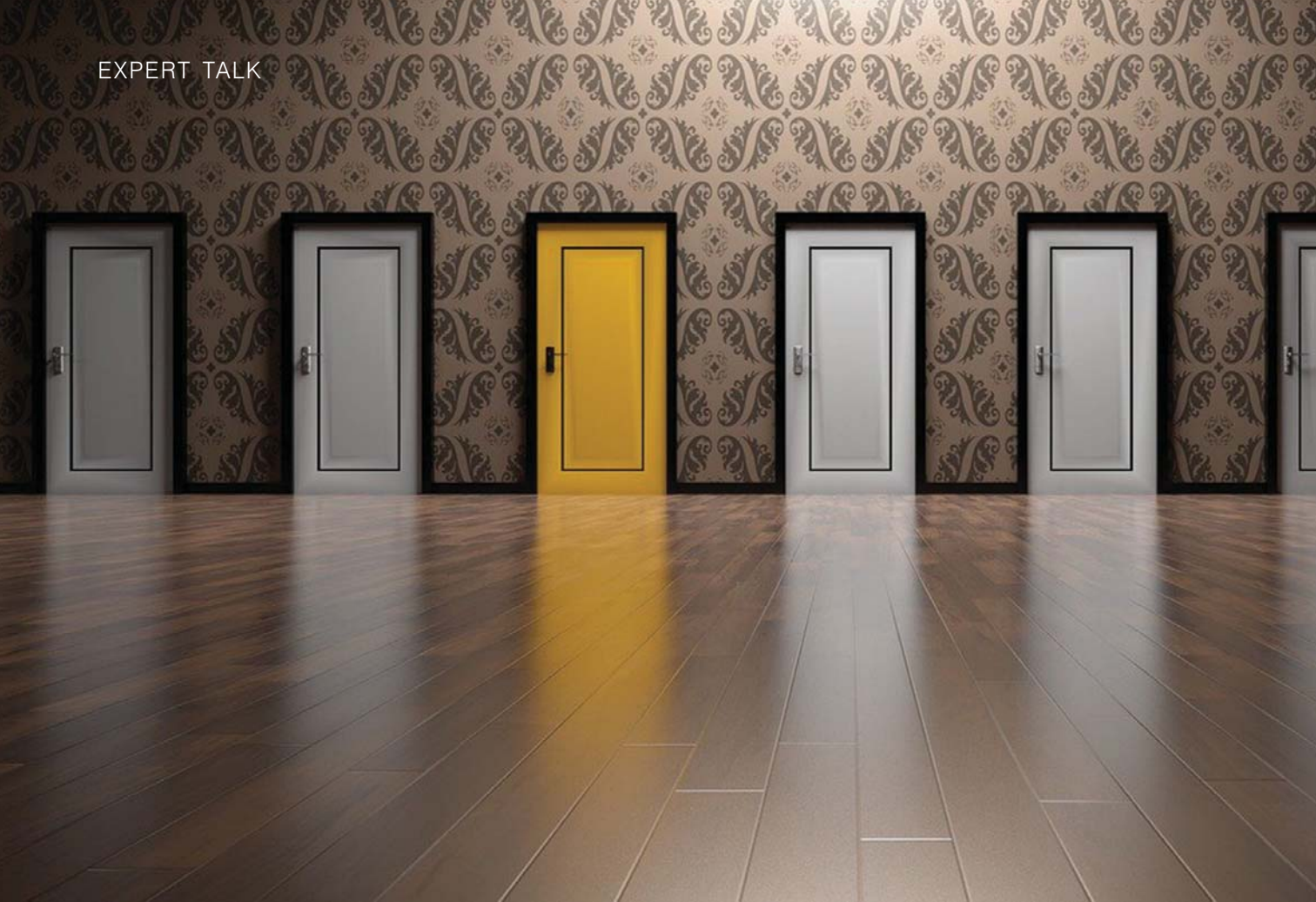
Big Picture Thinking

When strategising Learning, we often suffer from the oversight that Learning is about Learning. It is, but it needs to be aligned to and embedded in the organisational context- its growth strategy, its vision and its values. If that is ensured, L&D will not be a parallel department, cocooned in its silo, but go with the ebb and flow of organisational priorities.

Saloni has learned that lesson now, and she is back to being the great enabler she always was. 

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.



Opportunities Aplenty!

The COVID-19 pandemic has created difficulties and increased pressure on the real estate sector but it also brings opportunities with itself. Business and HR should rise to the challenges and seize the opportunities.

BY **ROHIT HASTEER**

The world around us has changed significantly with the COVID-19 pandemic impacting almost every facet of our lives. The coronavirus outbreak has hampered the supply and demand in the local economies, and virtually no sector has remained untouched by this health hazard. The Housing sector is no different and is facing the heat with direct impact on new project

launches, land acquisition, home buyers seconding guessing making such a huge investment at the stage etc. In fact, varying opinions are emerging on the impact of this outbreak on the real estate sector. However, crisis and adversities like these often bring opportunities along with challenges. COVID-19 has opened myriad opportunities for HR professionals working in the real



estate sector and a few of them have been mentioned below.

Demand for workforce

The current crisis has made many of us realise the importance of a home. With the pandemic reaching every nook and corner of the world, the only place that kept us protected was our safe abode. Besides safety, our homes also became our workplaces as a majority of us were forced to work remotely. A home was perhaps the biggest and the most valued commodity in recent times. The government is also working towards launching several affordable housing projects and the interest rates are likely to fall in future. Hence, post the temporary slump, one can expect the housing sector to stand tall on its feet again with the demand for homes rising. This would mean that organisations would need to pull up their socks to cater to the increasing demand and have the required manpower in place. Hence, talent acquisition teams will have a great opportunity at hand, and they need to explore new and innovative avenues of hiring.

Employee well-being

Employee well-being has not been a top priority for most organisations across industries, including real estate. While everyone has acknowledged the need, very little was done in terms of investment in this area. However, the recent pandemic has forced organisations in the housing sector to rethink their approach towards employee wellness. Right from safeguarding that employees have access to sanitised facilities, to ensuring their mental well-being, employers across the real estate sector need to include these offerings at the workplace. Prior to the pandemic, HR had to negotiate hard to ensure that health and wellness also becomes a part of the overall company philosophy, however, there is an increased understanding and need for employee wellness now. Even people would prefer working

with an organisation which cares for them. Hence, employee well-being is another opportunity area for HR professionals.

“Learning facilitators need to establish digital learning norms and improve learning efficiency and experience of people. They need to identify platforms which can cater to delivering content as per individual need.”

e-Learning

Whether it is a small business enterprise or a large conglomerate, COVID-19 has triggered everyone to become more adept to technology and we see product demos and sales pitches being made virtually. The real estate sector is no different. Virtual Reality (VR) tours, webinars to educate and engage homebuyers, digitisation around home search, paying rent etc. are now rapidly becoming a reality due to suspension of offline sales. Hence, it is imperative that HR digitises itself to keep up with the digital transformation of business. Historically, real estate developers and organisations have invested in instructor-led training to its people. However, with the new norm of remote working, it has become difficult to carry out these programmes and has created a much stronger need for online learning. Learning facilitators need to establish digital learning norms and improve learning efficiency and experience of people. They need to identify platforms which can not only host content, but also cater to delivering content as per individual need. This would mean incorporating bite-sized modules, webinars, virtual reality,



“HR needs to make the best use of the existing talent pool by moving them cross-functionally. In fact, it is a great opportunity for HR professionals to introduce crossover thinking into talent management.”

gamification and augmented reality as learning interventions.

Organisation Re-design: The coronavirus pandemic caught most of us off guard, and businesses at large were not prepared for a crisis of such a scale. With the adverse effects looming large on the economy, organisations need to adjust business plans and staffing arrangements in order to stay afloat. While there is perceptible uncertainty, but as one sees, some roles may become redundant, while the demand for some roles may increase. The role of HR becomes all the more important here as real estate sector needs to find ways to effectively utilise people better. For instance, hiring may not start immediately once we are back to normal, but the quantum of work would increase significantly to cover up for all that is lost in time. Hence, HR needs to make the best use of the existing talent pool by moving them cross-functionally. In fact, it is a great opportunity for HR professionals to introduce crossover thinking into talent management. Also, certain state governments have started overhauling the labour laws for ease of business. In a gig economy with relaxed norms, organisations in the housing sector can adopt more flexible employment arrangements. HR again would be at the forefront charting a new course for talent management.

Assessment & Incentive

Strategies: The recent pandemic has most certainly affected the Annual Operating Plans (AOP) of businesses and with the uncertainty unfolding each day, organisations cannot set long term goals in the near future. We may have to relook at the way we assess our people, and soon, organisations may drift towards quarterly, monthly, weekly or even daily plans. At the same time, the rewarding strategy may also need an overhaul. Material incentives (Bonus, International Trips, etc.) have been the focus of rewards strategy in the real estate sector, however, the coronavirus pandemic has changed the way employees look at rewards. Today, flexible working, telecommuting, humanistic care, profit-sharing are some of the incentives which are truly valued by employees. Also, at a time when the real estate sector is facing an economic challenge, it would be prudent for the sector to be financially responsible. Therefore, it is important for business leaders and HR professionals to devise a comprehensive and competitive total rewards program which is able to recognize and motivate people.

The COVID-19 pandemic has created difficulties and increased pressure on the real estate sector but it also brings opportunities with itself. Business and HR should rise to the challenges and seize the opportunities. 

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.



An Experience Par Excellence!

For a wellness programme to succeed, it is imperative that we reach out to our employees and make them a core part of the decision making.

BY KENNETH W WHEELER

Organisations that visualise human resources as people first and employees next are the ones that succeed in creating a robust wellness strategy that truly represents a 'Wellness Culture' everyone loves and resonates to. What more accomplished way to express employee care than by making a meaningful investment in their overall wellbeing! Even with the known benefits of wellness programmes such as lowered health cost, increased benefits, happy and productive employees – much needs to be achieved in the direction of establishing

an employee wellness strategy that truly works. It is therefore essential to explore ways of putting together a successful framework of wellness culture, and taking a holistic approach to improve the employee experience through wellness initiatives, both in and out of the workplace.

Engage and Involve Employees

Most employers fail to understand this. For a wellness programme to succeed, it is imperative that we reach out to our employees and make them a core part of the decision making. We need to put together a laundry list of wellness dynamics, educate employees of the benefits, and then roll out a survey to understand what gels best with them and spin your strategy around it. Conventional wisdom and research tell us that people engage in something when they perceive that they have managed to get a good deal. When employees are empowered to select programmes, you fulfil the assertion of WIFM (What's In It For Me)! This forms the seed of creating a successful wellness programme – and this approach now speaks to the employees need and generates an outcome that employees find desirable and beneficial, and thus, there is an automatic increase in interest!

Focus on Intrinsic Motivation

The true value of Wellness Culture is sustainability. How do you ensure



“Even with the known benefits of wellness programmes such as lowered health cost, increased benefits, happy and productive employees - much needs to be achieved in the direction of establishing an employee wellness strategy that truly works.”

employee motivation does not slip away? The approach of intrinsic motivation allows for a longterm impact where employees display behaviour as continued progress because the behaviour is self-rewarding. How can this be achieved?

- Select programmes that address a behaviour employee ‘can do’ and ‘want to do’ because their WIFMs are clear and merged with their values and belief system
- Encourage a committed leadership team that self participates, proactively supports the programme and actively encourages employee participation
- Highlight the values it holds like ‘A healthy lifestyle is a rewarding lifestyle’ – ‘Be a role model for others’ or ‘lead by example’
- Be high on celebrating success. Be loud on recognising employees who make progress in their personal goals. Make public call outs for employees that do a bit more, shine a bit more and bring a bit more energy to the programme and peers alike

Give less weightage to Extrinsic Motivation that runs on cash incentive pay out. It provides a short-lived burst of motivation that fades quickly and completely dies if incentives are pulled off. How many steps do you think an employee would take if some incentive amount was attached to completing 5,000 steps? 5,000 or at best 5,001? Would employees do 10,000? Just about a handful!

Identify Your Internal Champions

Identify employees from cross-functions who can be your voice to a larger group. They will help ensure the programme stays its course of intended ROI. This group can be titled ‘employee wellness club’ to carry out the following advantages in your favour:

- To build and sustain the wellness culture in the organisation
- Evaluate the programmes impact, influence and desired benefit

- Be your promoters and feed inputs on how things are moving at ground level
- Assist with reiterating the objectives and goals of the overall wellness programme
- Encourage peers and build the right momentum at a company level

“Unhealthy employees are more likely to disengage and are 43% more likely to have increased stress and anxiety,” says Dr Kevan Orvitz, CEO at MEGAComfort, a wellness tech company. Your internal champions can help you fight this concern effectively.

Strategic Communication – the most critical building block for wellness success!

According to a research by Harvard Business Review, 58% of organisations report that employees are unaware of the health and wellness benefits. Hence, your goal is to ensure that the programme information is both visible and accessible to all employees. To adopt a maximum positive impact, treat it how the marketing team would strategise communication for the release of a new product. Build loads of enthusiasm by selecting multiple communication channels through different internal campaigns.

Consider the following:

- Create attractive flyers, banners, inspirational emails from CEOs desk and posters to spread the eyeball reach on both internal intranet and social media alike
- Have wellness related short video clips uploaded on HRMS platform
- Use fancy slogans such as ‘Whacky Twisted Friday’ or ‘Shake a Leg Wednesday’
- Make it a part of your quarterly business review – evaluate and measure your programme
- Include it in your reward and recognition programme
- Collect & publish testimonials of employees benefiting from the programme

“HR must quickly rise to the occasion, tap into the openness of today's generation and in collaboration with other business stakeholders bring to life a unique 'Wellness Culture' specific to the organisation.”

- Involve leaders in your organisation to promote the efforts proactively
- Make communication happen both ways - roll out periodic survey for feedback to continuously refine the programme
- It must be a part of your new employee orientation

Communication on employee wellness programme must be strategic and ongoing with the need of constant marketing. If you do this smartly, you make a significant influence in creating your own wellness culture that can thrive beyond imagination!

Befriend Technology while capturing the Human Touch

Tech today is inseparable in almost everything we do, and the employee wellness programme is no different. What I would emphasise here is on the virtue of human touch. To make your wellness programme complete and meaningful you need to bring in the following attribute to your employees:

- Live consultations on topics like mental and emotional wellbeing
- Chat online option with a qualified doctor to address any employee and their family health query
- Online helpdesk support to understand insurance benefit or questions around deductibles to offering advice on managing anxiety to depression
- Parental advice, mother care and even managing child psychology
- Provide tools in your platform to allow employees to get their health screening done, use health calculators and health navigators while also taking a health risk assessment
- Merge this with personalised reports along with a professional to get proper guidance to make necessary lifestyle corrections

It is important to understand that we need to extend our programme and include diverse aspect of wellness –

mental, emotional, physical and psychological well-being as well.

Be tough to establish a Budget

Establishing a budget is a critical step as without designated funding, the programme will freeze to death. Put careful thought to all activities and spends involved and ensure you get a wellness programme budget as a default component in your HR budget – this must not be compromised or undermined in any way.

To bring it all together

The younger workforce is increasingly comfortable with discussing overall individual wellbeing and even mental health openly. They are forthcoming to act on it. HR must quickly rise to the occasion, tap into the openness of this expressive generation and in collaboration with other business stakeholders bring to life a unique 'Wellness Culture' specific to your organisation. Work stress is certainly on the rise and employee's mental mechanism to cope with it noticeably on a decline. Use the pointers above, blend technology and human touch to strike a right balance between employee wellbeing and organisational health – After all, one-third of our lives is attributed towards work, so, let's look at it as creating a 'way of life'! 

About the Author

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



Overcoming The Sombre Path To Failure

It is the onus of the HR leaders to run through Psychometric tests and related interventions in the organisation that ensures holistic health and development of their human capital.

BY KESHAV SRIDHAR

Stressful situations, strained relations, and the buckling point at which one gives in to the challenges in life and chooses the path of self-immolation is indeed painful. While it is tragic for the one who succumbs, it is equally horrendous for those who come to face with such disturbing news. As for the family members of the deceased, it is the most horrible experience to live with for the rest of their lives.

We have witnessed people who seemed to be bearing a strong personality, to whom the masses looked up to for inspiration, have ended their life suddenly. They leave behind several unanswered questions, and thereby, seed the doubts of existence deeper in the minds of their followers. Yes, life is very fragile and one should never take things for granted. You never know what your colleague could be going through in his/her life.

Often, your family, friends, relatives, colleagues, and your Boss would be engrossed in their own hustle. Also, discussions on mental health remain to be taboo even today. In our society, voicing a concern is seen as complaining, and sharing agonies is seen as a sign of weakness. Therefore, most people lose their natural self over a period of time, and hence, begin living off-grid.

Absence of freedom of expression

In the corporate arena, very few companies carry the culture wherein the freedom of expression is valued without any insecurities. Though most of the corporates have Psychologists empanelled with them as consultants, employees do not reach out to them for assistance. They dread that they would be mocked by their colleagues, despite assurances of confidentiality by the counsellor.

“Though most of the corporates have Psychologists empanelled with them as consultants, employees do not reach out to them for assistance since they dread that they would be mocked by their colleagues.”

It is observed that very few organisations have the maturity to acknowledge and accept the emotional challenges of their people, and offer genuine help. For a ‘Boss’, firing people could be the easiest thing to do. However, you never know the extent to which

you could be pushing someone to the edge of their life when you snatch away their livelihood. To all those overly critical people - life is not all black and white. There are different shades to it, and people experience a wide array of emotions as per the given situation and the changing times. One should remember we are mere particles in the flow of time and not absolute authorities, no matter what our ‘designation’ is in the family or the organisation.

Currently, the only difference between a Man and a Machine is ‘emotion’. Considering the current pace of progress in the field of Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning, it appears that even this uniqueness will be an attribute that will be undertaken by Machines. Everyone commits mistakes. The most important thing is whether one has realised their short-comings and is making efforts to improve and move on. As friends, relatives, and colleagues to someone who needs a helping hand, we need to be sensitive and mature enough to avoid overly judging people.

Whether it is stress owing to our own mistakes or because of the things done by someone, it is observed that we will be unable to live in peace if the people around us replayed and constantly reminded us of the disturbing events of the past.

The 'Forces' of Life

As per Applied Mechanics, 'Stress' is Force upon Area. The force that we experience in our daily life is, in fact, various energy transactions in every situation. In other words, these are the various shades of our emotions. The more localised the force, the more intense the stress. For instance, if one has gone through a traumatic experience in the past, and the event is replayed on repeat mode, either by oneself or the people around on a regular basis; this makes disturbing emotions (force) to become immensely localised i.e. related to a particular situation or experience. This cyclic and repeated turmoil of emotions cause a fatigue that things get unbearable over a period of time.

In cases of high depression, the world (area) is shrunk to only those people associated with the trauma/disturbance. Within no time, even these disturbing people fade away from their mind, and what clutches them very firmly is only the hard-hitting painful bursts of emotions, which becomes so paralyzing that it presses one brutally to question if it is really worth living a life of such quality!

And thus, the sooner one gets professional help, the better are the chances of coming out of such a dangerous phase of depression. It is noteworthy that when one is around such people, one must exercise due caution to ensure that the past is not replayed since it will trigger an avalanche of highly disturbing emotions in them. Discussions on achievements, failures, morals, status symbols etc. can be shoved away till the person is able to negotiate such things as a normal being. Hence, the biggest help you can do to anyone struggling with depression is to connect them with a well-qualified Healer.

Ways of spotting

Few ways to spot people who could be on the verge of going off-grid into depression, in your own team/family:



1. Such people are overly conscious about being judged by others. They become their own fiercest critics in everything they say and do. In fact, it is the voice of the people who had strongly criticised them in the past and were taken very seriously by them, which is why it has now become their voice of self-criticism.
2. As they live in the constant fear of being criticised, they obviously would try to avoid social gatherings. Also, because their voice (ability to speak out their mind) would have got suppressed by repeated experiences of stress, it would be an uphill task for them to even get ready and move out of their house to work in the real world.
3. Most likely, they would have frequent mood swings, and hence, they would latch on to some sort of habit, without which they cannot function normally. Most probably, it could be some substance abuse.
4. They would always want to be in the good books of all, as they are highly doubtful about their ability to fight back in case of any confrontation.
5. They would have fragmented speech and disarrayed thought process. However, by appearance, they may seem quite normal. Also, they would try to laugh a lot even in case of unexpected instances.
6. They would be trying to change the team, company or place very frequently, as they get very uncomfortable when people come closer to them over a period of

time. It is basically their fear of facing people and their criticism, manifesting in different ways.

7. They would not appear to be their true self, as they would have to always act to somehow get the acceptance of people around them. Passing through every day would be a big struggle for them.

8. In few highly critical cases, they would hear and see things which would exist only for them in their own world.

In this age of social media, whether we like it or not, most of us are in constant limelight, either for personal or professional reasons. And, more is our material needs, more is the urge to outsmart others. The reason for one's stress could be anything. It is unlikely that one would get professional help from their family. Hence, it is the onus of the HR leaders to run through Psychometric tests and related interventions in the organisation that ensures holistic health and development of their human capital. 

About the Author

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COVID Customisations: A Key to Wellbeing

The responsibility of wellbeing is with the self, family, organisation, and community as we prepare to coexist with COVID-19.

BY SWARNA SUDHA SELVARAJ

The birthdays and anniversaries celebrated together with friends and families in January, February and March of this year are historical and memorable moments because those who had these occasions after the lockdowns have only had quarantine celebrations digitally. In fact, many did not celebrate these events at all. Does this have to do something with wellbeing? Well, you know the answer.

Mobility is restricted during this global crisis, and human beings have been staying in the same place for a very long time, not because of their choice but out of compulsion. Psychologically, human beings like to do things out of their own free will. We come across situations in which people around us perform difficult activities easily and willingly if they are not forced to do so. However, when forced, even if the activity is simple, there is a high probability that mistakes will occur.

We are seeing a global crisis that has forced over 2.5 billion people in the workforce to work remotely. This crisis has already started creating extreme implications for the business sectors, especially in terms of managing costs and optimising the performance of their workforce.

Governments and organisations have created a charter on the wellbeing of people to make sure that possible support is provided to everyone so they can manage



this situation and come out of it successfully.

The Wellbeing Charter

A common trend seen across organisations is the three-phased approach towards managing the wellbeing of employees:

1. During the crisis
2. Return to work
3. Long-term plan

All of these wellbeing activities fall under these four broad categories:

1. Financial
2. Physical
3. Mental
4. Social

Physical safety has been the most important category in the first

phase, with extensions being provided for remote work and activities being conducted to ensure the work areas for those who are returning to work are highly sanitised. There were several videos of children and young adults celebrating the opening of food joints KFC and McDonald's in the UK last month. Employees of these food joints were assured of workplace safety by adopting many "contactless" delivery approaches.

Amongst many other commonly heard words, "furlough" and "layoffs" have become prevalent. There are organisations that are supporting employees with full payment of their salaries even though they are in furlough. Specific advances and

special relief funds are being provided for employees to manage their urgent expenses. Not many times do we hear about senior executives accepting pay cuts, but this was also gracefully done by leaders.

Virtual coffee connects on video have been part of the employee engagement and connection activities to support the mental wellbeing of employees. Multiple sessions on mental wellbeing by experts, services from trained counsellors, weekly engagements between team members and touchpoints of decision-makers to support with any quick decisions have all been in place across organisations as services for employees and their families. As I write this, I'm visualising those moments when we have seen employees joining sessions as families along with their children.

Organisations have come together to appreciate health care workers together and offer community support, and technology companies have also created digital solutions to the problems faced for helping the government in managing the pandemic.

As organisations get ready to welcome back more employees into workspaces and also implement their long-term plans, it is important that they don't go for a typical broader restructuring of policies, processes and systems, but instead have a segmented approach for customisation at a policy level too.

COVID Customisations

We are slowly moving ahead from all our short-term activities to long-term strategic direction to cope with the current situation and get businesses back on track. Needless to say, global organisations are also customising their plans based on the situations that every country is in.

Best Buy has transformed its process of posting company news in the elevators of its headquarters, previously called "The Lift", into a

digital posting now called "The Uplift". Such simple yet thoughtful changes could create a lasting impression. This is a great example of **customisation in communication** that can be suitable for all employees. This is very innovative and brings to life the visual effect of the elevator even when looking at it in the digital mode.

With employees becoming jaded by information overload, especially on learning, wellbeing webinars and programmes, we found a way to publish an **integrated employee engagement calendar** in TCS UK, which is available on the social collaboration platform for all employees. This has increased the engagement of employees and has brought **customised engagement** based on the interest of the employees.

Whether it is infrastructure or the internet that is going to replace the travel and petrol allowances or the hikes and promotions that will be withheld, offering transparency and **customisable benefit options** for employees to choose from, based on their personal requirements, might help employees in managing their wellbeing and also support their coworkers and families.

Special care to vulnerable employees could be an extended service, as there may be situations that could arise where a lack of this might lead to wellbeing issues.

Creative flexi-working policies that emerged in the gig economy are going to provide customisable options for employees to choose from. I would not be surprised if, in line with the "leave sharing" scheme, there may be a "salary sharing" scheme involving employees willingly supporting other colleagues of theirs who are laid off, mainly in sectors where layoffs are expected to extend over a longer time.

Beyond all this, the effort to keep in touch and celebrate success must be a part of every small and big team's agenda to stay connected and celebrate. Creating these

"throwback moments" is critical in ensuring the wellbeing of an employee.

A Joint Responsibility

If John does not make an effort to connect with his friends or his organisation to seek help when he needs it, it may lead to compromising his own wellbeing and that of his loved ones.

If 6-year-old Preetham needs more attention from his parents, and his parents are working very hard without even realising that Preetham needs attention, this could also create issues in wellbeing. A work-life balance and a commitment to it as a family would be essential.

If Jeanette was seeking help but could not find out where she needed to reach out in her organisation, then it could lead to wellbeing issues not only for Jeanette but also for her colleagues, as there is lack of clear, concise, and transparent communication.

If Martinez fell sick and was considered a COVID-19 case by the community, and they felt Martinez could be dangerous and were without empathy, this could also lead to wellbeing issues.

The responsibility of wellbeing is with the self, family, organisation, and community as we prepare to coexist with COVID-19. Self, of course, has the highest responsibility to stay calm and leverage resources, as and when required, to stay happy and keep growing. 

About the Author

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How to Get Started with People Analytics

Now more than ever, HR needs to continuously improve its capability to ensure that it remains relevant to the business. It must provide value that impacts business performance, the bottom line and a sustainable future. People analytics provides a way forward.

BY NADEEM KHAN

The COVID-19 pandemic has pushed HR to take on a more strategic role than ever before, where HR is now encouraged to use data and analytics to link people strategy to the business strategy and outcomes. To understand how to develop a people strategy, i.e. strategic workforce planning, it is essential to comprehend and implement people analytics as a strategic tool kit and a driving factor for this alignment.

What's all the fuss over People Analytics?

Traditionally, HR has relied heavily on 'intuition' and 'gut-feeling' when it comes to making people decisions that impact the business. However, the influx of digital technologies, big data and the internet of things have allowed organisations to track progress and feedback from not only their customers but also their workforce. Furthermore, whereas previously leaders determined the value of the business by looking at the narrow financials of a balance sheet, now, more than 80 per cent of this value has shifted off the balance sheet and into the intangibles, i.e., intellectual, social and human capital. This is why the role of HR has transformed into that of a strategic partner to the business, where people analytics plays a key

role in the process of business optimisation.

What is People Analytics?

To understand people analytics, one must understand human capital measurement (HCM) and reporting. HCM and reporting are about highlighting the current workforce composition and past trends of key metrics through dashboards that may include Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). Analytics, on the other hand, looks into the future by analysing current trends and using statistics to model the effects of a particular outcome.

Reporting focuses on past trends, whereas analytics focuses on future insights that can mitigate risk and influence decision-making. There is a misconception that by only reporting human capital, you will be able to identify and drive actionable insights. Research shows that HR spends too much time focusing on basic reporting tasks to the detriment of analysing this data.

Getting Started with People Analytics

Before getting started with people analytics, it's important to understand that this process is a journey, not a destination, which usually begins with reporting and moves towards predictive people

analytics. Now, let's have a look at the three most important steps to getting started on this journey:

(1) Identifying a Business Problem

HR has been blamed time and again of not understanding the business and focusing too narrowly on itself as a department aloof from the business operations. Hence, the first step in the process will be to identify a business problem that needs to be solved rather than an HR remit. Remember that people analytics is not about HR; it is about business performance and how to improve it. For this purpose, use the following six questions to assess and prioritise the business problem.

- i. Is the project critical and important to the business?
- ii. Is the data available?
- iii. Is the data easy, inexpensive and not resource-intensive to access?
- iv. Is the data clean and trusted?
- v. Are there significant risks if ignored?
- vi. Is the project valuable in financial terms?

If you score "yes" on all six aspects, your business problem is worth investing your time and resources towards as this will create a high-impact and low-effort project, enabling you to focus on a quick win. Nevertheless, it's always



important to ask, “Why are we looking at our attrition rates, and how does that impact our business performance in terms of a financial impact?”

(2) Collaborating with the Business

This journey will most likely involve extracting people and business data from multiple disparate systems and unifying these disparate sources into one single repository. In some cases, you may not have harmonised definitions, metrics and measures throughout the business. Your role is to synthesise all the data and information into one whole system. This will require HR to move out of their silos, collaborate and learn from the wider business. As finance and marketing have already been on this journey of forecasting the future, there is much HR can learn from both their wins and their mistakes.

(3) Driving Continuous Improvements

People analytics is a process that requires continuous improvements on three levels: HR’s capability, data and technology. Although the process begins with reporting, this should move towards predictive people analytics that brings strategic

“Whereas previously leaders determined the value of the business by looking at the narrow financials of a balance sheet, now, more than 80 per cent of this value has shifted off the balance sheet and into the intangibles, i.e., intellectual, social and human capital.”

foresight into the business. Throughout this process, HR will need to evaluate its own capability and ensure that it aligns with the business needs. Initially, we might find disparate and scattered data throughout the business, but HR must take the lead role in organising the data with clarity via dashboards accessible across the business as the process unfolds. It is also important to add the need for a people analytics leader who ensures that data-driven culture is cultivated in the organisation. Lastly, the key role in this whole process is technology. With old and clunky HRIS systems that provide nothing valuable to the

business, HR may need to invest wisely on developing or outsourcing a people analytics solution that shows business results. All this is a continuous journey and should not be considered as an end to a destination.

With the rapid advent of artificial intelligence and machine learning, organisations are now seeking to make permanent connections between core HR functions, marketing, finance and business performance to improve organisational practices. Now more than ever, HR needs to continuously improve its capability to ensure that it remains relevant to the business. It must provide value that impacts business performance, the bottom line and a sustainable future. People analytics provides a way forward. 

About the Author

Nadeem Khan is the author of *'Introduction to People Analytics – A practical guide to data-driven HR'*. He helps HR leaders become Strategic Business Partners so that they can have more business impact, income and growth. Unlike many others who focus solely on data analytics, Nadeem enables HR professionals to become business savvy, influential and use the power of intuition. He can be reached on LinkedIn @Nadeem Khan.

Call Logs Of An HR Enthusiast

In a recent survey by Josh Bersin, MIT Sloan Management Review and Culture X in the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, HR Departments polled the physical well-being of employees as the topmost area of priority and mental well-being was relegated to the bottom of the pile. Employees, on the other hand, polled job security as the top-most area of concern which preceded their physical well-being. Thus, it is evident that the priorities among HR departments and employees are vastly discernible, and more so, in such testing times.

BY **DR. ANAMIKA SINHA AND DR. JALLAVI PANCHAMIA**

It had been a month since the lockdown was enforced in almost all the states in India. After going through the phases of denial, anxiety, and finally acceptance, I started to find my focus at work. And yet, isolation, dual roles of work and home, skill upgradation, and many other similar demands were beginning to vex me. In my own family, someone was either “zombied” to the laptop screen or she/he had turned into a couch potato, watching TV ceaselessly. Even I was attempting to cope with myself. I did what I always do when I am lost, called my friends who are a source of inspiration and my intellectual backbones. It seemed befitting to seek their sense-making processes during this seemingly tumultuous and rocky period.

My first call was to Mini Menon, with whom I shared the POSH IC (Internal Committee). She responded on COVID-19 and its fallout in the future. She expressed great disappointment at how people assume that sexual harassment ends at physical distancing and that harassment is within

‘boundaries’ and not beyond physical harm. She said, “I am overwhelmed with people saying that with the lockdown there will be no work for you as a part of the IC team. Poor souls don't understand that when people have felt lack of control, have been monitored and chased by the government and the police, brought down to Maslow's levels of basic needs, some will innovate methods of bullying, including sexual harassment. Moreover, social media gives them the isolation and private space for such acts. We will have more cases once they have made sense of what is around them in the immediate. Worst is that the legal and social system will not be equipped and aware of how to deal with it. We need to find a way to educate both the men and the women on what might be a fallout of such long isolation and being in the anxiety.”

While what she mentioned seemed more like her fears and assumptions, I felt that similar incidents were being reported in other contexts. The confidence that

the acts would not be noticed or punished made perpetrators to experiment. Further, a quick look at a few articles in Psychology from various magazines suggested that there were increased incidents of domestic violence during the lockdown. Overall, her revelations bothered me.

I soon contacted Gaurav, my coach. He narrated how he was coping with the ongoing crisis. He said, “I see people operating from a need to protect. Their behaviour is guided by their primitive reptilian brains. There are too many unsorted emotions. Under COVID-19, people are adjusting to children screaming in the background while they are addressing an important strategy meeting, mopping and cooking, and are coping with an overarching fear of joblessness. Newspapers and WhatsApp have been circulating misinformation; salary cuts, economic meltdowns are often being discussed in the open which makes them insecure. The new skill in leaders would be to remain humane, shift focus from the bottom line to people and “connect”- the basic human behaviour. It is important to communicate actively to build trust and seek loyalty by extending loyalty. A new intelligence - beyond intelligence quotient (IQ), Emotional Quotient (EQ), Spiritual Quotient (SQ) and Social Quotient (SQ) - ‘Compassion quotient’ is needed in leaders now. Leaders, under this crisis, would have to prioritise continuity over performance. Performance management would shift to purpose and mission, rather than KRAs or leaving it to people to decipher. Servant Leadership with resilience would evolve. Leaders that are focused on power and position would lose loyalty. Investment in people will have a dedicated team to work when the lockdown is removed and work returns to normalcy.”

This conversation with Gaurav filled me with hope and positivity, and his words were vastly reassuring, to say the least.

At this point, I felt as if I were a host on reality TV, and our next contestant was a College Professor. She shared her excitement as well as fears around holding classes online. A quick look at LinkedIn, confirmed the increased postings of courses done on Udemy, Edex etc. She seemed to be almost certain that even after the lockdown has been lifted, we would continue to work remotely, through the 'online' mode. A close look at the increased usage of WebEx and MS team to over 700% ¹ since 16th March was indicative enough on the future of training and learning function, including the education system.

This resonated, albeit in a fast forward mode, on the prediction of future of work by Katz, a senior Harvard Professor, way back in the 90s. He had mentioned that technology will encourage flexiwork, multi-assignment, low loyalty to the employer, high loyalty to work and Gig economy. Big data and blockchain AI, Digital work, digital solutions in HR may get real sooner. The advantage would be that a shared, competent resource could be a cost-saving mechanism for firms and institutions. Nevertheless, it would put added burden on employees to get competent and reskill on a continuous basis!

I also spoke to a recruiter about emerging trends on withdrawing campus placements, delaying the new joining as well as onboarding online. I wondered whether her life was also in a big translucent mess! She mentioned that she felt guilty at times for being the mouthpiece for her company's decisions on delays or withdrawals. Often angry at the placement heads who gave her a mouthful on ethics in recruitment at this point, she mentioned that she had acquired new skills to be self-reliant and self-disciplined. She had started meditation and exercise. And this had emerged as a blessing in disguise.

The next contestant in my reality show was Mr Nikhil Maini,

an OD and OMR consultant. He said, *"Virtual teams mean virtual empathy. As work gets more digital, and work from home becomes a reality, organisations would have to evolve to include agility, better communication and alignment, coupled with very strong leadership. HR will need a digital mindset where even fun would no longer remain organic but would rather have to be digitally planned. The role of the supervisor's empathy and resilience has been well researched and reported in large-scale disaster studies in academics. In the present crisis which by nature is sociopsychological, leaders will need to engage teams with virtual skills. They will need to mindfully replace virtual methods with softening of facial features, a warm hug, resonated breathing etc. Access to bodily and non-verbal cues which we have in face to face meeting will no longer be available which they would otherwise do in face to face meetings."*

The last hot seat contestant was an NGO worker from Janvikas; one of the largest and oldest NGOs

of Gujarat. She spoke extensively on the challenges confronted by migrant workers and the vulnerabilities faced by them - hunger, poor access to government schemes, information asymmetry, access to phone and digital cash, social stigma, and the feeling of being locked up in a strange land without daily earnings, and no possibility of going back home. She felt that while community kitchens and community lodging provided by volunteers and NGOs was only a shortterm respite for them, a long-term sustainable plan is awaited from the government for this sector.

After her call, I felt that there was no denying that the scenario today will change us forever. Those of us who are open to accepting and adjusting to change would see this as an opportunity, and those who are caught in the "ifs and buts" will only experience greater confusion. Notwithstanding, of course, a strategy for returning to work, coupled with re-engagement needed to be worked out. Going forward, we would have to reinvent ourselves repeatedly at every level.



¹ <https://www.marketwatch.com/story/zoom-microsoft-cloud-usage-are-rocketing-during-coronavirus-pandemic-new-data-show-2020-03-30>



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Analysis By **Ravi Mishra**

Many a times, big changes happen by default. In recent times, after the internet revolution, COVID-19 has impacted a large part of the society and has presented a gloomy outlook to both the personal and professional front. The very question of survival has come into the ambit and forced people to fall in line, be it the forced lockdown or social distancing. Things are however still in motion and people seem to be adhering to the “Fail fast – Learn fast” principle.

The revelation of Mini as a POSH IC member is hardly frightening. We have witnessed media reports and social media posts on increased incidents of domestic violence during the lockdown, not ignoring numerous incidents of sexual harassment. One strongly believes that things will take its course to settle since the process of transition from one phase to another is an unpredictable and significant jump. An individual's social behaviour is complex, and hence, cannot be altered by design, since it evolves due to several internal and external factors. Therefore, HR leaders are required to educate employees on alignment to work in new realities and create the needed framework to address various issues and gender discrimination which were hitherto not experienced.

Gaurav has rightly pointed out that the imposition of fear psychosis or prevailing negative vibes getting

circulated in one's circle. Even though it is seen to be untrue on most occasions, it has created a lot of stress in people's life, and has led to foul play either for the survival of those who are weak or has been used as a power of position to exploit the situation in their favour. At times, people have no option but to accept such harassment, either related to work at home or due to their internal family related pushes in personal life. However, this is not a new thing but have increased in current situations due to constraints of joblessness, economy meltdown, salary cuts, bleak future etc. Everybody wants to secure his/her survival that leads to a compromise with the values in the absence of inbuilt safeguards in the system and lack of will in governance to address as a priority.

When talking of purpose and values in life, we simply ignore the context. We can relate human behaviour and the compromise in the given circumstances to the real life accounts by Victor Frankl in *Man's Search for Meaning*. People treat such priceless things as mere vanities, and one has come across victims having no regret, but accepting it as a reality of life. In instances where one of the spouses has a lost his/her job, it has led to reduced earnings with increased expenses.

At the same time, many managers who are working from home have a lot of good things to share. They

have managed to display great empathy and compassion to support their team members. They understand the compulsion and challenges of work from home, such as space constraints, health-related challenges and inadequacy of medical support, children not accepting the new reality, no domestic help etc. Many business leaders have also come forward to support their employees in such an hour of crisis. Managers have developed to be emotionally intelligent to handle such turbulent times with utmost care. This is a mere reflection of the organisation culture.

It is evident that we ignored the writing on the wall. As has been rightly predicted by Katz in the *Future of Work* or *The Shift: The Future of Work is Already Here* by Gratton, the new normal will have a huge impact on our lives. We, however, can anticipate a lot of positives. 

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 **Pramod K Tripathi**



“Tough Time Teaches you the best lessons of life”

In today's COVID-19 affected economy, controlling costs, maintaining competitiveness, and the survival of business are paramount, and hence, companies are going back to the nitty-gritty.

The protagonist is vying to highlight several situations (due to the COVID-19 pandemic) confronted by individuals irrespective of the sector they are in. She saw that the people she called were experiencing a similar status quo and were confronted with the same situation involving their family members. To understand the flip side of the corona-confined circumstances of various people, she called Mini Menon, her co-team member in the POSH Internal committees (IC). Mini spoke about the modus operandi of sexual harassment when people are in seclusion. She also advocated teaching men and women the impact of loneliness and its repercussions. Mini's thoughts were more on the deleterious aspects of a confined environment with worries and conventions. She also cited incidents to indicate that intimate partner violence was on an increase. Gaurav, the protagonist's coach narrated the present scenario, “people are in fear of job security, salary cut, due to miscommunication of social media.” He was unambivalent when he stated that at this juncture, it is vital to build trust in people and imbibe the compassion

quotient in Leaders, other than intelligence quotient, emotional quotient, spiritual quotient, and social quotient. He intensely advocated the dos and don'ts of Leaders in the prevailing scenario by illustrating the shift of Performance Management and investments on people with positivity. This conversation with Gaurav sparkled with optimism and coolness. HR folks will recall the line of Katz, the senior Harvard Professor, that technology will encourage flexi-work, multi-assignment, low loyalty to employer, high loyalty to work and Gig economy.

Further, during the conversation with her recruiter, the latter expressed her anguish at the placement heads on giving lectures on ethics and extending the major points, rather than focusing on employability of new talents. She was happy with the skill/traits she had gained during this period of lockdown since she felt self-reliant and disciplined with an amplitude of meditation and workout. This conversation, in fact, amped the caller.

Nikhil Maini, an OD and OMR consultant, said “*virtual teams mean virtual empathy*”, and highlighted the major chore for organisations and Leaders too, by adopting the best mode of communication, empathy, trust and many more in such unprecedented circumstances. Lastly, the worker from the largest and oldest NGOs

broadly underlined the challenges of migrant workers and their dire needs of livelihood etc.

In the given narrative, HR professionals had tried to evaluate the unique position of all those who have been forced to stay indoors. These professionals were exasperated leading to wide-ranging feelings and conditions of each in this epidemic condition with their unprecedented responses. There is a stark variance between what work from home meant as an uncompelled working arrangement, and what it has emerged in reality in the present situation. An operating archetypal that has been implemented globally, has had an impact on employee know-how, performance and finally on the outcome. 

About the Author

Pramod Tripathi is Deputy General Manager-HR, Bajaj Energy Limited and has been associated with the Bajaj Group since 2011. He comes with a diverse experience and has worked in entities such as Aditya Birla Group, Jaypee Group, Visaka Industries, Sahara India etc. Pramod carries proficiency in L&D, PMS, Policy formulation and Capability Building.



A Paradigm Shift

With economies having endured numerous tectonic developments, organisations had to take a closer look at their work norms, values and ethics, principles and policies, adversely affecting many a people issue.

BY **DEBJANI ROY**

I recall the days when I was working with Bharti Telecom way back in 1998-99. The Corporate office was located in a farmhouse opposite the Qutab Minar in Mehrauli in Delhi. Often, we would leave the office late in the evening, and we would find the Qutab Minar flushed in orange light, a beautiful sight to behold, courtesy the Archaeological Survey of India. Looking back, I feel this was a moment of 'wellness' of the best kind for us, since we carried this very image back home, and were motivated enough to come back the next day to

start afresh. Besides, innumerable employee programmes were floated internally from time to time by the incumbent HR department that created the general aura of employee wellness all around.

Therefore, it is a fact that Employee Wellness was not a new subject to the corporate world back then. However, probably in the last 10 years, wellness has been expressed more in terms of motivation and engagement activities – directly as well as indirectly, affecting employee morale and belongingness within a

company. Certain retention programmes were also aimed at uplifting the spirits of the people at the workplace, making them to feel valued. Together, engagement and retention programmes acted as adhesives that stitched up the fabric of the so termed 'Wellness' in those early days.

Wellness in the present day

That was then. Corporates have come a long way from those Golden days of employees working at even paces, with performance pressures being just at the right levels, and adequate rewards and recognition coming one's way. Today's workplace is vastly different - one that is fraught with huge performance pressures, corporate politics, norms of acceptable behaviours, psychological isolation (what with the new Work From Home patterns or Remote Working), insecurity of jobs, lack of work-life balance, and much more. With economies having endured numerous tectonic developments, organisations had to take a closer look at their work norms, values and ethics, principles and policies, adversely affecting many a people issue. Thus, we live in times of great stretch and stress today. An employee getting into the office on a regular morning no longer assures the continuity of his/her employment the next day owing to multiple factors. An employee, despite putting in 365 days of rigorous performance of a reasonable kind, is on most occasions, unable to lay claim to rewards whatsoever. If at all, he/she lands up with single-digit percentages as increment. Expensive MDPs and AMPs are no longer the order of the day, with organisations strictly believing that the impetus for learning is an employee prerogative. There is cut-throat competition for jobs, with the supply of manpower far outnumbering the number of available opportunities. And in all this – the employee suffers a rough turn throughout.

The hour of crisis

This has led to aberrations of different kinds at the workplace. Employee well-being - physical and mental/psychological - is at a crisis point. And this has rung alarm bells across many organisations. As a result – there is currently a renewed focus on 'Employee Wellness' all across, this time 'Wellness' interpreted more in letter than in spirit. This is further backed by research that tells us that the health status of employees directly influences the work behaviour, attendance, and on-the-job performance in an organisation. Therefore, improving employee well-being does result in a more productive workforce, and hence, 75 percent of high-performing companies today measure employee health status as a key part of their overall risk management strategy. This has also led to the Management believing in and HR executing many active wellness programmes. Besides productivity, other areas which are positively influenced through 'Wellness' are employee morale, recruitment and retention of employees, reduced absenteeism, reduced health risks, improved camaraderie amongst workers, better work-life balance, improved mental sustenance and many more.

What are 'Wellness' programmes? Simply explained, employees are the most critical and invaluable assets for an organisation. Ensuring their excellent mental and physical health sets employees up to perform well. The health and wellness of the employees usually have a direct effect on the productivity and profits of the company. Most organisations today are aware of this and are therefore prepared to invest reasonably enough on such programmes, dubbed 'Wellness'. Even if the good effects of such 'Wellness' programmes are hard to detect and spot at the first glance, employees who are usually healthy bring a whole range of health benefits to others and to the Organisations that they work for.

“Improving employee well-being does result in a more productive workforce, and hence, 75 percent of high-performing companies today measure employee health status as a key part of their overall risk management strategy.”

“With some amount of creativity and innovative planning, HR professionals can improve employees’ health status, resulting in a healthier, more engaged and more productive workforce.”

Kinds of ‘Wellness’ programmes range from:

- **Provision of healthy Food and Diets** (Organic, tasty, Office canteens)
- **Assistance (Rehab) facilities in-house** (for tobacco especially; prescription drugs etc.)
- **Sleep facility** (Nap corners)
- **Fitness Centres and programs** (Yoga; Zumba; Meditation etc.)
- **Exploring Transit options** (Cycling)
- **Employee Assistance Programs** (chat/online Counselling for depression, GAD, Stress, substance abuse etc.)
- **Wellness challenges and adventures** (drinking more water; reimbursements; weight loss; immunity workshops etc.) making every possible effort at creating a heal
- **Paramedical Services** (massage therapy)
- **Culture curries** (Grafitti walls/ boards; reading rooms; art therapy)
- **Social Volunteering**

Walking the extra mile

Organisations today are walking that extra mile in creating healthy working communities for themselves. As stated earlier, workplace wellness programmes are not new and have evolved tremendously over the past few years. We are talking about programmes that go beyond smoking cessation classes and health screenings. Significant examples being :

1. At Accenture, employees are offered Teledoc services, wherein they can ask health related questions to a doctor, 24/7.
2. At Asana, naps are a great offer to employees in one of the resting rooms to rest, rewire and bounce back at work. Daily Yoga programmes and free Gym memberships are on offer as well at this software company. The in-house culinary team serves 3 delicious meals every day, and also boasts of an inhouse nutritionist for employees to refer.

3. At Intuit, the company’s “Fit for Life” programme offers meditation and mindfulness classes as reimbursable expenses as well as incentives for employees engaging in stress-reduction habits, like taking a walk, practising breathing exercises, or listening to calming music.

The list can go on, citing Google, Microsoft, Draper, SAS, Deloitte etc. Many Indian organisations that have also embarked on this conscious journey are Aditya Birla Group, Kirloskar Group, Anand Mahindra Group, Infosys, Wipro etc.

An organisation’s health and prosperity are directly influenced by the health and wellbeing of its employees. In today’s competitive business environment, it is critical that organisations step forward and invest in human capital as a competitive advantage. To contain health care costs, managers should take an active leadership role in measuring the health status and then developing and promoting wellness strategies based on those data. With some amount of creativity and innovative planning, HR professionals can improve employees’ health status, resulting in a healthier, more engaged and more productive workforce. And with that lethal combination of productivity and profits resulting from a long-term vision of creating mentally and physically fit workforce communities, organisations would be in a position to sustain a formidable presence for themselves for years to come. 

About the Author

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



The Need For An Overhaul

The current times call for an overhaul in the tried and tested ways of working, and interaction. It is therefore important for organisations and individuals to recognise that it takes time to acclimatise.

BY **KALPANA BANSAL**

The COVID-19 pandemic has ushered in a slew of measures such as social distancing, work from home, extended lockdowns and many others. These measures have had a significant impact on our mental and emotional wellbeing. Employees at all levels are dealing with issues such as fear, anxiety, and depression. This is further exacerbated by the lack of social connect as a result of being away from work and peers. There is also an onslaught of new practices such as virtual learning and working, as well as the pressures of balancing work from home and childcare responsibilities, with combined financial losses due to pay cuts, increment freeze and layoffs.

The economic, psychological, and social consequences by such an unprecedented event viz. the COVID-19 pandemic has led to repercussions for the human race, calling for an increased focus on the concept of well-being and self-care in uncertainty. The pandemic in itself, while being neutral to demographics, has introduced or amplified issues such as socio-economic inequalities, gender biases, and discrimination which are associated with deeper human rights. Many of the guidelines issued by governments to citizens are contingent on access to food, water, sanitation, healthcare, and social security schemes for survival without having to leave home to work.

The Challenges of Work from Home

Even with the 'white-collared' workforce, work from home amplifies the challenges of urban housing, tiny homes with two working members, children wanting access to laptop/broadband while the parents are working, no domestic help, and extended working hours that eat into personal time. However, organisations are turning a blind



“The organised workforce which has long lived by the time-honoured notion subscribed to by western management practices which honour management hierarchy, subordination, goal setting and productivity measurement, is suddenly facing an unexpected dilemma.”

eye to the travails of existence without domestic help and the daily uncertainty of sudden changes to business plans. The pandemic also increases demands for a home with enhanced standards of cleanliness and to provide basic needs like food and water for its members. Landlord pressures to vacate homes, EMI pressures, and changes in retirement milestones due to decreased earnings, have all led to a great deal of pressure on the average employee. This has resulted in an uptake in cases of chronic stress, substance abuse, domestic violence, anxiety, depression, and selfharm, leading to significant loss of productivity, increased absenteeism, and conflict in relationships owing to such mental health challenges.

Families of four to eight members are spending days at a stretch at home, in highly confined spaces, with hardly any social interaction. This has led to disagreements, fights, and arguments that can cause friction, and take a toll on mental health. One of the key aspects of this closeted time is that it has increased physical proximity while reducing the quality of time spent with one another. Couples are battling chores, homework, financial pressures, constrained spaces, office discussions in the living room. This has changed the complexion of the relationship levers and rendered it dry and monotonous.

Pertinence of mental health

Mental health emerged at the forefront of global health priorities of this decade. Countries, communities, and organisations, however, have not treated it on an equal footing with physical health in terms of budget, advocacy and practice. Global estimates put the allocation of health budgets to mental health at less than 7% of the overall health budgets. The current pandemic has accelerated the move towards an increased focus on mental well-being. The arbitrary division of physical and mental health focus and the propensity to brush

over mental health issues has created an untenable situation of unmet human needs and violations of human rights across the world.

The organised workforce which has long lived by the time-honoured notion subscribed to by western management practices which honour management hierarchy, subordination, goal setting and productivity measurement, is suddenly facing an unexpected dilemma. Avenues to express unmet psychological needs, the need for space, the need for acceptance, and the time to grapple with their inner demons have reduced. It has also brought attention to the lack of focus on mental well-being and has resulted in a new narrative for mental health. This has resulted in a paradigm shift in the evolution of a human rights framework that considers mental well-being. Sustained efforts by the WHO, and the World Bank have resulted in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, making mental health a human development imperative.

With a rapid increase in mental health cases, organisations are called on to shift their attention to address mental health challenges faced by employees through action on the social and psycho-social determinants of health.

Organisations are taking a 3-pronged approach to this challenge by:

- Protecting mental health by minimising work-related risk factors such as conflict, stress or uncertainty
- Promoting mental health by enhancing work satisfaction and providing opportunities for employees to build on their strengths
- Addressing mental health problems through counselling and EAP programmes.

This approach is cascaded through many interventions such as:

- **Communication:** Building an awareness of the workplace environment, the challenges of

“Organisations have the responsibility to support individuals with mental challenges in the current time. Proactive methods such as flexible hours, worklife balance, addressing negative workplace dynamics, and effective communication can help to ameliorate the issue.”

virtual work and the uncertainties, and crafting stories of warriors and providing a sense of community

- **Walking the Talk:** Organisational leaders set the tone in terms of behaviour and action by recognising that employees have their own fragilities and provide room for acknowledging that vulnerability and not expecting them to be on top of their game at all times.
- **Learning from best practices:** Look at other companies who have acted and replicate what's working
- **Demographic Segmentation of Employees:** Understanding the opportunities and needs of individual employees, so that multiplicity of solutions emerges, and employees are not treated with a “one size fits all” approach
- **Building Support Resources:** Spread awareness of sources of support and where people can find help, such as a counselling helpline, chatbots, community chats, listening to podcasts.
- **Sensitisation of people managers:** Identification of distress, early warning signals, harmful use of psychoactive substances and illness and equipping them to be a point of reference
- **Examining policies and practices:** Organisational practices that support a healthy work-life balance;
- **Recognition Initiatives:** Recognising and rewarding the contribution of employees.

Taking proactive steps

Mental health interventions need to be rendered as a central part of an integrated health and well-being strategy that covers prevention, early identification, support and rehabilitation. Leadership alignment and acceptance of the difficulties of acknowledging is key to the effectiveness of any intervention around mental health. Organisations

have a responsibility to support individuals with mental challenges in the current time. Proactive addressing of issues such as flexible hours, work-life balance, respect for personal time, addressing negative workplace dynamics, and supportive and confidential communication can help to ameliorate the issue.

The current times call for an overhaul in the tried and tested ways of working, and interaction. It is important for organisations and individuals to recognise that it takes time to acclimatise and this would likely impact the work delivery. Some things may slip up or be less than perfect, and it is alright to take it slow and easy. Establishing new routines, re-charting new ways of doing things and reprioritising earlier commitments might require that we allow ourselves some time to take a deep breath, and may require us to proactively reach out to our leaders and inform them about the challenges. The good part about all of us being in this together is that managers are more understanding of the travails and are more willing to accommodate, and its best to deal with the issue sooner rather than later. 

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.



Exploring Force Majeure In Employment Relationships

BY ANSHUL PRAKASH, ABHINAV RASTOGI AND DEEKSHA MALIK

If there is one thing that COVID-19 has reminded us, it is that we cannot predict everything. In its fullblown shape, the pandemic disrupted businesses, and several entrepreneurs made attempts to resort to *force majeure* clauses in their commercial arrangements with third parties to get some respite from their obligations.

Force Majeure has been defined in Black's Law Dictionary as an "event or effect that can be neither anticipated nor controlled." Generally speaking, a *force majeure* event is understood as one that presents

unforeseeable circumstances wherein a party to a contract would be excused from performing its obligations. The concept is often distinguished from a mere hardship in performing one's contractual obligations, and it instead refers to an unexpected turn of events that frustrates the very basis of formation of a contract. In the context of the COVID-19 outbreak, there have been several discussions around the question whether the pandemic could be considered as a *force majeure* event. While some answer in the affirmative, it is imperative to note

that from the judiciary's standpoint, this defence is not fool-proof. Several factors, including the intention of the parties, the purpose of engagement, the local situation, and the possible means of fulfilment of the terms of the contract would be examined by a court before allowing relief to a party.

Examining the Indian employment and labour laws

Perhaps, one concept under Indian employment and labour laws that can be considered closest to a *force majeure* event is lay-off. Lay-off is envisaged under the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947 (IDA) (a statute that covers every establishment wherein business or calling of employers is carried on) to mean a situation wherein the employer is unable to provide work to its employees for reasons beyond its control, such as shortage of raw materials, break-down of machinery or natural calamity. When such an event is triggered, the employer can prevent employees from reporting to work and can accordingly refuse to pay wages to them, for wages is paid only in return for the services rendered by the employee. However, the employer may be required to pay compensation to the employee for the loss of work. Where the establishment is a nonseasonal factory/mine/ plantation employing 50 or more workmen (nonmanagerial employees), the quantum of compensation and the period during which such compensation is to be paid is prescribed under the IDA. For other establishments, the compensation must be contractually agreed, or else the employer would be required to pay compensation up to the whole of the wages payable to the workmen.

The question often asked is whether an employer can *suspend* the contract of employment during a *force majeure* event (employers may not want to terminate the contract altogether, as they would want to reinstate the employees upon the situation returning to normalcy). Courts in India have usually answered in a cautious manner. In *Rajasthan Trade Union Kendra v JK Synthetics Kendra* [(1996) ILLJ 347 Raj], the court observed that there could be circumstances resulting in an

employer's inability to provide work to its employees, but the result of the same is not cessation of employment relationship, but only a suspended animation for the time being, post which the employee is required to be reinstated at work. Similarly, in the case of *Auro Engineering Private Limited v RA Gadekar* [(1992) ILLJ 693 Bom], the Bombay High Court dealt with the issue of nonconsideration of annual increments for a period when the employer had laid off its employees (in particular, non-managerial employees) at the time of determining their retrenchment compensation. The court observed as follows:

"Time and tide would not cease to flow, [and] increments would not cease to be earned. The only consequence of the contract of employment being suspended, by way of layoff, strike or lock-out, would be that the employees would have no right to demand wages, nor would the employer be liable to make payment of wages during such period."

What emanates from these observations is that even if lay-off is considered as a temporary suspension in employment, the continuity of service (which assumes significance for the purpose of availing several benefits) under the contract of employment remains unaffected by a lay-off/*force majeure* event. Indeed, several statutes recognise the continuity of service period of an employee even during break in work occasioned by a lay-off. Importantly, a person is deemed to be in continuous service for the purpose of receiving:

- a) retrenchment compensation under IDA;
- b) earned leave entitlements under several state-specific shops and establishments statutes (such as the one applicable in Maharashtra and Karnataka);
- c) maternity benefit under the Maternity Benefit Act, 1961; and
- d) bonus under the Payment of Bonus Act, 1965.

It is imperative to note that most of the labour laws (and consequently the entitlements based on continuous



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service) are aimed at benefitting non-managerial employees or lowpaid employees. For managerial employees or employees earning a fairly high remuneration, employers have the flexibility to determine how the employment relationship would be treated in a *force majeure* event in accordance with the contractual provisions.

Considerations while incorporating and using a force majeure clause in an employment contract

In view of the above legal position, a *force majeure* clause in an employment contract should be very carefully drafted. The first step should be to identify the target category of employees who would be governed by the terms of this clause, for, as mentioned above, the ability of the employer to enforce a *force majeure* clause to its fullest extent would depend on the applicable laws governing the relevant category of employees. If the targeted employees are those holding a managerial position, the relevance of a *force majeure* clause is of paramount importance as the relationship in an unforeseen event would be governed by such clause. Of course, an employer can draw guidance from the extant legal regime, even if not applicable to managerial employees, to ensure that the clause in question passes judicial scrutiny. Once the target category is identified, it would also be important to check if there is any other arrangement (such as a settlement agreement / collective bargaining agreement entered with a trade union) that may impact the operation of the *force majeure* clause or require the employer to notify before invoking the same.

The next consideration pertains to the kind of events the employer would like to specify as *force majeure*, and the consequences that would ensue from invocation of the same. The specific events to triggering a *force majeure* situation should be carefully set out with limited discretion accorded to the employer. A rather vague or all-encompassing

clause would be difficult to enforce, especially in a country like India where employers and employees are not considered to be in an equal bargaining position and employment laws are more often than not interpreted in a pro-employee manner. Similarly, the consequences ensuing from the *force majeure* clause should be carefully thought through and well negotiated in advance with the concerned employee. A suspension of employment resulting from a *force majeure* event may be subject to statutory stipulations, as discussed earlier. On the other hand, while termination of employment can be envisaged as a consequence, one may have to caveat its invocation with the prevailing legal position. For instance, when the COVID-19 outbreak reached India and the nationwide lockdown was announced, the government of Karnataka passed an order prohibiting termination of employment as a result of the lockdown (which was later withdrawn). Further, invocation of a vague *force majeure* clause to terminate the services of an employee may be regarded as an act bereft of good faith and a colourable exercise of the employer's rights.

In any event, invocation of a *force majeure* provision should be done cautiously. An examination of the event, the impact on the employer's industry, the job specifications of the concerned employees, any alternative means of fulfilling the terms of employment etc. should be assessed before resorting to the relevant clause.

In India, employment contracts rarely provide for a *force majeure* clause. Given the limited industry practice and judicial approach in this regard, one needs to look to the future and carefully observe how the jurisprudence evolves on this front. Until then, employers are advised to take the cautious route and not treat employment contracts at par with commercial contracts as far as *force majeure* events are concerned. 



BY ANSHUL PRAKASH AND PRACHI VIJAY



Prachi Vijay is an Associate in the Employment, Labour and Benefits (ELB) Practice in the Mumbai office.

Q In furtherance of the lockdown orders in the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Union Ministry of Home Affairs vide order dated 29 March 2020 (MHA Order), and various state governments issued advisories/orders (State Advisories/Orders) requesting employers to not terminate the employment of their employees or reduce their wages/salaries during the lockdown period. What is the status of these advisories/orders vis-à-vis labour laws in India?

A The Union and State governments have issued various advisories on aspects relating to termination, reduction in wages, leaves, etc. While it is suggested that these advisories issued mostly under the Disaster Management Act, 2005, must be adhered to, considering the exigency and unprecedented situations that we are encountering currently, these advisories cannot be said to supplant the applicable laws that specifically govern issues pertaining to employer-employee relationship. The employers may still invoke the provisions such as lay-off and retrenchment. That said, establishments need to be mindful of the sensitivities involved and must avoid arbitrary actions as far as reduction in potential headcount is concerned.

Q Can employers reduce the salary of employees in the backdrop of MHA Order and State Advisories/Orders during the lockdown period?

A Section 9-A of the Industrial Disputes Act 1947 (ID Act) read with Schedule IV of the ID Act provides that any reduction in wages will amount to change in conditions of service. As per the ID Act, no such change can be effected without furnishing the concerned workmen (non-managerial employees) with 21 days' notice prior to such a change. In West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh, the time limit is 42 days instead of 21. Such notice would be sent in the prescribed manner (the procedure for issue of a notice under Section 9-A of ID Act is prescribed under the Industrial Disputes Rules of the relevant state).

In cases where an employee is not a 'workman' under ID Act, the change in conditions of service would be guided by the terms of his/her employment agreement and the company policy. For any change in the terms of the employment agreement, consent of the employees will also be required to be obtained.

The employer should ensure that there is no unilateral/arbitrary action of change of employment conditions of workmen/non-workmen to avoid any litigation or backlash by the employees.

Q Can employers reduce the headcount in the backdrop of MHA Order and State Advisories / Orders during the lockdown period?

A Employers (manufacturing establishments with 50 or more but less than 100 workmen) may invoke the provisions of 'lay-off' as set out under ID Act without prior Government approval. For the period of inability to provide employment to certain sections of workmen, the company will be required to pay 50% of the basic wages and dearness allowance (if any) for a period of 45 days, if such workmen have completed at least 240 days of continuous service in the company. For the balance period, the company may enter into an agreement with the workmen and opt for unpaid leave of absence. However, such period should be reasonable (say a month), and if the company foresees a prolonged period of 'no work' situation, it may contemplate any of the following alternatives:

- a) consider retrenchment of the workmen; or
- b) have discussion with workmen to consider the option of voluntary resignation.

For managerial employees, the option of progressive rationalisation of salaries may be explored by taking such employees into confidence. **HC**



The Relevance Of Upskilling

The COVID-19 pandemic has put an added emphasis on the way we learn and adapt to constant changes; multitasking and acquiring new skills are essential to navigate the challenging post-lockdown world.

BY SURESH KUMAR CHITRALAYAM

“A collective fear of uncertainty is apparent across all industries and has revealed that we need to rethink the way in which economies and societies need to battle the COVID-19 crisis.”

COVID-19 has upended the lives of many. And owing to the nationwide lockdown, businesses and individuals have incurred insufferable losses. At a wider scale, the economy has been set back by a few years. A collective fear of uncertainty is apparent across all industries and has revealed that we need to rethink the way in which economies and societies need to battle the crisis. While still reeling from the aftereffects inflicted by the pandemic, businesses and employees are finding new ways to stay afloat in such a faltering economy.

Coping with the situation

Individuals across the globe are grappling with the fear of contracting the virus. In addition, many are troubled with the thoughts of losing their jobs, furloughs, and salary cuts; and have already shifted their focus towards spending money cautiously and minimally. Adding to the financial strain, they are constantly worried about their jobs. Professionals who have lost their jobs owing to the pandemic are unsure of securing another job. In such trying times, employees must find new ways to tackle the situation. Upskilling is a smart move that can ease their worries and help them succeed in the post-lockdown world. Understanding the importance of upskilling and continuous learning, many companies have started upskilling their employees.

A Perfect Time to Upskill

Isolation from the real world, quarantine, and working from home is already the new normal for professionals. They have more time at their disposal because they no longer spend countless hours commuting to offices or socialising etc. Furthermore, weekends give them blocks of uninterrupted time to focus on learning something they have always wished to learn. With several online courses available for professionals across sectors, they can study at their own pace and within the comforts of their homes. This can also function as a leisure activity because online learning provides the flexibility of learning in small increments to its learners. With numerous platforms and universities opening their doors for online learners, an employee can find a course that aligns with his/her interests at the click of a button. Companies are also facilitating virtual training sessions for employees. The current remote working scenario offered to employees also facilitates a virtual learning atmosphere.

A Healthy Distraction

Though working from home may prove successful for some, it cannot be denied that some employees are busier than ever, and are consumed by tight deadlines and heavy workload. With no option to socialise or venturing out of their homes, they



might feel stressed because they are too focused on work. Learning a new skill can help them get distracted from work and their set routine. Not only will it make them take their minds off the cabin fever they are experiencing during this period, but will also help them adapt to the difficult times ahead. At the same time, they have something to focus on, and it does not come with any associated stress.

The need to continue learning

Upskilling, while making use of the available time during the lockdown comes with an array of benefits. There must be a new skill that an employee would have wanted to learn, but had to postpone for quite some time. Taking advantage of the time in hand, they can brush up a skill, such as a programming language, or can advance in their field of interest. This is also the right time to learn new technologies or explore cross-functional skills that will help their career advancement. Not only will upskilling help them gain invaluable insights in areas of their interest, but will also serve as a mark of how well they can positively handle and manage change. Employees will also feel confident that their new skills, fresh knowledge, and being

up-to-date will help them navigate the challenges in their careers post lockdown.

Benefits of Upskilling

Post lockdown, industries will drastically set new trends; the economy and businesses will undergo rapid changes. Organisations will need to rethink the way they operate. They will have to streamline their workforce to improve efficiency. While organisations focus on such practices, upskilling can be the best investment an employee can make, because the workplace and job market will no longer be the same again. It is going to be a lot more competitive. By upskilling themselves with the right skills, employees can become a nimble and talented resource an organisation would vie to retain.

Continuous learning has always been of paramount importance to career-oriented individuals. The pandemic has put an added emphasis on the way we learn and adapt to constant changes; multitasking and acquiring new skills are essential to navigate the challenging post-lockdown world. With or without lockdown, employees have to constantly challenge themselves and evolve as better professionals. In the given scenario, upskilled employees can handle any challenge thrown at them by the market or an organisation with the utmost confidence. 

“By upskilling themselves with the right skills, employees can become a nimble and talented resource an organisation would vie to retain.”

About the Author

Suresh Kumar Chitralayam is Director- People & Operations, Vuram Technologies. Under Suresh's guidance, Vuram Technologies has emerged as one of the best places to work in the country and has been certified as a 'Great Place to Work' for two consecutive years. He has been conferred with the Top HR Minds (India)' award by the World HRD Congress. Suresh holds an MBA in Human Resources. Beyond work, he actively participates in activities by Bhumi, an NGO.

Inspired By The New

*Not shying away from weathering the storm is perhaps a way of marching ahead for **Rahul Goyal**, Managing Director and General Manager, ADP India & South East Asia. In his vast experience stretching across diverse HR domains, Rahul has achieved professional success because of his potential to transform challenges into opportunities. A proponent of the outside-in approach to business, he has an entrepreneurial mindset and enjoys working on ambitious greenfield projects. Making things happen rather than waiting for them to happen is Rahul's strong belief, and finding innovative ways of solving the workforce challenges of tomorrow are perhaps his favourite food for thought. In pushing the limits daily to bring next-gen HCM and payroll solutions to businesses, Rahul has set an example for many in the HR industry, whether it be in enthusiastically going the extra mile for clients during these challenging times or being passionate about technology, employee experience, and the future of work.*

BY ANKITA SHARMA

Q ADP has a 70-year history of leading the way globally in the HR technology space – and it continues to be at the forefront of providing next-gen solutions for the human resource industry. Take us through the journey and evolution of ADP in India.

A ADP has been present in India for quite some time. We have had our global delivery centers from way back in early 2000 with around 10,000 associates now based in Hyderabad, Pune and Chennai locations. We have been offering HCM solutions and payroll outsourcing services to domestic clients and multinational corporations (MNCs) based in India. The Indian market is adopting payroll outsourcing and HR technology at a fast pace. Both Indian corporations and MNCs across industries seem to have developed a greater appetite for ADP solutions and services.



Q The current situation has forced organisations to rally around bold ideas and radically rethink the way they work. How are your clients' needs changing amidst the pandemic, and how are you supporting them?

A COVID-19 came as a surprise, and I don't think many organisations were fully prepared for a pandemic of this magnitude that has challenged business continuity plans.

In this situation, we realised that our clients needed flexibility in Service-Level Agreements (SLAs) and timelines. They also wanted additional digital functions and features matched with a super-simplified approach as well as necessary checks and controls. We seized this moment, and our associates closely connected with our clients to listen and understand their evolving requirements. We collaborated with clients to deliver the services. Our digital solutions met the increased demands for a work-from-home (WFH) environment, and we helped our clients to operate their payroll and compliance needs remotely. The pandemic is a shared experience, and COVID-19 brought our clients and us together.

Rapid Fire

• **Favourite quote:** *Growth is never by mere chance; it is the result of forces working together.* — James Cash Penney

• **The best business book you recently read:** *Nine Lies about Work* – Marcus Buckingham, Ashley Goodall

• **Complete this sentence: I strongly believe in...** making things happen rather than waiting for them to happen.

• **What comes to your mind when you hear these words?**

The future of work: Bots

Inclusion: Human connections

Resilience: Optimism



“Like in many other countries, India also witnessed several legislative changes that impacted payroll, affecting both employees and employers. Thirty-five legislative changes were brought in a short span of three months.”

Q The fast-changing regulatory environment in response to the continually evolving COVID-19 situation is significantly impacting organisations in India. How is ADP supporting businesses to respond quickly and remain compliant with the frequent legislative changes?

A Like in many other countries, India also witnessed several legislative changes that impacted payroll, affecting both employees and employers. Thirty-five legislative changes were brought in a short span of three months. We have a team of compliance and legislative experts who actively follow these changes, interpreting and incorporating them into our products. This had to happen very quickly, with immediate effects for our clients. We also conducted a

Up-Close and Personal

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

A I now have a new mantra: "Fitness first."

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

A This pandemic has taught me to genuinely care for others. We've never gone through a crisis like this, and connecting with others, including family, friends and my teams, is really important to me.

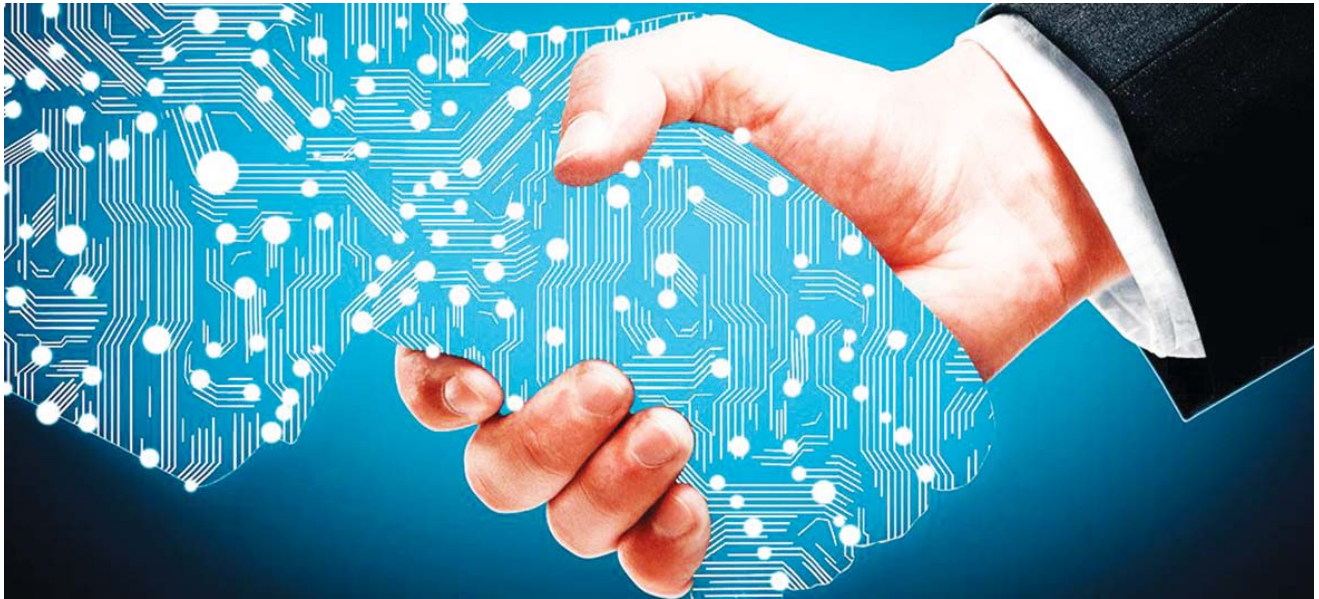
Q What would we be surprised to learn about you?

A I have recently developed a keen interest in Indian mythology

number of webinars to communicate these changes to our clients, answering their queries, and preparing and helping them to stay compliant.

Q India hosts the second largest group of ADP associates after the USA – with several business units based here. What talent challenges have you been facing over the last few weeks, and how are you addressing them?

A With the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdown, ADP



India offices also transitioned 100% of our associates to work from home.

Switching to full remote working was new to everyone. This was also a very challenging period. An uncertain environment was around all of us. First and foremost, our response began with the health and safety of our associates. We invested in developing a strong culture of communication across the organisation. Our leaders spent significant time and effort connecting with their team members with day-start and day-end meetings, prioritising informal discussions about their wellbeing and their family's health rather than only being task-oriented. This element of empathy, acknowledgement of the constraints, and genuine expression of thanks helped our associates to be continually engaged and deliver our clients' requirements efficiently. We all felt a sense of urgency and found a new meaning and purpose whilst servicing our clients.

Q What has COVID-19 changed the most for HR professionals? What are the areas of concern that employers might be called upon to address going forward?

A I believe the biggest lesson from COVID-19, as we just discussed, is

the importance of employee wellness. HR professionals will have to incorporate employee wellness programs into their future HR strategy.

Secondly, we've been talking about flexible working for a very long time. Employees would expect flexible work conditions and a hybrid approach in terms of working in the office or remotely from home. HR professionals need to also consider temporary unavailability in their workforce plan because of the current COVID-19 situation.

Going forward, HR leaders will also be spending significant time in building a stronger work culture focused on empathy and gratitude, thereby fostering stronger human connections and collaboration.

“Going forward, HR leaders will be spending significant time in building a stronger work culture focused on empathy and gratitude, thereby fostering stronger human connections and collaboration.”

Q Which are the biggest opportunities that COVID-19 has brought forth for the HR Technology industry? Also, what are your immediate focus areas?

A This crisis has brought to the surface a very important and yet often less visible core HR activity: the payroll function. Organisations are realising that timely and accurate payroll processing is central to business continuity in times like these. Companies will be investing in building robust and scalable payroll systems and will focus more on data security and data privacy aspects, along with easy-to-use features. We also see organisations increasingly wanting to consolidate and aggregate multiple payroll vendors, especially in multi-country scenarios. At ADP, we will continue to focus on providing innovative payroll and HCM solutions to our clients and their employees. **HC**

Microsoft Commits To Skill 25 Million People

BY ANUSHRUTI SINGH

In wake of economic crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, Microsoft Corp. has announced a new global skills initiative aimed at bringing more digital skills to 25 million people worldwide by the end of the year.

The initiative includes immediate steps to help those looking to reskill and pursue an in-demand job and brings together every part of the company, combining existing and new resources from LinkedIn, GitHub and Microsoft.

This is a comprehensive technology initiative that will build on data and digital technology. It starts with data on jobs and skills from the LinkedIn Economic Graph. It provides free access to content in LinkedIn Learning, Microsoft Learn, and the GitHub Learning Lab, and couples these with Microsoft Certifications and LinkedIn job seeking tools.



Microsoft has also committed over \$ 20 million in cash grants to help non profit organisations across the globe to assist people to learn digital skills. 

“Nesternship” Opportunities For Young Professionals

BY ANUSHRUTI SINGH

Nestlé India has launched a virtual internship programme, “Nesternship” for young professionals.

The programme addresses applications from Graduates in the Final Year of any discipline and Post-Graduates and focus on upskilling and enabling the interns to thrive in workplaces, that they join, at a later date.

The programme offer virtual internship opportunities to 1000 young talents across diverse functions and education backgrounds over the next four months. The programme will go live on 1st August 2020 and will continue for four months, with upskilling 250 interns every month till end of November.

Suresh Narayanan, Chairman and Managing Director, Nestlé India said, “India's future hinges on the energy, capabilities and hard work of our youth and being part of that eco-system, Nestlé India is committed to this imperative. We intend to do our humble bit and play a part helping the youth of the country cope with these unprecedented times, by ensuring that they do not lose out on opportunities to build their professional competence. As a Company, we have always believed that in times of need, we must heed the call of society”. 

Netflix To Allocate \$100 Million Into Black Community's Financial Institutions

BY ANUSHRUTI SINGH

Netflix has pledged to allocate 2%, or about \$100 million of its total cash holdings, into the financial institutions and organisations that directly support African American communities in the U.S.

As per the streaming giant, the initiative is a part of its “commitment to racial equity.” The company said it will start with \$35 million, of which \$25 million will be moved to a newly established fund “Black Economic Development Initiative”, and \$10 million will go to Hope Credit Union for creating economic opportunity in underserved communities across the Deep South.

“This capital will fuel social mobility and opportunity in the low- and moderate-income

communities these groups serve. We plan to redirect even more of our cash to Black-led and focused institutions as we grow, and we hope others will do the same”, Netflix wrote in a blog post.



The move comes as several U.S. tech firms witness increasing pressure from investors, consumers and workers to take action against racial inequality following nationwide protests sparked by the death of African American George Floyd in police custody. 



When The Boss Is The Cause!

It is imperative for organisations to consider the issue of burnout very seriously, and more so when the current scenario is laden with layoffs, job insecurity, work from home, and high dependence on technology.

BY DR. FARAH NAQVI

‘Burnout’ was first coined in the 1970s by Herbert Freudenberger. And this concept was further developed by Christina Maslach, a Social Psychologist, who subsequently developed the most widely used questionnaire for assessing burnout. Until the mid1990s, when a general version was published, burnout was more or less a

phenomenon restricted to the humanities or caring professions. Researchers like Leone et al. argued that burnout is the heir to *Neurasthenia*, an illness first described in 1869 by Neurologist George Miller Beard. *Neurasthenia* centred on the notion of a somatic depletion of nervous energy caused by excessive demands on peoples’ brains, owing to the fast-paced

modern life, causing symptoms such as exhaustion, anxiety, despair, insomnia, palpitations, and migraines. The striking similarity between burnout and neurasthenia is that both are considered maladies of their times, and mental exhaustion is a common defining symptom in both the conditions. So, the concept of burnout is archaic but not obsolete.

“Burnout is the heir to *Neurasthenia*, an illness first described in 1869. *Neurasthenia* centred on the notion of a somatic depletion of nervous energy caused by excessive demands on peoples’ brains...”

Burnout: A medical condition

In May 2019, WHO included burnout in its International Classification of Diseases (ICD11) defining burnout as, “*resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed.*” This update served the purpose of not only raising awareness but strengthening its strong connection to workplace factors causing burnout. Many assumed that burnout would now be considered a medical condition. WHO then clarified that it has been included as an occupational phenomenon and not a medical condition. Often people experiencing burnout ignore its severity, perceiving it to be temporary work stress. However, it is important to note that there is a major distinction between stress and burnout. Stress is characterised by over engagement, while burnout is characterised by disengagement. Stressed people can still see the proverbial silver lining in the cloud, but burnout is associated with a feeling of helplessness and hopelessness.

Burnout can be caused by multiple factors and could be related either to the individual, interpersonal stressors or workplace environment. Whatever the cause, it is important that burnout is not discounted as a problem specific to certain employee/s. While it is critical to understand whether everything is fine with the employees,

it is equally important to ascertain if things are fine with the company. In 2018, Gallup conducted a survey of 7,500 employees and found the top five reasons for burnout as - unfair treatment at work, unmanageable workload, lack of role clarity, lack of support from the manager and unreasonable time pressure. In another survey on 9013 participants, Teamblind Inc identified poor leadership as the number one cause of burnout in Tech workers. Various researches in recent years, including those conducted by Harvard, University of Manchester etc. indicate that poor leaders/toxic bosses are often the culprit for employee burnout.

In June 2018, a survey was conducted by *The Predictive Index* on 5,103 respondents from 22 different industries asking them to rate their manager on a scale of 1-10, with 1 for terrible and 10 for awesome. Those who got a rating of 4 or below falling in the category of ‘bad managers’, had several aspects in common. These managers failed to communicate clear expectations, played favourites, displayed a lack of concern for the career development of subordinates, were not open to feedback, wanted to prove themselves right, betrayed

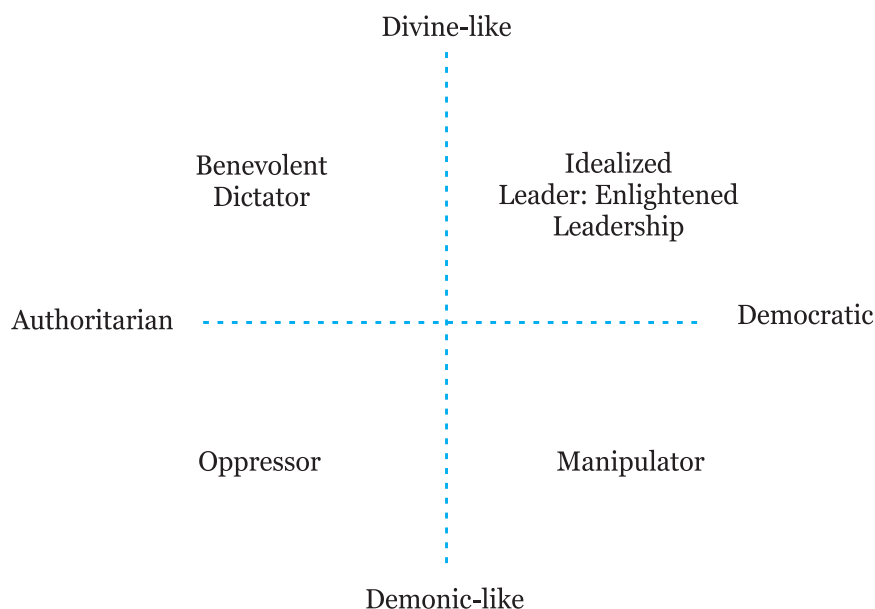


trust, were poor listeners, and put their own needs first. These managers, though focused on themselves, lacked self-awareness as well as knowledge about how their behaviour impacted those around them.

Types of Managers

An analysis of different types of managers in light of the Human Quality Grid by Dr Subhash Sharma presents us with four types of managers or leaders.

- Democratic & Divine-like
- Authoritarian & Divine-like
- Democratic & Demonic-like
- Authoritarian & Demonic-like



Management Styles and Leadership Grid

The First strand of thought views humans in terms of the authoritarian-democratic modes of management style. The Second strand of thought is derived from the lessons about human nature from *Gita*. The Divine-like human qualities include truthfulness, gentleness, modesty, steadiness, forgiveness, freedom from anger, malice, and excessive pride (*Gita*, XVI, 2&3). The Demonic-like display arrogance, excessive pride, anger and manipulation (*Gita*, XVI, 4,10). A combination of Democratic and Divine-like can be considered as an 'idealised' type of manager. The Authoritarian and Divine-like is the typical benevolent-dictator. Democratic and Demonic-like is the typical manipulator type of manager. This type uses the democratic process as a facade to cover up his/her manipulative tactics. Authoritarian and Demonic-like is an oppressor as depicted through many mythological characters.

The 'bad managers' in the study by the predictive index quoted above seem to be more of the democratic-demonic types. In the same study, respondents were given an open field question to share the top words that came to their mind when thinking of great managers. Strong work ethics, respectful, supportive, communicative, honest, transparent, fair were the keywords used by them to define great managers correlating with the idea of divine democratic managerial style. If the managerial style is more of authoritarian-demonic type, there is likely to be high levels of negative energy taking a toll on employee's emotional and the organisation's financial health.

The need for due credence

In a research by Tait *et al* to study the impact of organisational leadership and physician burnout,

published in Mayo Clinic proceedings, the respondents were asked to rate the extent to which they agreed with a set of given statements about their supervisor. The statements were along the lines - *my supervisor holds career development conversations with me, inspires me to do my best, treats me with respect, recognises me for a job well done, empowers me to do my job, is interested in my opinion, keeps me informed about changes and encourages me to develop my talents.*

“Organisations will have to keep a close eye on every workplace factor that could cause burnout, be it a bad boss, work policies, or factors rooted in the organisation culture.”

It was found that for every 1-point increase in the composite leadership score, there was a commensurate 3.3% decrease in the likelihood of burnout. While this research reestablishes the close linkage between managerial style and burnout, it also suggests that the key for positive workplace lies in the Divine managerial style (autocratic or democratic), depending on the situational contingencies. Implementing such kind of surveys where managers can get feedback and take coaching for making improvements in their management practices can be worthwhile for reducing burnout caused by a bad manager or boss.

Work forms an integral part of a person's life, and it is imperative for organisations to consider the issue of burnout very seriously, and more so when the current scenario is laden with layoffs, job insecurity, work from home, and

high dependence on technology. The present dynamic and uncertain work climate calls for drawing upon the Divine democratic managerial style for creating a synergistic work environment. It is noteworthy that workplace burnout can be cumulative, and in the event of a manager experiencing burnout, it may affect those working with him owing to the snowball effect. Hence, organisations will have to keep a close eye on every workplace factor that could cause burnout, be it a bad boss, work policies, or factors rooted in the organisation culture. 

About the Author

Dr. Farah Naqvi is a writer, academican 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>.

LinkedIn Rolls Out 'Polls' Feature To Tap Into Professional Network

BY ANUSHRUTI SINGH

LinkedIn has globally rolled out a new 'Polls' feature, a quick, easy way for members to tap into the collective knowledge of their professional networks to gain opinion and perspective on topics and conversations related to the contemporary scenario.

The polls allows users to reach out to their networks to ask for feedback, share it with others, spark new conversations, and make informed decisions based on the responses.

Amid the current uncertain environment, recruiters, HR heads, marketers, and company heads are all using the feature in diverse ways to solicit feedback across relevant subjects like workplace preferences, shopping habits, and key company goals.

In India, members and companies such as L&T have currently been using Polls to shape workplace policies, and identify industry trends and hiring trends for the future. 



SBI To Upgrade Existing Work-From-Home Policy To Work-From-Anywhere

BY ANUSHRUTI SINGH

In a bid adjust to the new challenges posed by COVID-19 pandemic, State Bank of India is in process of upgrading its existing work-from-home policy to work-from-anywhere.



According to SBI's annual report, apart from rapid adoption of digital technology, the focus of the bank in the days ahead would be on revisiting risk assessment and business procedures. The WFA facility has already been implemented across 19 foreign offices.

"For instance, likely job cuts and salary reductions will have relatively low level of stress on account of higher proportion of Govt/ Quasi Govt sector customers," the report quoted SBI Chairman Rajnish Kumar as saying.

With global acceptability of Work-from-Home (WFH) arrangements, the Bank is in process of upgrading its existing WFH policy to Work from Anywhere (WFA). 

Skill India Launches AI-based Digital Platform For Skilled Workforce

BY ANUSHRUTI SINGH

The Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE) has launched 'Aatmanirbhar Skilled Employee Employer Mapping (ASEEM)' portal to help skilled people find sustainable livelihood opportunities.

Apart from recruiting a skilled workforce that spurs business competitiveness and economic growth, the Artificial Intelligence- based platform has been envisioned to strengthen their career pathways by handholding them through their journeys to attain industry-relevant skills and explore emerging job opportunities especially in the post COVID era.

ASEEM refers to all the data, trends and analytics which describe the workforce market and map



demand of skilled workforce to supply. It will provide real-time granular information by identifying relevant skilling requirements and employment prospects.

ASEEM, also available as an APP, is developed and managed by National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) in collaboration with Betterplace. The portal aims at supporting decision and policymaking via trends and analytics generated by the system for programmatic purposes.

The AI- based platform will be used as a match-making engine to map skilled workers with the jobs available. The portal and App will have provision for registration and data upload for workers across job roles, sectors and geographies. 



Wellness Programme: A Misnomer?

Employee wellness is best managed when our focus shifts back to fundamentals, and thereby, simplifying the HR policies, where employees are driven by their deliverables and not control mechanism.

BY MRINMOY MAJUMDER

“Employee wellness has been the buzzword to keep employees fit and fine, so that the organisation and the country collectively have a healthy workforce.”

In an intense football tournament, the knockout stage overwhelms the players and there is constant pressure to perform in every match and emerge victorious. Here, the coach plays an important role and the team adapts on the basis on his style.

Now, picture a corporate environment where at the end of the day what matters is to ‘close the sale’, so much so that the persons in-charge of sales skip their meals, work long hours, and yet, manage to maintain a relationship with their respective customers. According to a write-up in Time¹ (2019), workers in the Amazon warehouse in Minnesota alleged that they are being treated like robots and were hardpressed to meet delivery targets. This happened largely because workers’ transaction is managed by technology, and are hence competing with technology to match up to its expectations and efficiency level.

Closer home, a couple of years ago, a food aggregator’s delivery person was notoriously caught on camera taking a bite of the food meant to be delivered. The clip created quite a stir on social media, making the aggregator to come forward with an official statement on Twitter. The actions of the delivery person were completely outrageous since it cast doubts on the aspects of hygiene being followed by the organisation. However, the COVID-19

pandemic single-handedly made companies and customers to be more hygiene conscious and made us realise that most of the tasks can be done without setting foot into the company’s premises.

Homogeneous tasks such as factory production aside, jobs involving knowledge sharing and business intelligence, mostly require brains to prick together that may or may not be confined to a physical space. Work From Home (WFH), once considered a privilege, is now a norm, hinting that it requires a strong mandate for us to re-think our work engagement. Seemingly, employee wellness has been the buzzword to keep employees fit and fine, so that the organisation and the country collectively have a healthy workforce. It is perhaps logical to consider that being unfit adds to the collective stress of employees, so employee wellness does matter.

Let us now re-think and ask ourselves, when we have better access to technology, resources and health care, employee wellness becomes an area of concern. To an extent, the answer lies in developing exuberant HR policies to keep up in the talent market, that we seldom pay attention to basics. In a high paced corporate environment, getting leave becomes a challenge, since it is maintained that ‘leave cannot be claimed as a matter of right’. Since the ancient days, as envisioned by



“We exist to perform apart from everything else in economic terms. So, when transactions are mechanised, overt human relations force itself into economics, thus, making human relations symbolic.”

Adam Smith, ‘work’ is often termed as an economic transaction. Hence, in practice, no one, by virtue of earning and providing salary is to be understood to be conducting charity in any form. We exist to perform apart from everything else in economic terms. So, when transactions are mechanised, overt human relations force itself into economics, thus, making human relations symbolic. Symbolism, on the contrary, has proliferated on a much higher scale due to social media. E.g. health or fitness challenges meant for employees are often broadcasted through their social media platforms, much to the fanfare of hashtags/views/trends.

Employee wellness is best managed when our focus shifts back to fundamentals, and thereby, simplifying HR policies, where employees are driven by their deliverables and not control mechanism. Where employees may choose to customise their work

schedule, where they are given ample time for themselves and their family, and where there is no restriction on physical space of work execution. If not, employee wellness programmes become misnomer since intense work pressure and clocking long-hours is beyond the control of employees. 

¹ *Time* (2019). *I Worked at an Amazon Fulfillment Center; They Treat Workers Like Robots*. Retrieved on June 19, 2020 from <https://time.com/5629233/amazon-warehouse-employee-treatment-robots/>

About the Author

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Upskilling-An Imperative

HR and Learning & Development professionals of today must be skilled to facilitate an environment, both in policy and practice, where people with diverse experiences succeed as a unified and strong unit.

BY AVESH KUMAR JHA

T imagine a crisis that warrants your organisation to change the way it operates overnight! While we ponder on the 'whys' and the 'hows', the bigger shock might be the longevity of this change and that it might simply emerge as the 'new normal'. We do not have to imagine this anymore, as leaders across the globe are dealing with it in reality in response to the COVID19 pandemic. The outbreak of COVID19 is an unprecedented crisis for individuals and businesses alike. The impact of the pandemic is highly visible on economies, and countries around the globe are trying everything possible to curtail the spread of the virus. In a matter of weeks, individuals and businesses have been compelled to grapple with the question of self-survival.

Organisations have been scrambling for ways to maintain business continuity in the face of this fastspreading pandemic. In such testing times, how quickly we adapt, how creative we are when it comes to planning, and how well we execute those plans, will determine how we emerge out of this adversity. The crisis has created an imbalance in the socio-economic wellbeing of people. People are forced to rethink about their career plans, financial goals and other commitments as the impact is proving to be huge. Remote working, dependency on digital and redefined job profiles

along with reskilling of resources is going to be the future of work. The pandemic has jolted workplaces into rebooting and getting smarter.

“Remote working, dependency on digital and redefined job profiles along with reskilling of resources is going to be the future of work. The pandemic has jolted workplaces into rebooting and getting smarter.”

With crisis comes opportunity

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) has estimated job losses of over 25 million as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. While the lockdown is a massive setback for everyone, every crisis presents an opportunity. The need to relook over the manner in which we worked prior to the pandemic has emerged. Now, we need to look at newer ways that can assist us in the given context, and also in the post COVID-19 era. For instance, this may involve greater utilisation of cloud platforms to connect employees virtually. But



then this would mean that everyone in the organisation is equipped to use these technologies and there lies the need to shift to the 'continual reskilling and upskilling mindset'.

Many industry leaders are anticipating a recession and economic downturn in the post COVID19 era. While this alone risks jobs, let us not forget the onset of the automation boom and the fast-paced technological landscape. To remain employable and relevant in such competitive times, reskilling and upskilling is the only way to survive and thrive!

The generational advantage

Today, the workforce in many organisations constitutes of four or five generations, right from the Traditionalists (born before 1946) to the Generation Z (born after 1997). This mix offers huge benefits, due to the unique perspectives and ideas of those involved. Each of these generations has reacted differently in the pandemic, basis their skills and experiences. This also means that organisations are needed to be prepared to cater to the needs of the diverse set of people to enable them to deal with this situation. HR and Learning & Development professionals of today must be skilled to facilitate an environment, both in policy and practice, where people with diverse experiences succeed as a unified and strong unit. Most of us might not have faced a crisis of such a kind during our lifetime, and hence, might not be prepared for it. Reskilling and upskilling are the only ways in which the situation can be managed and prepare ourselves for the present and future.

Thought leaders, over several decades, have been making liberal use of the acronym VUCA – Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous. Thanks to COVID-19, we are experiencing the real,

dynamic VUCA world, for the first time! Remote working, which was always termed as a 'benefit' for certain employees or roles, has suddenly emerged as the only way to work!

Analysts and commentators have said that remote working will come about as the new normal. We need to think about the skills that are required to work efficiently and manage the workforce during this change, enabling them to stay current, relevant and productive. And the next step is inculcating the habit of upskilling, so that our people are inspired to continue to stay relevant and worthwhile.

“We need to think about the skills that are required to work efficiently and manage the workforce during this change, enabling them to stay current, relevant and productive.”

Technology: The key enabler

Technology has been the key enabler for remote working and companies are making huge investments on this front to keep their operations running. Organisations are making extensive use of video and audio conferencing apps, chat/messaging tools, cloud storage and other virtual management tools. But the big challenge ahead of everyone is whether we are sufficiently skilled to work with such tech tools? So, this presents the trigger of learning, unlearning and relearning. This is the way the world will reorganise, redesign and rethink methods of staying connected, engaged, productive and contributing usefully.

It is natural to witness a rise in the demand in digital skills. It is therefore handy to accept this trend. That said, some things are likely to remain relevant - the emotional connect with people, empathy, the need for people to listen effectively, to understand to each other and to be able to influence each other. Honing these skills will be key in a remote working environment. With proximity out of the question for some time, the need for people to refresh their skills on these aspects will emerge. As has been stated by Alvin Toffler, American writer, futurist, and businessman, *“The illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn.”* This is of utmost importance today and deserves to be treated with great urgency. One believes that the time is now to reconstruct ourselves through consistent reskilling and upskilling. Wishing everyone a safe, strong, healthier and successful future! 

About the Author

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Is Your Action Bias Costing You?

When faced with a new or uncertain situation, we prefer doing something — anything — to feel like we have control over a situation. This happens even if the action is irrational, unwise or counterproductive.

BY ANKITA SHARMA

A few months back, my friend and I were rushing to get to an appointment. Upon reaching the main entrance of the building, we went to the nearest lift and pressed the call button. Within a few seconds, I frantically started pushing the already-lit call button. Then, when we got into the elevator, I kept hitting the tenth-floor button — I mean, like four times in around six seconds. My well-meaning friend told me that this would not make us move along faster. On hearing this, the other elevator occupant laughed and said, “I do this all the time! Too much, actually.”

I know that those extra button pushes do not make any difference,

but I can't help it, especially when I'm in a hurry. Many of us are particularly susceptible to action bias. When faced with a problem, we prefer doing something — anything — in order to feel like we have control over a situation. This happens even if the action is irrational, unwise or counterproductive.

“Woah! Action bias? But that's a good thing! Taking action is what helps me get things done. It makes me productive,” I hear you say. Speed is essential to individual and business success today. Bias towards action is generally a good thing. Taking action implies not succumbing to “paralysis by over-analysis”. It encourages us to

experiment. It also makes us see failure as an acceptable outcome, provided that we learn from it. But, in the face of ambiguity and uncertainty, we often get restless and feel compelled to act. Many of us ignore the costs and default to action, regardless of whether it may provide zero or even negative effects.

Let me turn to soccer goalkeepers to show you what I mean. When defending a penalty stroke, the goalie has to choose a side before the player even kicks the ball. So, is it better to dive to the right or the left? Here's the kicker (pun intended): Statistically, goalies are far better off staying put at the centre! Despite this fact,

a fascinating 2007 study found that goalkeepers almost always choose to dive to either side. Why? The answer might surprise you: It feels and looks better to have failed in stopping the ball by jumping in the wrong direction (action) rather than staying still in the intense situation of a penalty shootout (inaction). This is action bias — we want to look active, even if it achieves nothing or makes matters worse.

Action Bias and COVID-19

Action bias is pandemic to individuals and organisations. The COVID-19 crisis has made this even more explicit. Although it is true that staying at home is an easy task compared to defending our country in a war, hanging back did not turn out to be as easy as it seemed. People around the world have been acting irrationally — be it the crowding of supermarkets to stock up on toilet paper or the continued breach of stay-at-home and social distancing directives. Such people have been popularly termed as “covidiot”.

We prefer taking some action rather than passively sitting at home — even though restraint and patience are the best strategies right now — because we perceive that value can primarily be realised through action.

Think Before You Act

We have a tendency to think that people who do the most stuff produce more value. Such a conclusion couldn't be further from the truth. Often, the person who does not act quickly or restrains him or herself affects real change. Choosing to look busy when things are unclear is an easy way out; by contrast, making actual progress is challenging.

Action bias makes us act sooner than we should. Consider meetings, for instance. Since the pandemic struck, we have been spending more time than ever before

collaborating with colleagues via meetings and conference calls, often across different time zones. Many of us are mindlessly participating in thousands of meetings in the name of “keeping up with change” when most of them merely philosophise on the issue at hand rather than solve it. Action bias lures many of us to say yes to meetings we could easily skip. We don't even ask ourselves why we are doing what we are doing. In ambiguous situations, we are tempted to fix problems, but defaulting to action could instead aggravate it and impede productivity. In other words, we sometimes have to think rather than act impulsively.

The next time you get invited to a meeting, don't be afraid to pause for a while until you find the right action. Think: Is this meeting truly useful? Or am I attending this meeting for the sake of looking/feeling good? And if your answer is the latter, carefully reconsider your next steps. For example, could you just catch up on the post-meeting minutes? If both you and your team member have been invited to attend a meeting, could one of you forgo attending it?

“We prefer taking some action rather than passively sitting at home — even though restraint and patience are the best strategies right now — because we perceive that value can primarily be realised through action.”

Build in Time for Reflection

A few years back, a couple of Harvard researchers conducted a field experiment with Wipro,

Bangalore. The employees put through call centre training were divided into two groups. One group continued to take technical training and practice calls as usual until the end of the work shift. The other group was asked to sit in silent reflection during the last fifteen minutes of every workday. The result? The reflecting group performed 23% better after one month of training, despite the fact that the other group worked fifteen minutes longer every day.

We all have a lot of learning to do right now, and building in time to reflect rather than just act can improve performance and also build resilience. Recent data from LinkedIn reveals that professionals are investing 130% more time on skilling/ reskilling/ upskilling since the COVID-19 outbreak. We will learn best when we create the space for it through inactivity. Spend at least fifteen minutes at the end of each day just reflecting on what you've learned.

Final Thoughts

Inaction is usually not looked upon favourably. However, thinking, pausing, reflecting, or simply restraining are all hard work. Just because no action is observed doesn't mean that nothing significant is happening. The adage “Don't just stand there; do something!” could be changed to “Don't just do something; stand there!” for specific situations. 

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1. *Action bias among elite soccer goalkeepers: The case of penalty kicks* (Bar-Eli et al., 2007).
2. *Reflecting on Work Improves Job Performance*. HBS Working Knowledge. (2014).

It is critical to identify and understand one's mindset because, in order to be successful, one must be self-aware of the mindset to which they subscribe.

**“Human Beings are
work in progress who
mistakenly think
they're finished”**

Carol Dweck, Professor at Stanford University and the author of *Mindset—Changing the Way You Think to Fulfil Your Potential*, says that leaders approach problem solving with two mindsets. Someone with a fixed mindset when stuck with a problem will assume they have reached the limits of their abilities. Whereas, Growth mindset propels people to try out different option of solving the problem. Predicting what the future would require is an impossible task, so leaders must equip themselves with strong portfolio of future ready skills in order to keep responding with dynamism and insight. Growth

mindset is one such skill. Both these mindsets tend to remain subconscious and unacknowledged by the person. There is a large body of literature indicating the impact such mindsets have over the way people perceive and interpret the qualities of individuals, groups, and the world around them. For instance, at the individual level, mindsets impact motivation, academic achievements, procrastination, and other outcomes differently.

When encountering setbacks, for instance, people who view their intelligence as fixed tend to attribute

failure to the lack of ability and would react by feeling a sense of helplessness, withdrawal, or being petrified. Yet, people who view their intelligence as malleable tend to make fewer helpless attributions and to invest greater effort or change their approach in response to failures. In particular, it seems that these two mindsets set up different frameworks or 'meaning systems' that guide people's attributions and behaviours. For instance, growth and fixed mindsets about intelligence influence academic performance and self-esteem through a network of goals, beliefs, and strategies that stemmed from these beliefs. It has also been proven by Research that internalisation of growth mindset buffers a negative consequence that people with low socio-economic backgrounds and minorities suffer in school.

It is critical to identify and understand one's mindset because, in order to be successful, one must be self-aware of the mindset to which they subscribe. One who employs the Growth Mindset believes that life requires continuous learning, and that failure is a critical and necessary component of that learning and self-development. It is the deep belief that mastery, talent, and ability is developed over time through perseverance, grit, and hard work.

Interestingly, evidence shows that it is possible to shift from a fixed mindset to growth mindset. Microsoft is a good example of what happens to an organisation when it adopts an altered mindset. Microsoft has reworked on its culture by adopting a Growth Mindset. Satya Nadella has popularised the concept of Growth Mindset when he took over as the CEO in 2014. Microsoft had come up with a framework to implement and practice this organisationally, and the culture was changed from "know-it-all" to "learn-it-all". In fact, it got reflected in the mission statement of Microsoft, *"to empower every person and every organisation in the planet to achieve more."*



The key learnings

What can other organisations learn from this especially in challenging times due to the pandemic? When the entire company embraces a growth mindset, their employees report a feeling that is far more empowered and committed, and experience a greater advantage in the event of stressful situations. By seeing the world through the lens of growth enables in steering away thoughts from the negative focus back to the positive. They also received far greater organisational support for collaboration and innovation. In contrast, people at primarily fixed-mindset companies focus more on looking smart report more of only one thing; cheating and deception among employees, presumably to gain an advantage in the talent race.

Growth Mindset is a useful and handy framework that organisations can use in the current times. Instead of stressing over problems, employees can use growth mindset to see opportunities for improvement. While there will be stressful situations, growth mindset will make employees feel empowered to respond in a positive and constructive manner.

Is it easy to adopt a growth mindset? No, it is not. Carol Dweck explains, *'we all have our fixed-mindset triggers.'* When one faces criticism, negative feedback and disappointments, there is a tendency to become defensive and insecure, responses that inhibit growth. Our organisational cultures will also comprise of fixed-mindset triggers. In

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order to grow and develop, we need to identify and work on these triggers. It is hard work, but individuals and organisations can gain a lot by deepening their understanding of growth-mindset concepts and the processes for putting them into practice. It gives them a richer sense of who they are, what they stand for, and how they want to move forward.

To summarise, an important thing to remember in these times is that hard times are temporary. Adopting a growth mindset to see failure as an

opportunity to learn and get better can help when faced with challenges. In a fixed mindset, everything is about the outcome. If you fail, it has all been wasted. The growth mindset values what you are doing whatever the outcome. Remember, challenge and failure are necessary to learning, self-development and growing as an individual.

To quote Carol Dweck, *“In one world, effort is a bad thing. It’s like failure, means that you’re not smart or talented. If you were, you wouldn’t need effort (Fixed Mindset). In the other world, effort is what makes you smart or talented (Growth Mindset).”* **HC**

Traits of Growth Mindset	Traits of a Fixed Mindset
• Embracing Challenges Head-On • Perseverance (not giving up) in the face of setbacks, defeat and failure • Seeing Effort and Hardwork as a Path to Mastery • Using Criticism and Negative feedback as a form of learning and self-development • Finding lessons and inspiration in the success of others	• Prefers to Avoid Challenges • Giving Up Easily to obstacles or challenges • Seeing Effort as fruitless or a waste of energy • Ignoring useful negative feedback or criticism and taking it personally (i.e., ego) • Feeling threatened by the success of others • Not learning from or acknowledging their mistakes because of arrogance or Ego

Source : Mindset - Changing the Way You Think To Fulfil Your Potential By Carol Dweck

About the Author

Dr. Manavi Pathak is Head - Talent & Leadership Development at Trent. She has professional expertise in area of Talent Management, Learning, Leadership Development & Executive Coaching. She has extensive experience in leadership and consultancy with global industry players across industries, PSUs and education/ social sector. She has been associated with Human Capital for the last 10 years.

Appointments



Sterlite Power Appoints Swaminathan Subramanian As CHRO

Sterlite Power has named Swaminathan Subramanian as the group Chief Human Resources Officer (CHRO). Subramanian has 22 years of experience in consulting, HR Governance, Mergers & Acquisitions, Compensation & Benefits with in-depth exposure in Asia, Africa, and Middle East market.



Avalara Appoints Kathleen Weslock As CHRO

Avalara has appointed Kathleen Weslock as chief human resources officer (CHRO). Prior to her appointment she was serving as CHRO at Livent. She has over two decades of experience and has overseen human resources for several companies, including Cisco, Deloitte, FIS (formerly SunGard Data Systems), and others.



Bharti AXA General Insurance Appoints Paramjit Singh Nayyar As Head-HR

Bharti AXA General Insurance has appointed Paramjit Singh Nayyar as the CHRO and member of the management committee, after a three-year stint at HDFC ERGO Health Insurance. He has nearly two decades of diverse experience of scaling up businesses in industries, such as BFSI, telecom, retail and healthcare.



RealI Appoints Varun Bhatia As Chief People Officer

RealI has named Varun Bhatia as the company's first Chief People Officer (CPO). He has over 30 years of experience spearheading people strategies and leading entire HR organizations. Most recently, Bhatia served as Chief People and Culture Officer at AirAsia. He has previously worked as the CPO of AirAsia Group, CHRO of Levi Strauss & Co., and executive positions at Kraft Foods, Procter & Gamble, and The Gillette Company.



Myntra Appoints Kenneth Sequeira As Deputy Director- Human Capital

Myntra has roped in Kenneth Sequeira as the Deputy Director - Human Capital. Prior to this, Sequeira was Talent and Learning Consultant at Kantar where he played an instrumental role in designing, developing, and delivering learning interventions of all modalities. Sequeira pursued Master of Management Studies in HR from Xavier Institute Of Management and Research.



NetCom Learning Appoints Subir Sinha As Director-HR

NetCom Learning has appointed Subir Sinha as its new Director, Human Resources for India and the US. Sinha brings with him nearly 30 years in the HR industry, having worked with companies such as the Creative Group, Arvind, Reliance Retail and ITC - Agrotech. In the past five years, Sinha has freelanced as a consultant, leading his own firm, Subir Sinha HR & Corporate Advisory.



Licious Appoints Naveen Kumar Nerlaje As Head-HR

Licious has named Naveen Kumar Nerlaje as the head of human resources. He is a seasoned professional with nearly 20 years of experience in various facets of Human resources Management. Nerlaje comes with a very strong experience in shaping the organisational culture, nurturing progressive employee relations and talent & organisational development.



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