

Human Capital

REALISING BUSINESS STRATEGY THROUGH PEOPLE

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THE BEST OF BOTH WORLDS

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Dr. Deepika Pandita

From The Publisher's Desk



C OVID-19 has brought forth yet another twist. The way of work after the vaccines are made available, thereby, assuring employers that the workplace is at last rendered safe, is worth looking into. That, however, does not discount the fact that remote working shall remain in vogue. To give credit to where it is due, industry leaders and employees alike opted for the remote working model when things appeared crudely hazy, and, attained near about the same productivity levels that they had prior to the pandemic. One can only imagine what they could achieve if they had the time to prepare themselves. The remote working model has its flip sides too. A Microsoft research revealed that people showed signs of mental fatigue in only two hours. This is besides various other

reports that showed employees suffering from anxiety, depression and loneliness, as also increased instances of domestic violence from some major Indian cities. In the January 2021 edition, Human Capital has therefore explored various facets associated with the Hybrid model. Praveen Sinha writes that we are likely to witness a reversal in terms of work location preference for hybrid in favour of 'office only'. Nishath Usmani mentions that the Hybrid working model was always in existence, and COVID-19 only helped to bring it into action.

Interview features Dorie Clark, a leading authority on self-reinvention and bestselling author, who highlights aspects that individuals can do to build career resiliency and also shares actionable tips to develop an intrapreneurial mindset. Persona features Deepti Varma, Director – HR for Amazon in APAC and Middle East, who drew inspiration from her mother's words, *"the greatest form of creativity is the recreation of oneself"*, and is hence leading crucial initiatives for a creative and diverse workforce at Amazon. Case Study highlights another interesting facet to gender discrimination. In this case, at female employees are, at times, preferred over male employees when it comes to promotions, better appraisals, sabbaticals and even opting out of offsite projects.

The words of Roland Busch, the Deputy CEO of Siemens is largely clairvoyant, *"COVID-19 gives us a chance to reshape our world and reimagine work."* Pandemics, after a point in time, subside, but the lessons learnt in dealing with them is what drives humanity forward.

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contains 76 pages including cover



The Year Of The Virus

Even as companies assimilate the lessons learnt from 2020 and plan their next steps for better managing employees, there are new and immediate challenges looming in the new year.

BY GAUTAM BRAHMA

The year 2020 will go down in history as the year of the COVID-19 pandemic which damaged the world economy, bereaved families, and disrupted lives everywhere. For work organisations, it was also a year when several important lessons were learnt by all.

The first lesson was that a surprisingly large number of jobs can be done from home. Many organisations that would have dismissed any possibility of their particular work getting done from home have had to accept that this was indeed possible. Not only that, many companies saw improved productivity from their workforce in this period.

The second big realisation was that people who worked from home in the past were not having a cushy time. All preconceptions were laid to rest as people working from home, for the first time in their lives, saw their personal and work schedules mingle so much that they seemed to be at work morning to night on all the days of the week. People in office mocking people who worked from home is certainly a thing of the past.

The third learning was that people have an amazing capacity to learn new ways of working quickly. For instance, many school teachers whose past familiarity with technology was often limited to messaging on the phone learnt to

be savvy with setting up video conference calls, delivering lessons online and conducting remote tests and assessments.

The fourth insight was that there were many people in every organisation, who were not adding much value. They seemed to become invisible and redundant this year. Work seemed to be happening without much contribution from these, often middle to senior management, staff. They seemed to be pathetically drawing attention to themselves by arranging unnecessary meetings and making pointless calls to their juniors and seniors, probably because they did not know how to spend the time on hand.

“Many companies that confined their target-based variable pay policies to sales staff may decide to extend that approach to more segments of their workforce.”

The fifth lesson was that all work can be managed by monitoring outcomes. There was no way to physically see how people were spending their time, and somehow, this did not matter anymore as long as they finished their assigned tasks on time. There were no

longer any brownie points to be earned by coming to office early and leaving after the boss left. Some people did persist in marking their apparent diligence by sending communications at early hours of the morning or late at night, but when everyone was blending life and work anyway, this did not impress anyone.

These lessons were learnt while responding to the environmental shock delivered by the virus. Some of these learnings will lead to logical next steps of the kind outlined below.

Firstly, and this is a no-brainer which has already been extensively discussed on many forums and in the media, work practices will be codified so that even after the pandemic ends, many people will be asked to work from home more often than not. This will reduce all kinds of costs including office rentals, upkeep and transport. This will be both good and bad for employees. Good because of convenience and bad because of the loss of opportunities to bond and build social capital, and to get away from domestic concerns for a part of the day.

Secondly, now that almost every kind of company has seen a large variety of jobs getting done well from home, there will be a greater acceptance of gig workers, who may cost less. Such contractual employment will also offer greater

flexibility in cost management as this kind of engagement is easier to ramp down when work is lean. Companies can be expected to revisit and strengthen processes for engaging people under a wider set of employment contracts - onrolls, part-time, piece-work based, and full-time contractual working outside the office.

Thirdly, companies will see value in restructuring compensation and benefits so that employees are reimbursed for investing in ergonomic work environments, improved IT infrastructure and other costs incurred while working from home. Some companies have already started doing it by redefining allowances relating to commuting and meals. Others may choose to follow.

Fourthly, now that outcome-based monitoring has become widely accepted, companies may tweak their goal-setting, performance appraisal and variable pay practices to accommodate this lesson. Many companies that confined their target-based variable pay policies to sales staff may decide to extend that approach to more segments of their workforce.

Even as companies assimilate the lessons learnt from 2020 and plan their next steps for better managing employees, there are new and immediate challenges looming in the new year. For many companies, these will prove daunting, especially when seen alongside the lessons of 2020. These challenges arise from the proposed changes in employment-related

legislation. The new labour codes have several novel features. Just to give two examples, allowances cannot comprise more than half the total compensation and overtime pay entitlements cover a greater variety of positions. HR managers will have to extensively review and recast existing policies to meet these and other new requirements. For many managers this will be the most comprehensive overhaul of compensation and benefit systems they have ever been involved in.

“If 2020 was a year of adapting to a sudden shock and drawing lessons for the future, the new year offers opportunities to deploy those learnings and respond to the somewhat more benign challenges...”

If 2020 was a year of adapting to a sudden shock and drawing lessons for the future, the new year offers opportunities to deploy those learnings and respond to the somewhat more benign challenges that are specific and clearly visible. The old year was one of scrambling to improvise. The new year will be one of meticulous study and detailing. 

About the Author

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





A (Un) Likely Reversal?

'Facts First' philosophy dominates the exercise relating to scenario building, creating alternatives futures, and the comprehension of the possible impact of predetermined on working location preferences in the future.

BY PRAVEEN SINHA



Before delving into the main story, it is necessary to examine the history of the Plague pandemic which was brought in from Hong Kong to British India in 1896. It has been reported that it killed around 13.5 Million people in undivided India over the next thirty years (1926). According to the World Health Organisation, the pandemic was considered to be active until 1960, when worldwide casualties dropped to 200 per year. The colonial government's measures to control the disease in India included quarantine, isolation camps and travel restrictions. As we know, post the pandemic, life became normal - until the advent of COVID-19 in 2020.

Considering the above, one would like to admit that this piece is 'work in progress', and before taking an imaginative leap into the future, one has looked into



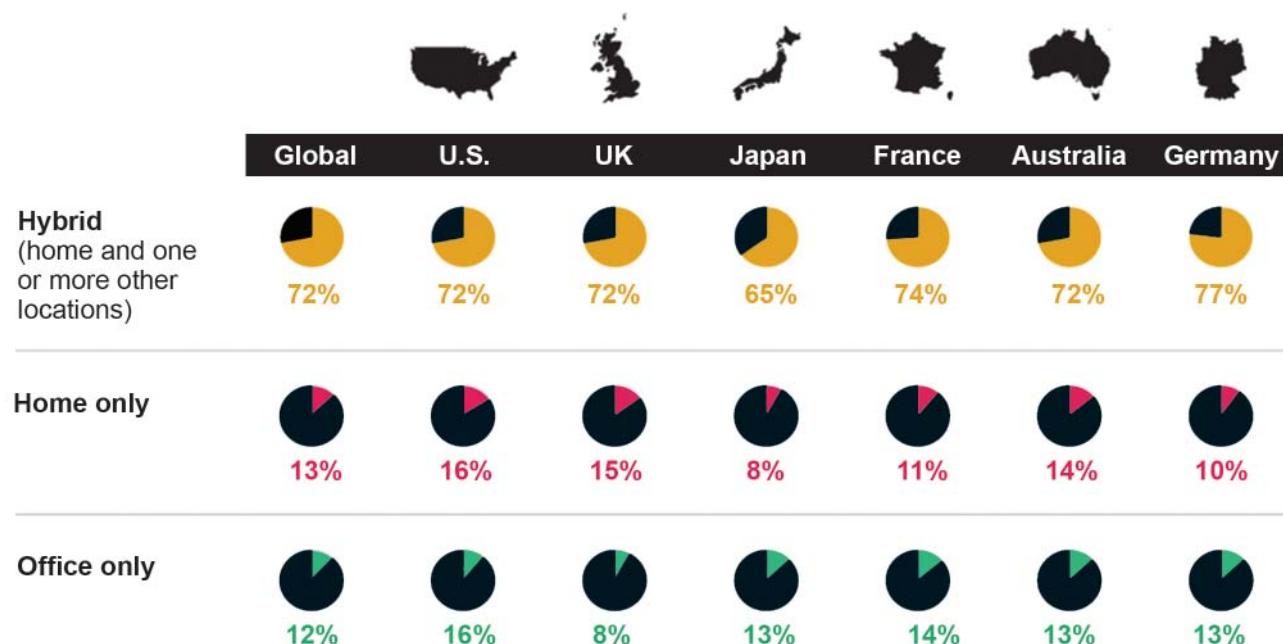
the statistics available in the public domain on changing work location preferences. An estimated 72% of knowledge workers are not keen to return to the office full-time, and hence, as preferred by the employees, companies are required to start investing in hybrid environments. However, companies must bear in mind that *'What goes up will come down'*.

“An estimated 72% of knowledge workers are not keen to return to the office full-time, and hence, as preferred by the employees, companies are required to start investing in hybrid environments.”

It is interesting to look at the survey report posted by Slack, a US-based collaboration hub, to understand the current global trend. The

report indicates a clear preference for a hybrid working location. And, it appears as though the preferences for a working location has been 'permanently disrupted' due to COVID-19. However, one cannot be sure.

Hybrid, home or office: A global breakdown of working location preferences



We are undoubtedly standing at the dawn of a new era. But, I personally see a possible reversal in terms of work location preference for hybrid in favour of 'office only'. If not a complete reversal; the hybrid working location preference will weaken to a great extent as compared to the current level i.e. 72% (though there is no exclusive survey report in the

Indian context available over the internet, the other collective survey reports largely show similar trends in India).

In view of the emerging positive trends, as shown in the table alongside, we may like to examine and open discussions on 'Hybrid work location preference post COVID-19 vaccine,' say in the next 5-10 years.

How some of the Covid-19 vaccines compare

Company	Type	Doses	How effective*	Storage
 Oxford Uni-AstraZeneca	Viral vector (genetically modified virus)	 x2	62-90%	 Regular fridge temperature
 Moderna	RNA (part of virus genetic code)	 x2	95%	 -20C up to 6 months
 Pfizer-BioNtech	RNA	 x2	95%	 -70C
 Gamaleya (Sputnik V)	Viral vector	 x2	92%	 Regular fridge temperature

*preliminary phase three results, not yet peer-reviewed

Source: Respective companies, WHO

“A possible reversal in terms of work location preference for hybrid in favour of 'office only' is highly likely. If not a complete reversal; the hybrid working location preference will weaken to a great extent...”

My discussions with corporate executives and students in India, the US and the UK reveal that physical presence might be required for induction, orientations, teambuilding and project kickoffs, but not necessarily for other work. They feel that the tasks that may take several hours in the office or at university campuses may be completed in just a few hours at home or from remote work locations (workplace). They see that remote working works well, and witness high

productivity! However, they are riddled with many questions, anxieties, and push backs, since nothing is 'absolute' and lasts forever. Work location preferences are something similar! Further, the reconfiguration of life will always remain to be a challenge for humanity.

Let us recap what we mean by Hybrid work location preference. In the most generic usage, 'Hybrid' is about reconfiguring life and creating a more flexible future of work. In other words, hybrid work

tends to encompass more freedom around 'WHEN TO WORK AS WELL AS WHERE'. This description suggests that it generally grants more autonomy to employees to fit work around the other aspects of their lives, rather than the other way round. It clearly signifies that hybrid is the best of both worlds - *structure and sociability on one hand, and independence and flexibility on the other.*

Well, the new models of work location preferences are continuously evolving and are yet to assume a permanent pattern. Let us understand what *Kissflow*, a digital workplace solution and services company having offices in the US and India, is doing – they have introduced a mixed working



SUSHIL BAVEJA

Executive Director- HR, DCM Shriram Ltd.

“The transition towards a hybrid work environment has already begun. What earlier was seen as a myth has already started taking shape of reality. Corporates and employees cutting across sectors have started adapting and accepting it as the work protocol of future. Institutionalising it requires an enabling ecosystem that is characterised by significant technology adoption that enables virtual accomplishment of work processes and outcomes, a leadership that has a greater blend of empathy, compassion and trust along with sharp focus on deliverables & accountability, capability building across levels for an effective virtual work protocol management and a culture that drives collaboration, wellness, understanding and psychological safety”

model called *REMOTE+*. The company has distributed the month in this manner - employees to work three weeks from anywhere with one week of office-based work. The company covers the accommodation cost for the office week and allows employees to return home for the rest of the time.

It is true that different industries will respond differently to the issue of adapting to new work location preferences - one model fits all will not work.

It is also necessary to examine work location preference from the angle of social needs fulfilment. We are well-acquainted with Maslow's theory of hierarchy of needs wherein he talked about moving from Physiological needs to *Security needs to Social needs to Esteem needs to Self-actualisation.* At this point of time, this theory is prompting us to consider the influence of 'Social needs' (like affinity, relationship, belonging, affection, friendship) for people over working location preferences over a period of time. There is a feeling that hybrid working location preferences will come at the cost of fulfilment of social needs.

The arrival of the COVID-19 vaccine, which is almost at the door step, will help people to come out of the shell of 'insecurity'. It will also encourage them to move from the security needs stage to the higher need i.e. social needs fulfilment. And that is when it will influence change in work location preference in favour of office only location.

The recent experiences of lockdown relaxation followed by festivals in India such as Dussehra, Diwali, and Thanksgiving- particularly in the US, surge in domestic and international travels, rapid increase in foot falls at the malls etc. make it evident that people by nature cannot sacrifice or change



VARGHISE K

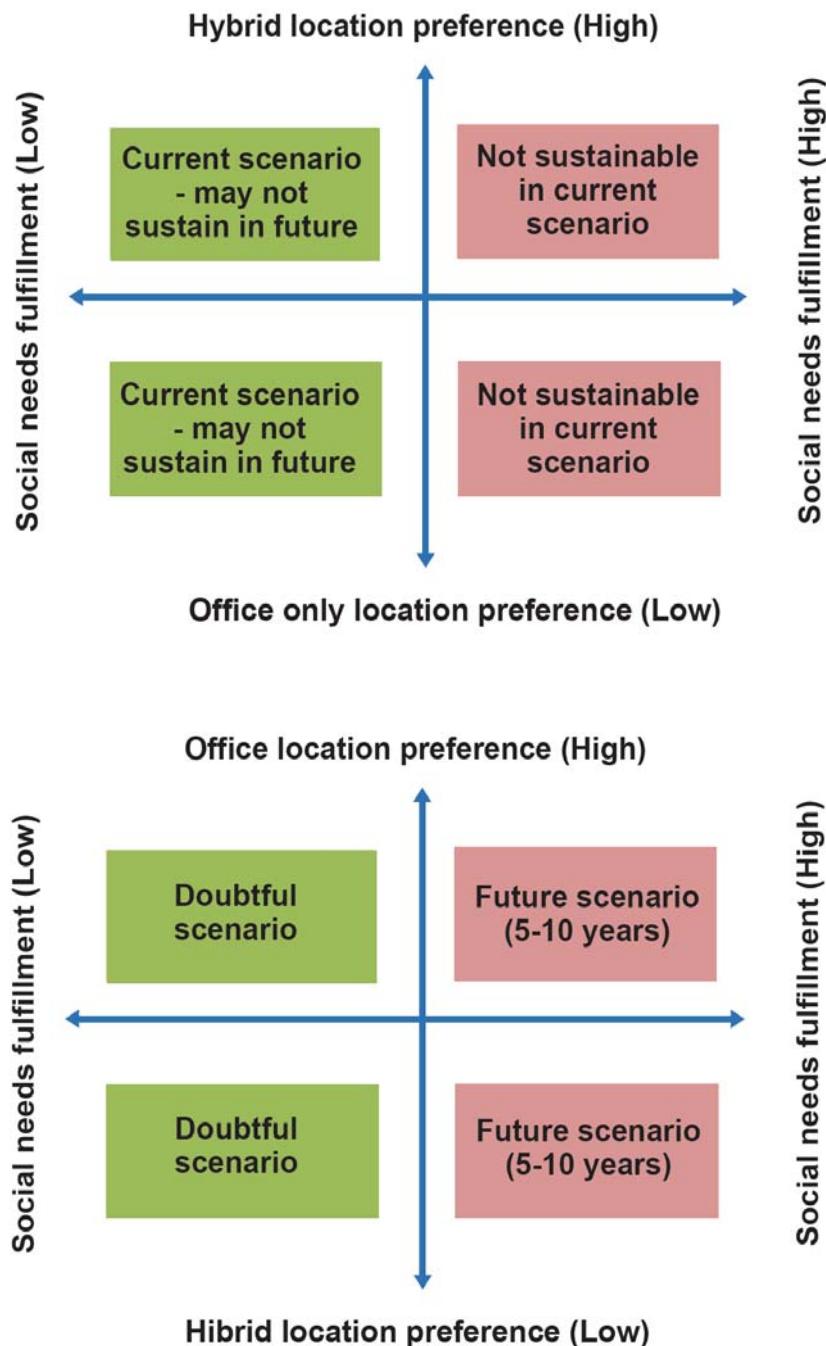
VP and Head - Human Resources, CMS IT Services

“Covid-19 has forced organisations to think differently. Organisations have shrunk their physical workspaces to only house those employees who's in-office presence is essential for their BAU to run smoothly, as well as a few additional seats as per the hot-seat mechanism to accommodate others attending office on need-basis. This system is relatively new, and it is commendable how well businesses have seamlessly moved on to it and improved productivity, especially at the middle and upper level of the hierarchy. The ROI is also looking good, so organisations are considering continuing this hybrid model. But on the flip side, "any-time-any-day" approach to work has significantly increased chances of 'burnouts'. The fine line between work and home is fading.”

their basic nature of sociability. They cannot keep aside or put their social needs fulfilment on ice for long durations.

Presently, there is undoubtedly a tension between sociability and safety from the point of view of infection contraction. But it appears as though that people will try to reduce this tension and revert to normal life. However, it is difficult to say how soon - possibly in the next 3-5 years.

Let us look at 4 + 4 scenarios (8 alternative futures) in the context of Maslow's hierarchy of needs and working location preferences and fulfilment of social needs.



AKASH SANGOLE

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

“HR is positioned uniquely to lead enterprises, recover and thrive in the new world of work. It is pivotal in creating vital leadership, shaping the way enterprises recruit, develop talent, and take care of their experiences by acting as a driving force in keeping the workforce and organisation engaged, productive and resilient. Accelerating digital HR, driving process improvements - concerning where and how to prioritise, along with the agility to perform better and be right in the game. This would certainly be a 'rebound' to the new beginning in creating the “best of both worlds” for colleagues.”

Let us see what we mean by Forecast, Scenario, Predetermined and Hope –

■ **Forecasts**

- Single future
- A statistical summary of expert opinion - also supported by survey data
- It requires that we first decide what we want to forecast (e.g. Demand of automobile, Working location preferences etc)
- Forecasting is useful in the short term, where things are reasonably predictable and uncertainty is relatively minimal compared to our ability to predict

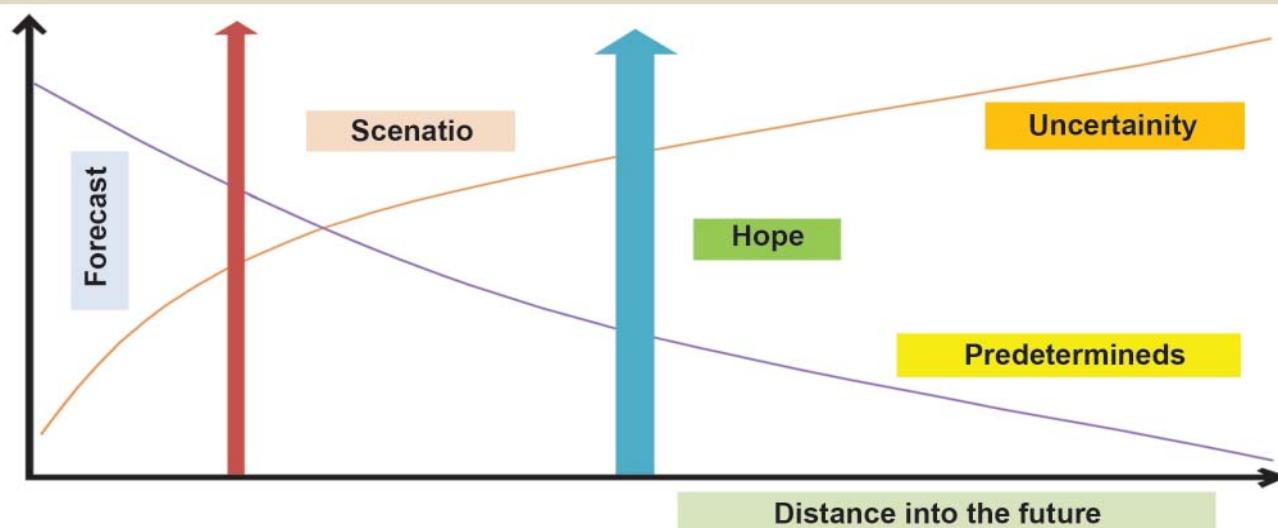
■ **Scenario**

- Creating alternative or multiple futures for different types of industries
- A description of possible events and ‘weak signals’ which might

Presently, there are several questions with respect to our indulgence in visualising working location preferences.

- Are we into ‘Forecast’ mode?
- Have we created ‘Scenarios’ (alternative futures - moving out of traditional single future to multiple futures) to understand the working location preferences?
- Do we have the sense of ‘new knowledge developing at the fringes’?
- Have we deliberated enough over the fine balance of predictability and uncertainty in the current and future business environment?
- Have we clearly understood the unfolding of ‘Predetermined’?

The Balance of Predictability and Uncertainty in business environment leading to changing working location preferences...



LIA LYNN MARCOS

Senior Director, Regional Human Resources, APAC Sykes

“The key in successfully transitioning to a hybrid work model is having a clear understanding of business goals and HR knowing how to translate, handle, and support both work-at-home and brick-and-mortar models. Companies have to be very clear that they need to ensure quality delivery of needs for the clients and customers, maintaining service excellence without sacrificing the applicants and employee experience. With these goals in mind, companies need to deconstruct the current brick-and-mortar service model and adapt this to a remote workforce that would benefit employees no matter where they may be. Through technology and digital tools, companies will be able to provide support, coaching, and mentoring seamlessly.”

have a dominating effect on the unfolding of the future

- Scenarios are used in estimating the probable effects of one or more variables (Environment issues like – Social, Political, Economic, Technology, Social - now Medical & Health is also added)
- A conceptual description of the future based on cause and effect
- Different parts of the world will develop in their own ways and at different paces.
- Scenarios explore “how the world will work” in the future

Predetermined

Certain events have already occurred, but their consequences have not yet unfolded. Our ability to accurately comprehend the visible effect of predetermined decreases substantially as the future timespan increases. For instance, a bent for hybrid working location preference, long-term effect of COVID-19 on society, dent on social needs fulfilment due to COVID-19, wildfires in Southern California, impact of changing demographics, African American COVID-19 mortality etc.

Hope

As shown in the last diagram, hope is the space created when

‘uncertainty’ increases and visible effect of ‘predetermined’ decreases sharply as we move into a distant future, say in the next 5-10 years.

As stated earlier, this article is ‘work in progress’. ‘Facts First’ philosophy dominates the exercise relating to scenario building, creating alternatives futures, comprehension of the possible impact of predetermined on working location preferences in the future. For sure, it is serious work and requires a good amount of research and deep exploration.

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About the Author

Praveen Sinha is Ex Head - HR Centre of Excellence, Corporate HR, Escorts Ltd and Co-founder, People n Planet Fora. He comes with an experience of more than 35 years and has worked in Damien Foundation, Belgium, Deepak Fertilizers & Petrochemicals Corporation, Tata Finance, Raymond etc. Praveen has a Post Graduate degree in Personnel Management & Industrial Relations from XISS Ranchi and is a Certified coach-Art & Science of Coaching from Erickson coaching International.



Is Hybrid Work The ‘Promised Land’ ?

The seeds of hybrid working model were sown many years ago. However, it took a crisis like COVID-19 for such a model to emerge as a reality.

BY NISHATH USMANI



‘The future is already here - it is just not evenly distributed’

– William Gibson

On a chilly winter evening in December in 2011, I was seated with my colleagues and was watching the breath-taking performances of one of the most expensive shows of *Cirque du Soleil*. This was an evening out in Paris; part of an official get together of the team of fairly junior, non-client facing staff, and spread over

four continents and fifteen countries. This was a biannual team meeting, that happened at various locations in Europe. If you are wondering how this organisation could afford these seemingly expensive offsites, with luxurious shows and dinners thrown in- your question is well placed. The answer lies in its unique business model. A model that supported

remote work, brought in specialist workers from across the globe; working for a common purpose. This was the genesis of what today, has come to be called 'the Hybrid Organisation!' The seeds of this model were sown many years ago. However, it took a crisis like COVID-19 for such a model to emerge as a reality. Like they say, *'the future is already here - it is just not evenly distributed'*.

So, what is a hybrid organisation? *"It is a company or a team with a few employees who are co-located and some others who work remotely, which is also referred to as "hybridremote."* There are three fundamental shifts that underpin today's hybrid working model:



ADITYA KOHLI
CHRO, Clix Capital

"As an organisation builds new capabilities, it must be extremely thoughtful about adapting to the changing environment. The pandemic has revolutionised the way we look at Work, Workforce and Workplace. Typically, large changes take place in waves. First, the early adopters who procure the benefit of the change but also carry the most risk as frontrunners. They will become the beacons to drive the new normal. Then come the fence-sitters, who wait to see the impact and implications of the change before they adopt it. Spend time with this group as they can offer incredible insights on what works and what doesn't in ironing out the crinkles. Finally, there are the naysayers who need significant motivation to change. They won't change on seeing the light but will after feeling the heat."

- **Work is what you do, not where you go to:** You could be in your office connected to a colleague who is in the next cubicle, the next house or the next country. Irrespective of your location, it is business as usual for your co-workers. Tools such as Slack, Asana, Trello, Google docs etc. have made collaboration possible like never before. Technology enables you to check into the office reception when you come to the office. However, when you do not, you will still be able to come to the virtual reception, and enter your virtual meeting room. On the day of your onboarding, you meet the other joiners in the office's virtual amphitheatre. So, the question of where you are no longer remains as a matter of concern. What you do from wherever you are is the only thing that counts!

- **Work is about the outcomes, not the work:** The advent of the multiplex transformed the movieviewing experience for an entire generation, who were used to the 'three shows only' scenario. Similarly, the hybrid working model has rendered the work concept of 9 A.M. to 5 P.M. redundant. It is not about the hours that you spend working, it is about the work that you do in those hours. The concept of long working hours still exists, but the hours have changed. You could call the two hours in the evening as your *'Do not disturb hours'*- and choose to go for a painting class, so long as you compensate for those hours. The core point is that as an employee, you will be measured for the outcome of your tasks, not the tasks themselves.

- **Work is about subcultures, not culture:** Today, there is no 'one company culture'. In fact, several subcultures exist simultaneously. These subcultures are a great way to unite people with their common interests. Professionals join to celebrate their passions and learn more about their preferred way of living. The



KAVITA NIGAM
Chief Human Resources Officer,
KARAM Industries

"The new hybrid model promises lower costs, more individual flexibility, and improved employee physical health. It will pave a way to tackle the threat of the pandemic better. However, for productivity, leadership is crucial, and team leaders must seek concrete results and take accountability from their teams. In the hybrid virtual model, teams also need to adopt new norms and change the way they work if they are to maintain and improve, through collaboration and innovation. Simultaneously, transparent communication and best technical support are also very critical in the new normal working."

concept of the community- a smaller set of people that you will go to, is slowly becoming the order of the day.

These positive shifts notwithstanding, the hybrid working model may, in fact, prove to be difficult to adopt. More than the technology and the tools, the real shift is required to happen in the mind of the working employee. Here are a few reasons why this may not be as easy as it seems:

- **Trust is in short supply:** The hierarchical Indian society thrives on the inherent belief that 'all men are not made equal'. Caste, economic status, urban-rural, the reasons for demarcation are many and since everyone is not the same; not everyone can be trusted. In a hybrid work environment, where you cannot see half the people you work with, trust becomes the most important

For Building Blocks to Support New Work Models for a Hybrid Future



Leadership, Culture, and purpose

- Revisit and redefine the purpose to inspire the organisation
- Articulate and activate the culture required to reinforce purpose, turbocharge engagement, and drive performance
- Build leadership muscle to drive behaviours to live purpose and create culture throughout the organisation



Structure and roles

- Adapt structure and roles to lock in speed, empowerment, focus, and deep caring for employees and customers
- Align around target customer experiences, and use support platforms to increase speed and scale
- Go beyond the traditional “boxes and lines” focus to make location part of the redesign to reduce the real estate footprint



Ways of working

- Connect with the employee experience; survey your people on how, when, and where they get their work done
- Build new agile team norms and processes to enable the members of each team to collaborate at their best



Systems and spaces

- Reimagine workspaces around employee needs and activities to support hybrid work models
- Invest in digital infrastructure and smart workspace technologies to support the transformation

Source: BCG analysis



AKANKSHA SANE

Senior Director- India HR Delivery,
PTC Inc

“With the COVID situation, Hybrid options have offered new remote work opportunities to many employees. Organisations must consider giving flexible work from home model especially for working mothers to incorporate in their corporate culture. This will eventually lead to creating value in the company and employees will have greater responsibility to perform at their best. Equipping all the employees with the tools and resources for the Work from Home option will help in working seamlessly leaving them and everyone satisfactory. ‘Bring your whole self’ to work, that’s the culture that we need to strive for, give the levy to employees to manage work along with personal demands.”

currency. The ability to trust requires an open mind. And to become trustworthy, you need to give more than you receive. In India, both these aspects seem to be in short supply.

- **Emotional intelligence is a rare intelligence:** To be able to hear the tinge of sadness in the voice over a zoom call, or to read the frustration sitting between multiple email lines – requires a certain amount of sensitivity and awareness. When employees meet face to face, the emotions and the body language speak loud enough, but it is harder for most people to ‘see’ this over electronic media. As a result, unhappiness and disillusionment creep into our work lives, and goes unnoticed by almost everyone. And work continuously suffers.

- **Performance management becomes a black hole:** With physically scattered team members, the role of the performance manager can be complex. The outcomes of the work must be so clearly defined or chunked such that it becomes easy for anyone to make an assessment. Work in the hybrid working model is like a *relay race*,



PRINCE AUGUSTIN

EVP Group Human Capital &
Leadership Development, Mahindra
& Mahindra

“Today, organisations have to plan for the workplace basis the roles and convenience of the employees- those whose roles allow them to work from home, those who are facing infrastructural challenges at home and would prefer to come to office, and lastly, those for who work from office is absolutely essential. It is the accelerated digital adoption and innovation that has played a crucial role in a smooth transition to these new work models. A combination of co-located and remote work practices will allow companies to experiment with a range of solutions and provide flexibility and the best of both worlds to the workforce.”

with everyone picking up the baton hoping that the other runs just as fast. In reality, the chunking of work in such a manner is not always possible in a fluid, collaborative work environment.

• **Flexibility is flexible:** How flexible is flexible? This can be an endless discussion depending on which side of the table you are on. You could be a team member who does not want to attend a morning meeting because you want to take the yoga class. As a manager, you insist on the morning meeting, because you have a doctor's appointment for your mother in the evening. So, where does one draw the line? Besides, if schedules and timelines become flexible, then the concept of 'EoD' itself changes.

So, is the hybrid working model not the ultimate panacea or the win-win for all? Well, it could be, if we, as leaders and team members, develop a few core skills

that will help us thrive in this hybrid *phygital* future.

• **Be the Master orchestrator:**

The concept of bringing 'one's best version to work' is passé. The hybrid working model will compel employees to bring their complete selves to work. After all, there is only one 'you'. You cannot be a very different *avatar* at home and something else at work. Which means that as employees we will need to develop skills of a master orchestrator, stringing together the parent-teacher meetings and the client presentations to ensure the symphony of your life is beautiful.

• **Become the purposeful**

executor: It is very easy to lose focus and purpose in a hybrid work environment. For sure, there is no one physically breathing down your neck, but work needs to get done. This means to be successful; one will need to be high on execution, and also be purpose driven. Extrinsic motivation will help so much after that employees will need to search and harness their purpose to reach their full potential.

• **Build the community:** The hybrid working model will make the world a smaller place and, in some way, make us go back to the basics. Just like in the preurbanisation era, people lived in communities, employees will align themselves to self-sufficient or likeminded communities. This will mean that we need to excel in communication because 'reaching out' will harder; but it is this skill that we will help grow.

• **Make 'kind and empathetic' your middle name:** With one employee in Irkutsk in Russia and another in Zaragoza in Spain, team members will have no option but to adapt to different cultures, languages and time zones. This will mean that patience, gratitude and kindness need to become key work competencies. One will need to develop strong empathy and collaboration skills along with technical competence.

"...and He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've seen



BENAIFER PALSETIA

Chief Human Resources Officer,
Indostar Capital Finance

"The pandemic has radically altered the work paradigm and forced organisations to adapt to a dynamic business environment with sustained urgency. It has enabled the pursuit of a hybrid model that promotes Innovation & Sociability along with Independence & Flexibility. The focus will not only be to drive technological enhancement but also to grant more autonomy to employees. Re-skilling and upskilling employees will be top priority in ensuring strategies of the future are sustained at scale. Leadership strategies built around the workforce will be returned with enthusiasm, loyalty and trust by the employees when the pandemic finally fades off."

the Promised Land" says Abraham in the Book of Genesis. In many ways, the hybrid working model may be the promised land, with one important caveat. "*Leave your country, your people and your father's household*"- said God in continuation. Similarly, we will need to leave our narrow definitions of work and workplace if we want to truly become inhabitants of the 'promised land!' **HC**

About the Author

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



ABHAY SRIVASTAVA

Chief Human Resource Officer, IKS
Health

"The pandemic has taught us many things, and mainly, resilience as individuals and adaptability as businesses will be the critical ingredients for winning in the future work environments. As we cross over to the other side of this pandemic, inventing and adapting hybrid work dynamics, will be integral to HR strategy. We must provide a work environment that is agile and focused on technology-led business enablement. As human capital leaders we must create capabilities by swift technology adoption; empower the workforce by upskilling redundancies; and generate excitement by providing a dynamic work paradigm."

Future-Proofing Your Career



*There is no job security anymore. This probably isn't news to you — 2020 seemed tailor-made to remind us that nothing is predictable. But the question remains: how can you prepare in 2021 to make your career future-proof no matter what gets thrown at you? Tough times like the pandemic can create the impression that, as professionals, we're in the grips of forces beyond our control. **Dorie Clark**, a leading authority on self-reinvention and bestselling author who teaches at Duke University's Fuqua School of Business and Columbia Business School, doesn't entirely buy this. In an interaction with Human Capital, she discusses what individuals can do to build career resiliency. She also shares actionable tips to develop an intrapreneurial mindset and lays out the steps for creating a personal brand as an asset that pays dividends over one's entire career.*

BY ANKITA SHARMA

Q You have written and spoken extensively about how people — even those who have full-time, steady jobs — should leverage their expertise and skills to develop multiple income streams. Why is building diverse sources of income essential for professionals in any field?

A Professionals need to build multiple income streams because having one full-time job that's safe and secure is an illusion. In most cases, having a job is secure until it isn't. I learned this lesson very early on when I was a journalist and suddenly got laid off from my job. I didn't have a Plan B or a lot of savings. Moreover, I lost my job right before September 11th, 2001. Looking for work amid such massive economic and sociopolitical uncertainty was terrifying. This was when I realised that the more legs we can have on our table, the more secure we will be. Having multiple streams of income is a way of limiting risk. It's a way of capturing the additional upside, and it enables you to sleep better at night.

Corporations are going to do what is necessary to sustain themselves. Given changes in industry trends and unpredictable situations like the ongoing pandemic, there will be layoffs. We need to make sure, as much as we can, that we are insulated against such uncertainty. Creating side gigs and diverse sources of income is one of the ways we can protect ourselves from disruptions.

Q In building a portfolio career, how does one determine what one's side gigs could be?

A When determining what your side gig could be, you want to go for the low-hanging fruit. The best method is to look at the things that people around you already come to you for. Other people can oftentimes recognise your areas of expertise more easily than you can. Many of us think that something is easy and everyone can do it. But the truth is

that it may be easy for you but not for other people.

Think about what it is that people are always trying to tap you for. Maybe you are a great photographer, so you're always the friend that people ask to take snapshots. Maybe you have a great fashion sense, and people ask you for your suggestion about putting their wardrobes together. Perhaps you have an interest in technology, and people want your advice about the products they should buy or how to install them. These are all things that you can leverage. This doesn't mean that you're going to start charging your friends for these services. However, if you are strategic about it, you can start doing things for free, asking for testimonials and referrals, and start charging your friend's friends for these services over time. That's how a business begins.

“Professionals need to build multiple income streams because having one full-time job that's safe and secure is an illusion. In most cases, having a job is secure until it isn't.”

Q One of the things some readers might be thinking about right now is, 'How do I fit a side hustle into an already-busy schedule?' What would your advice be for them?

A When you start a side gig, it will take up additional time on your nights and weekends. There's no way around it. If it were easy, everyone would be doing it. But that is what separates the people who are successful from the people who lie around and say, 'Oh, it'd be great to do something' or 'I wish I could do something.' We all have the same 168 hours in a week. If

you are smart and strategic, you can use those hours more effectively. This doesn't mean that you suddenly need to invent 20 hours a week out of whole cloth. That's not possible.

If you can find time to build and develop things slowly, you will make demonstrable progress. And it builds up. It's like the compound interest that you would gain in any investment. Spend an hour or two per week to experiment, like taking on a free client to get a recommendation or a testimonial, writing a blog post so that you have content to put on your website, sharing your ideas publicly so that other people notice you, or putting together a presentation that you can send to prospective clients who are inquiring about the work that you do.

Over time, you can get much further than you might imagine. There's a saying that most people overestimate what they can do in a day and underestimate what they can do in a year. I really believe that's true.

Q Global recruitment specialist Michael Page named 'intrapreneurship' as the most in-demand skill for 2020 because an increasing number of companies are looking for talent with entrepreneurial traits. How can individuals cultivate and hone the mindset of an intrapreneur?

A Being an intrapreneurial thinker within a corporation is an incredibly valuable skill. Essentially, it's about having an ownership mentality. An intrapreneur has agency and is not just sitting back like a robot waiting to be told what to do.

I give speeches and deliver webinars all around the world for a variety of corporations. I can't tell you how many people come to me regarding this specific issue. Leaders often ask me how they can get their employees to take more responsibility and be more proactive.

If you are looking to cultivate your intrapreneurial skill as an employee, the most important thing is to recognise that you have the ability to do so. You shouldn't wait for permission. Of course, that doesn't mean that you should go wild or do things that you know your company would look at askance. It means thinking creatively.

When you see a problem, rather than just saying to your manager, *'Oh, there's a problem; what should I do?'* come up with potential solutions. Even better, to the extent that it's possible, test out some solutions. See what you can gin up. Is there a low-cost experiment that you could try? Is there some way that you could begin to validate something?

The key to developing an intrapreneurial mindset is not to rely on the comforts of the corporate apparatus. Corporations often have enough money and manpower to go around. If you are a scrappy entrepreneur, you don't have those. You have to rely on your wits and some duct tape to get things done. If you bring this kind of mentality to a corporation, it's extraordinarily powerful.

If you had no resources whatsoever, were constrained by budget, manpower, and time, how could you effectively solve the

problem? Thinking within this frame of mind can often lead you to robust solutions.

“The key to developing an intrapreneurial mindset is not to rely on the comforts of the corporate apparatus.”

Q While companies like Google, Intel, and 3M are well-known for their intrapreneurial success, it's still difficult to drive intrapreneurship within many organisations. How can HR and business leaders contribute to developing and sustaining entrepreneurial attitudes in employees?

A One of the keys for corporations to encourage intrapreneurial thinking within their employees is to understand why they are not behaving entrepreneurially. By and large, it comes down to one major reason, which is that people are afraid to take risks because they are scared they will fail. They believe that failure will lead to punishment or, perhaps, the loss of their job. If that's what people think, you can understand why they wouldn't want to be intrapreneurial. Who wants to take a risk that will lead to them getting fired?

HR and business leaders need to de-risk the process for potential intrapreneurs. First, publicly call out the fact that intrapreneurial behaviour is encouraged. Second, celebrate employees who do behave in such a manner. When you see success, hold it up, shine a light on it, and say, "This is what we're looking for." When you are praising certain behaviours, you will generally get more of those kinds of behaviours.

Perhaps even more critically, corporations need to hold up and celebrate the people who have failed in their intrapreneurial endeavours within the company. That's the part that people are most afraid of: what happens to all the people who tried something but didn't work out? Did they get broomed out? Leaders need to hold up that person and let it be known that you are praising their effort.

It doesn't matter if the project failed because the whole point of intrapreneurial thinking is not about spending millions and billions of rupees trying to accomplish something. It is about trying to test something quickly on a tight budget and validate it. If it doesn't work, it's not the end of the world, because you didn't spend a lot of time or money. In fact, you have a victory since you have more data and information, which will enable you later to make better and smarter choices.

Q In your book, *Reinventing You*, you describe a three-step process to personal branding. Why is a personal brand important, and how could each step you've laid out help people get started on this front?

A Your personal brand is a synonym for your reputation. It matters enormously because most people in the world are not those you have worked with personally and directly. The vast majority hear about you through secondhand information. Thus, you want them



to hear good things. You want to have a great reputation so that if someone becomes aware of you, the information about you makes them want to work with you or hire you.

I suggest a three-step approach to personal branding:

i. The first step is to get a sense of how you're currently perceived in the marketplace.

One simple and fun way to do this is what I call the 'three-word exercise.' Reach out to friends and colleagues who know you reasonably well, and ask them, *'If you could use only three words to describe me, what would they be?'* By the time you get to the fifth or sixth person, you will see patterns in what people tell you.

It's helpful because most of us have a limited idea of what it is about ourselves that people find the most distinctive and unique. When you begin to get insight into that, it enables you to figure out your strengths and what you can lean into to drive your competitive advantage.

ii. The next step is to understand what you would like your brand to be and imagine the future you want. That involves doing some creative visioning, identifying where you want to go, and looking at what you need to close any gaps. It could be additional training, taking classes, working on beefing up some of your soft skills, expanding your network in a different industry, or cultivating contacts outside of your company if you have been at your organisation for a long time.

iii. The final step is what I call living out your brand. Many people think about developing a personal brand as a one-time activity, but that's not right. You are constantly recreating your brand with each interaction you have with people. So you need to be very conscious about how you are presenting yourself. That doesn't mean being fake or stilted. It means understanding the

messages that you are sending on a day-to-day basis.

Who comprises your circle that you hang out with? Who are the people you surround yourself with? What kind of leadership roles have you taken on? What are the things you talk about? How do you treat other people? All of these questions matter as they shape your personal brand and how others perceive you.

“The whole point of intrapreneurial thinking is not about spending millions and billions of rupees trying to accomplish something. It is about trying to test something quickly on a tight budget and validate it. If it doesn't work, it's not the end of the world, because you didn't spend a lot of time or money. In fact, you have a victory since you have more data and information, which will enable you later to make better and smarter choices.”

Q Over the past year, several million people across the globe lost their jobs. What advice do you have for those coping with a layoff?

A As I mentioned earlier, I was laid off during the chaos following the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the US. So I can empathise with people who have lost their jobs. One advantage, if we can call it that, of losing your job in a pandemic is that it is less stigmatised. People will not immediately assume that you got laid off because you must be terrible at your job. There's a lot

more understanding in the marketplace because we're in a pandemic, and the economy is terrible.

You could be an amazing employee and performer, but there simply aren't jobs to be had in some industries during an international crisis. This situation makes it easier for you to break into other sectors because many smart employers see it as their lucky break to get high-quality talent that otherwise would have been swept up by other companies and industries.

Here are some key points to consider when searching for a job:

- Sometimes, when people are laid off, they get panicky and become profligate in their job applications. They start treating their resume like an assembly line, sending it off to hundreds of places. This is a mistake because the point isn't to play a numbers game but to be deliberate. If you are in an industry that has collapsed during COVID-19, and you need to shift to a new industry, you are at a bit of a disadvantage because your experience has been in another realm. You've got to be thoughtful about making a case for how your skills translate. Write deliberate cover letters, explaining the skill translation, and what you can bring to your new job.
- The best way to break into a new job, particularly in a new industry, is to have a warm lead that will vouch for you. Taking the time to use social media sites, such as LinkedIn or even Facebook, to see who you know, who works at a particular company or knows a certain hiring manager is important. You will be far more likely to get an interview or possibly even land a job if you have someone that they already trust vouching for you and saying, *'Well, she might not have experience in this particular industry, but she's smart. She'll be able to pick up whatever she doesn't know very quickly.'* **HC**



Easy Does It!

Implementing Learning interventions is never easy, but good preparation, more often than not, helps achieve the intended learning outcomes.

BY DIPANKAR DAS

Often, Learning departments do not merely jostle by implementing a programme or two. Quite often, there are big-ticket programme launches that require several months of advanced planning. The L&D department in a large MNC in India was tasked with creating an elaborate Learning intervention for a sister business's Fast Track employees. This business was based in the Middle East and the programme would involve the Fast Trackers travelling to India, Manila and East Europe to undergo this programme. The programme would comprise not just a few key modules, but addresses by select members of the India business leadership team, psychometric assessments and debrief, meeting with domain experts with HR and Learning personnel handholding them through the entire programme. And to boot, the programme would be a paid opportunity, so the India business would actually earn additional revenue for designing and implementing this programme. L&D departments, typically far removed from revenue opportunities, could not fathom the quantum of their happiness at the prospect of earning.

Readying for the Run

In the past articles, we had discussed the importance of doing a good Training Needs Analysis, of designing well and then delivering with expertise. Well, that is truly the groundwork for good



programme implementation too. The Training Needs Analysis allows the Programme Managers to understand the skill gaps that exist and what the stakeholders want the programme to contain. Both these expectations need to be well blended.

Pilot Practice

Large scale implementations are challenging, not just logistically, but also due to the risk of mistakes, overruns and scope creep. Hence, it is advisable that before we go in for full-fledged implementation, would prove to be hugely beneficial. While digital learning has this baked-in in its development process with rapid prototyping and

Alpha launches, the same does not hold for classroom Training. Hence, approximate ways to reduce risks and take pre-emptive measures before a full-scale launch are a must-do.

Key Lookouts

Some of the key aspects we need to be on the lookout for have been listed. First and foremost, get the stakeholders on your side. They should believe in the programme and recognise the value it brings. Remember, they generally control the purse strings and not having them on board would derail the show, and, conversely, their support will ensure the smooth running of the Programme.

“The stakeholders generally control the purse strings and not having them on board would derail the show, and, conversely, their support will ensure the smooth running of the Programme.”

The next set of participants in the programme who need to be aligned are the Trainers themselves. The Train the Trainer programme and the subsequent certification are a key Quality Control measure and pregnant with consequences, if not done well. Remember, the Trainers will carry the value of the Programme on their shoulders. They are the anchors of the programme, both in terms of domain knowledge, and being the ambassadors of the programme. A single misstep on their part may prove to be one too many. Hence, they need to be certified for domain knowledge and, side by side, calibrated to the vision, imbued with the values and aligned to the end goals of the programme. Anything less will result in slippages which could be put the programme at considerable risk.

Next, the programme needs to be socialised. Organisations should know about its existence, the value it brings to the table and benefits it promises, not just to the narrow circle of participants, but to the organisation as a whole. Here, the intent needs to be to generate awareness, but also an aspirational value associated with the programme. That in turn ensures the transformation of reluctant participants into enthusiastic learners. Also, not just for one batch, this programme then becomes a fixed lodestar for achievers in the organisation.

It is one thing to create aspiration for a programme, quite

another to prep the participants. They are both the customers and recipients of the programme. Their buy-in is critical and linked to the key adult learning principle of what is in it for them. They need to know upfront that which is expected of them. How they will benefit. Logistically, they need to know the time it will consume, the travel it will involve. Actually, a dedicated Orientation Programme for them would go a long way. This sensitisation upfront helps not just in planning, but develops a broader acceptance, even a sense of anticipation and helps to obviate last minute surprises and the lack of preparedness.

“The Trainers carry the value of the Programme on their shoulders. They are the anchors of the programme, both in terms of domain knowledge, and being the ambassadors of the programme.”

Going Granular

As they say, the devil is in the details. And the details have a devilish propensity to derail well laid out plans. Hence, it is advisable to take a Project Management approach to the execution of the Programme. What is meant by the Project Management approach is that we develop a robust plan with timelines and responsibilities for each deliverable and understand the interrelationship between the deliverables. From the high-level communications to planning the logistics, it needs to be seamless. Coming down to the most granular is how we ensure the Training Rooms are set up, amenities provided and how learning friendly they are. It goes without saying

that optimal AV arrangements, flipcharts, whiteboards, preferably a cluster or horseshoe sitting arrangement, enables learning to flow smoothly. Unfortunately, due to poor infrastructure, it is very common to witness a reverse Pareto, where a huge adverse impact on learning happens due to the smallest logistical lacunae or problems with physical outlay.

Such programmes rarely begin or end in the classroom. There are pre-work studies to be done and post-work to be followed up with. Both are important for the initiation and internalisation of the key learning flowing from the programme. Following up on post-learning activities is a tough task, as most participants, once out of the Training room, get lost in the day-to-day Operations and lose the sense of urgency which may have been there in the Training room.

A long story short

Coming back to our original story. Endless hours went into planning and when our participants landed from the Middle East, most of them coming to India for the first time, Murphy's law could have played truant. However, the advance planning paid off. The participants learned well, enjoyed the sights and sounds of India, during the weekends, and left satisfied enough to give very positive feedback, which resulted in this programme becoming an annual feature and part of the Individual Development Path for the Fast Trackers. 

About the Author

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



A Few Desirable ACTS

Organisations cannot be resilient if their People Leaders are not in harmony with the evolving contextual competencies. Given the uncertainty, nothing beats a leader with humility, perseverance, and creativeness on any given day.

BY JAYDEEP DAS

Volatility, Uncertainty, COVID-19 and Ambiguity are the precise reasons for which the world needs good People Leaders. The year 2020 has put many People Leaders on a steep learning curve to tide over unprecedented leadership challenges caused by the pandemic. As we pin our hopes for a safer 2021, many are left wondering as to what needs to be done to support the people under their care, given the backdrop of the evolving situation.

While some organisations are partially back to normal working with precautions, several others are looking at tweaking policies to cement flexi-working as they journey into the future. This arrangement, however, is not the same as work from home, as the select workforce is operating in the presence of key stakeholders at home and they do merit their share of attention and time.

COVID-19 has followed a non-discriminatory approach by affecting people regardless of their workspaces in multiple ways. The evolving situation has become our best teacher. It is an undeniable fact that all employees, whether sweating out on site or working from home while struggling to maintain personal space at times, deserve a higher degree of empathetic leadership. Work has invaded into our family spaces with a prolonged remote working arrangement and some family chores have invaded into our workspace. Leadership is not only about being

profit focused, but also about being responsible as a shepherd for the well-being of a thriving workforce.

Given the *COVIDified* constraints, it is certainly a huge ask of any leader. However, the journey can be more engaging if our people leaders demonstrate these *ACTS* prominently as we journey further.

Authenticity

Being authentic is the ability to do what you say and say what you do. It is all about practicing what you preach. Even in the absence of perfect answers, leaders should keep listening to their team members and empathise with their concerns. Leaders should not be hesitant to share their own concerns with the team. Moving one step further, authenticity is not exactly about positional authority, rather, it is on moral authority. Respect comes as a precursor for being an influential leader.

Positional authority provides a leader with influence with a specific context for a limited time, whereas moral authority lingers well beyond the reporting diagrams. Needless to say, that the moral authority is essential more so during times of disruptions and uncertainties. It is about having the nerve to say that we do not have the solutions now but will try to get them as we walk along. Once we are able to walk the talk then employees will start to believe in our thinking process, engagements and responses. As a people leader, one needs to be

“Respect comes as a precursor for being an influential leader. Positional authority provides a leader with influence with a specific context for a limited time, whereas moral authority lingers well beyond the reporting diagrams.”



exceedingly human. Consistent demonstration of concern for real fears and anxieties being experienced by employees, not only professionally and economically, but also socially and personally is what will keep the flock together and flourishing. Adding empathy in all leadership dispensations is critical in the distance economy.

Crisis Resiliency

A resilient leader remains glued to the organisation's core strategic intent and grabs every transformational opportunity while managing the day-to-day confusion. The Leader's ability to put safety and wellbeing of people first,

and broadly trust in the team as leaders in their own space is what makes resiliency easier. Leaders must emulate forward-leaning and the sense of urgency as competencies to shape the future as a team. Delegation is another pivot that empowers the team to own their functioning and coping. Leaders of 2021 cannot afford to be afraid to let go and delegate to others. The ability and willingness to give up control and decentralise power that comes alongside responsibilities is imperative.

A good leader who understands risks and repercussions of a delayed decision acts on early signals of trouble and does not hesitate to make tough in-time decisions. In times of great uncertainty, people expect their leaders to lead with calmness, composure, the willingness to share information with clarity, and the audacity to admit if they need to change course. Good leadership embraces the uncertainty and speed of change with agility. A leader's own emotional resilience when confronted with ambiguity is the foundation to what the team can achieve. Leaders and managers who can maintain psychologically safe and emotionally resilient teams even during such times will truly experience the impact of what motivated teams can do.

A growth and newness inclined mind-set, as opposed to 'been there, done that' will allow leaders to experiment, learn from failures, and inculcate the same tenet in their team members. Now is the time to reinvent teams that will thrive in the workspace of tomorrow.

Trust

Trust is earned and that feeds into influencing ability. People crave for certainty even during ambiguous times such as this has been. Credibility sets the foundation for trust building and once trust sets in leaders are positioned as influencers. All people leaders need to hear this out loudly, *"You can be uncertain but you cannot be unclear."* In simple words, leaders need to be adequately clear in communicating the exact situation they are in or the developments going forward.



source- focus.kornferry.com

“Leaders of 2021 cannot afford to be afraid to let go and delegate to others. The ability and willingness to give up control and decentralise power that comes alongside responsibilities is imperative.”

Pretention is a pitfall that all leaders need to acknowledge. Pretention erodes credibility much quicker than a simple admission of “*I do not know*” stand. Be clear even when you are not sure about things. An individual will be more open for influence when she or he is convinced that the leader is aware of the feeling of the individual. Leaders need to be more human and check-in often with the people they have. I personally do not recollect any exit interview in which communication was cited as the reason for leaving. Trust takes a long time to establish, but only a moment to crash. Hence, it is vital to safeguard honesty at any point in time.

Stewardship

Leadership implies responsibility to people under care and attracts duty of care approach. With teams working from home, some on sites, leaders have to play the role of the binding glue that brings people together on a common purpose where everyone feels valued and included. Managers need to be mindful not let ‘out of sight, out of mind’ mind-set to creep in. Inclusive leadership is key to chase

success. Leadership is not about making decisions on your own, but owning the decision once you make them, so seek counsel, consult and let the decision be co-owned by your people at large. Keep your life simple, it helps. It is critical to realise that you cannot expect the team to do anything that you will not do yourself.

As leader, one critical piece is to protect learning budgets to avoid any regret later. The current crisis will require a larger skill shift much more than before for the next normal. Leaders should step up as shepherds. A shepherding presence in matters pertaining to the team is more important than the best of the best presentation. 

Happy 2021!

About the Author

Jaydeep Das provides strategic leadership as International Head – People & Culture for Children Believe. Prior to his association with Children Believe, he has provided his leadership to ChildFund International as the Director HR, Administration & IT. He started his career in corporate sector and then moved to World Vision India in 2006.



Greening The Greenhorns

For most managers that inhabit our workplaces, a great foundation at the start of their career often plays a defining role in the success that they are able to achieve over the long-term.

BY VIKAS DUA

At the turn of the millennium, the stars aligned in more ways than one with the arrival of a strapping young man in tinsel town. Clad in a stylish leather jacket and riding a throbbing sports bike, he roared into the frame and a star was born in the Indian constellation. Welcomed by whistles and shrieks in cinema halls across the country, he immediately won a million hearts. Post the release of this romance-themed movie, *'Kaho Na Pyaar Hain'*, Hrithik Roshan was flooded by as many as 30,000 marriage proposals, apart from more than a few cherished awards! These were undoubtedly a testament to the impact he had managed to create on the big screen.

A Bollywood inspiration

For a nation that is forever in love with Bollywood and is looking for yet another star to worship, it was as if he had just descended from heaven. This belief also fit in well with the much-loved narrative of star-kids being born and silver-gloved into stardom. Many ascribed his huge achievement to the luck of having been born into one of Bollywood's well-established families. What many of the adulatory fans across the country missed was the hard work and guidance prior to this mega launch that had chiselled Hrithik into the star he had become.

But Bollywood is hardly considered to be a professional environment, for reasons we will not get into here. So, let us cut to



the corporate world and look at the dynamics for those starting out. In the Indian landscape, education and work have traditionally seen as two separate phases in our lives. It is naturally assumed that only after completing one's academic journey would one embark into the professional sphere. By design, therefore, it implies that all that one must learn has to be imbibed during the span of one's years as a student, and after entering the workplace, one would be a practitioner—someone who would have the wherewithal to independently discharge his or her responsibilities effectively from the word 'go'.

Employment is the best education

To be fair, that is not an impediment

that cannot be surmounted. And, to ratify this, one need not look any further than one of India's most iconic leaders, Azim Premji. Forced to cut short his studies at Stanford University upon the demise of his father, he took charge of Wipro in 1966 when he was only 21 years of age. In the decades that followed, he built it up into the multi-billion dollar global, diversified corporation that it is today. While we do get inspired by his stellar achievements, I am sure we must also have the maturity to understand that leaders of such calibre are few and far between.

It is for reasons such as this that many leading organisations across the world focus on creating enabling programmes for new recruits and set them up for long-term success. Unilever's

'Management / Executive Training Programmes' are legendary. Students from the best of business schools across the globe vie to get into these programmes, knowing that they represent a 'gold standard' as far as professional training is concerned. Many executives who have been fortunate enough to be burnished through these programmes have gone on to lead not only Unilever, but equally reputed organisations across the world. The 'Oberoi Centre of Learning and Development' designed and operated by The Oberoi Hotels, is also another classic example of a 'Management Trainee' programme executed to perfection. Combining a mix of classroom and on-the-job training, it churns out hospitality professionals who hold their own, from New York to New Delhi.

“At the young age of 21, Azim Premji, upon the demise of his father, was forced to cut short his studies at Stanford University to take charge of Wipro in 1966.”

Grooming them young

Programmes such as these successfully bridge the gap between the academic and the professional phases for those young entrants entering our workplaces and put them on a solid footing. So, what are some of the facets of such programmes that 'green the greenhorns'?

- **Immersion in a structured programme:** A critical requirement of any such programme aiming to get your future leaders off to the right start is that it must be structured. There must be a defined programme charter that arises from the overall programme objective.

Depending on the requirements of the organisation, it must include critical dimensions and tracks to ensure that the right exposure is provided to those undergoing it. Rotation across the tracks provides the incumbents holistic learning about the business and builds their capabilities.

- **Guidance from mentors:** One of the fundamental building blocks of a training programme like this should be the integration of mentors to support the development of the participants. The mentors should be identified from within or outside the organisation and assigned after careful deliberations. Often, while the quality of mentors is very high, their inability to extract time from the busy schedules to support their mentees becomes a hurdle in driving success of the programme.

- **Introduction to latest technologies and thoughts:** Given that the entire objective of a training programme like this is to prepare the next generation of leaders, it is essential to provide them unhindered access to the latest thoughts, practices and technologies in the space that the organisation operates in. It, therefore, also flows that the programme content and delivery pattern must continuously evolve.

- **Exposure to challenging assignments:** Nothing great is achieved by remaining within one's comfort zone. And when it comes to the high-quality talent that is input into such a training programme, it is quite natural to expose each one of them to challenging assignments. This serves a dual purpose- it prevents them from sensing a feeling of boredom and also pushes them to extend the boundaries that have been established by the organisation till that point.

- **Opportunity to go beyond the defined scope:** To try to truly take out the best from your future leaders, within the structure of the programme allow them to go beyond the defined charter. As you

give them the confidence that they have the inherent capability to be game changers, you will see many more of them taking the initiative to go beyond the mandate and create newer avenues of success for the organisation.

It would be fair to say that Hrithik went through a similar 'training programme' in his formative years in his chosen field. In the years leading up to his debut film, he had learnt the business of the movies from the inside out. He had spent countless days in the film studio, playing multiple roles on the production side. From fetching tea to sweeping the sets, nothing was out of scope in the journey of learning. And, as he graduated to more deserving responsibilities, he was ably guided by the production house's team. Only after a few years of 'scrubbing in' under their watchful gaze, did he turn to face the camera. And a star was born 'overnight'.

In a similar manner, for most managers that inhabit our workplaces, a great foundation at the start of their career often plays a defining role in the success that they are able to achieve over the long-term. Therefore, if the above listed aspects are kept in mind while designing a management trainee programme, you can be rest assured that you will be able to create a pathway towards success for your young leaders. They may not be able to set the dance floor ablaze as well as Hrithik, but they will surely brighten up your organisation's future! 

About the Author

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

COVID-19 Pandemic & The Job Market

The COVID-19-led pandemic brutally battered the Indian job market. LinkedIn's monthly "Labour Market Update" found that due to the lockdown restrictions, hiring in India declined to an all-new low of -50% (year-on-year) in April '20.

Organisations around the world had to grapple with

unprecedented challenges due to the pandemic as the world of work transformed overnight. Though market pundits predicted a grim future for the job market, hiring activities, surprisingly, swung back to almost-normalcy once organisations settled down to the realities of work from home.

A few trends in the Job Market in 2020



IT SECTOR LEAST IMPACTED

- From July '20 till November '20, hiring activity rose steadily, according to the Naukri JobSpeak Index.
- By Nov-Dec '20, IT/Telecom made a comeback as the top sector with maximum talent demand, according to a RecruiteX study.
- The most in-demand roles were Project Manager, Software Developer, Software Tester, Consultant & Digital Marketing lead.



BOOST IN REMOTE WORK HIRING

- An Indeed study said that job-seekers increasingly searched for terms like 'remote', 'work from home', and other related phrases.
- 'Remote-work' searches increased by over 377% as a share of all searches on Indeed India, from February 2020 - May 2020.
- 83% job-seekers consider remote work policy an important factor when searching for a job.
- 53% of employees considered taking a pay cut to access remote working options.
- On LinkedIn, remote job postings tripled since March '20.



FEMALE PROFESSIONALS MOST AFFECTED BY PANDEMIC

- An X-Leap survey showed that 47% of women took a sabbatical, globally.
- A Deloitte Global survey found that 7 out of 10 women believed their career progression will slow down due to the COVID-19-led restrictions.
- Among survey respondents, 89% said demands on their personal time and daily routine had changed due to the pandemic
- 92% indicated that these shifts had a negative impact.



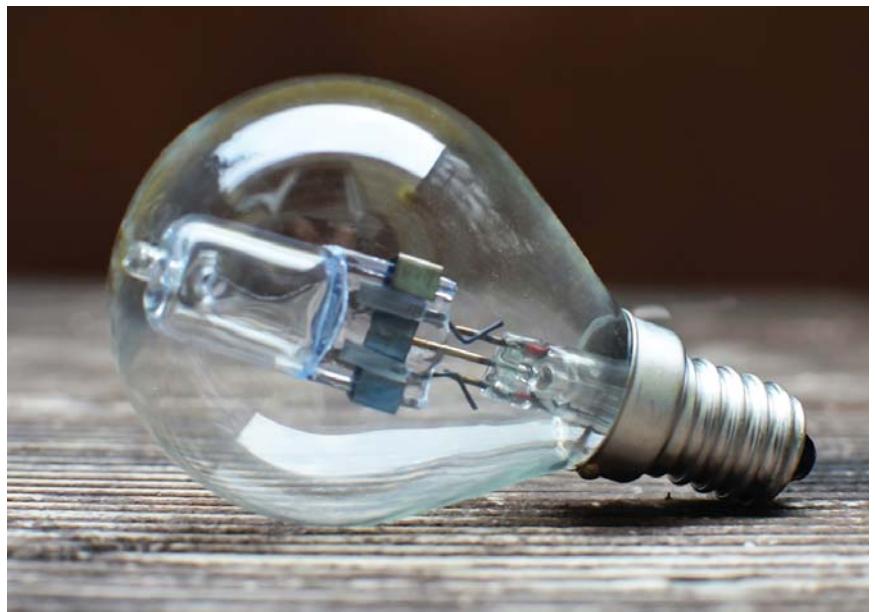
MRINMOY MAJUMDER

Beyond Psychometric Testing

Human behaviour is best observed and cannot be quantified. To this, organisations need to go beyond the periphery of traditional organisational behaviour textbook and must employ various immersive methodologies to understand human behaviour.

The tools that bind the HRs together across geographies is not technology, but perhaps something older than technology viz. 'psychometric testing'. Psychometric Testing is supposedly a scientific way to measure an individual's personality type and style. What sets psychometric testing apart from the rest is the easy classification and labelling of people. A closer look would provide a deeper and sharper sense of psyche and ease with which it can be quantified. Most of these tests have had limitless popularity primarily after WW II since businesses could escalate manifold only after the war, owing to the emergence of marketplaces as an offshoot of war. Hence, people in organisations emerged as the new soldiers in civilian clothes on whom such large testing could be conducted, who now stand as testament of the scientific method of psychometric testing.

With the growing demand for People Analytics, there is now a correlated demand for an easy and less-time consuming tool for categorising people into typologies. Even a non-academic analysis of these tools would reveal several critical drawbacks in them. Their usage in such a largescale environment have had unnoticeable damages to the discourse of organisational behaviour. Since this involves human beings, it



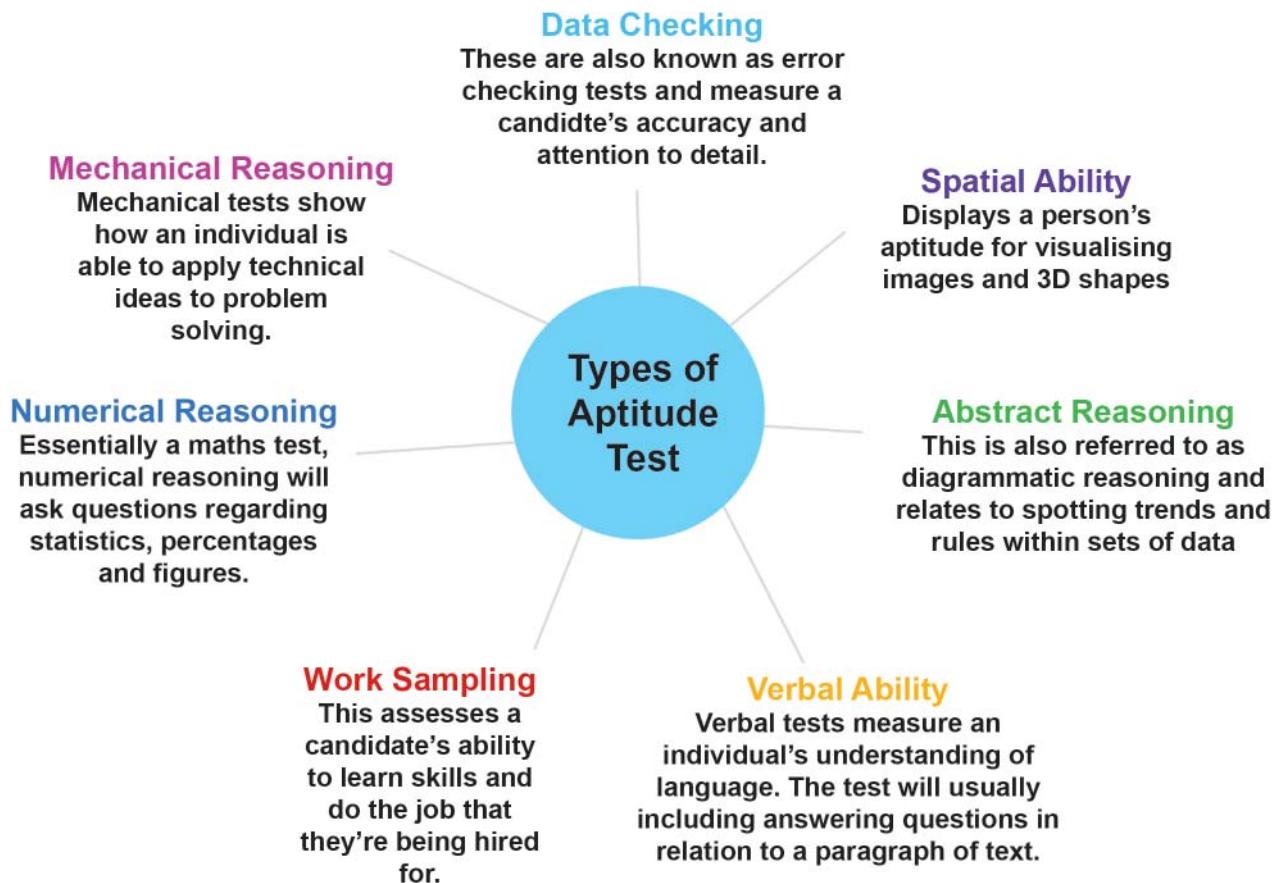
becomes a matter of utmost concern. And, most of these testing, especially in developing economies, go untraced since such a form of testing is completely unregulated. The EU and UK have strict regulations in place and require proper approval before employing psychometric testing on the general population. In India, however, no such regulations are in place, and hence, its growth has been unrelenting.

The critiques of tools

1. Most practitioners employing these tools and analysing the results are themselves not trained psychologists, as most of them

have simply are done certification in testing, which barely touches upon the classic theories of Freud, Jung and Skinner.

2. The infamous and most widely used MBTI (Myers-Briggs Type Indicator) is in fact unscientific. MBTI has been created merely out of boredom. Merve Emre is her book, *The Personality Brokers: The Strange History of Myers-Briggs and the Birth of Personality Testing*, has thoroughly investigated the genesis of MBTI and why this work of assumption emerged as the universal personality testing tool. MBTI was created by Katharine Briggs and her daughter Isabel Myers, who

source : agencycentral.co.uk

selectively borrowed concepts out of Carl Jung's theory and interpreted it in their own ways. And, surprisingly neither were trained psychologists. History has it that Katherine was inclined towards creating 'civilised adults' and turned her house into a lab for baby training, where she closely monitored Isabel and her neighbour's children. She copiously recorded her observation in a notebook called, '*The Dairy of an Obedience-Curiosity Mother*'. Emre suggests that however problematic the tool may be, it resonates with the human condition to that which is collectively defined by the society.

Finding a larger audience

The typologies are a mere reflection of a disciplined society minus the outliers and rebels. Hence, it is

hardly surprising that such tools could find a larger audience in the corporate without a proper context. With increased awareness, it was realised that MBTI did not identify human behaviour, and hence, could not reform it. It merely categorised human behaviour with the comfort level of the society.

To avoid largescale damage to employees' behaviour through psychometric testing, organisations must employ trained psychologists who spend time and resources on employees' individuals. Human behaviour is best observed and cannot be quantified. To this, organisations need to go beyond the periphery of traditional organisational behaviour textbook and must employ various immersive methodologies to understand human behaviour. Methodologies such as focus group discussions,

ethnography, and participant observation may well serve to understand human behaviour the way they are and not categorise them.

Even though time is of utmost essence for the corporate, using incorrect means can have largescale repercussions on humanity. Human behaviour is highly qualitative and contextual, and hence must never be quantified. 

About the Author

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Busting Myths

The failure to have a successful talent management framework is a matter of concern for many organisations and a lot of this could be attributed to the myths associated with it.

BY ROHIT HASTEER

Today, given the prevailing talent wars, it is critical for organisations to have a sound talent management strategy in place. Talent Management is the art of acquiring, nurturing, and retaining a workforce of productive and engaged employees to achieve organisational goals. However, the failure to have a successful talent management framework is a matter of concern for many organisations and a lot of this could be attributed to the myths associated with talent management. Some of the common myths have been mentioned in the paragraphs that follow.

Talent Management is HR's responsibility

Most often, it is left to the HR to figure out and implement Talent Management, and when issues pertaining to poor engagement, higher attrition and lack of productivity arise, the talent management strategy stands questioned. The ownership of nurturing talent must be conjoined and the business should collaborate with HR and become a codriver in managing talent. Unless there is adoption at the top to fulfil the need to have a robust talent management strategy and a co-ownership in driving the same, talent management gets diminished to a mere paper model.

A One-size-fits-all approach

Talent management is one among the most complex programmes to decode and implement, and

essentially so since it deals with humans. Every individual comes with a different potential and simultaneously has a different need. While some people may need an instructor-led programme to learn, many others might learn when a new assignment is offered to them. Organisations should never fall into the trap of creating a standardised programme only because it is easy to implement and monitor since this may end up as being counterproductive. The true value of a talent management programme can be derived if it is built on specific individual needs, keeping the business objectives in mind.

Performance Management equals Talent Management

Often, Talent Management is misinterpreted with Performance Management and the focus is on giving high-performing individuals higher pay with an assumption that it shall lead to their retention. The problem with this approach is two-pronged - it only rewards performance and does not tap into the potential of individuals; this approach rests on the belief that compensation alone can motivate high performers. Talent Management, instead, goes beyond just pay and focuses on engaging with individuals at a deeper level. It cuts across the employee lifecycle and starts with hiring right, to

- Create customised learning solutions

- Create focused engagement plans
- Identify individual potential
- Offer meaningful work
- Create progressions plan and perhaps much more

Borrowing a talent management framework from journals or other organisations may never be a successful solution, as each business has its nuances and so do people. Hence, every organisation must establish what is needed for themselves and weave a framework around the same.

Talent Management is not for starters

Talent Management is often seen as a good-to-have amongst other processes in an organisation. Start-ups or organisations in nascent stages usually lay greater focus on talent acquisition vis-à-vis other aspects of HR. While it is crucial to onboard the right people, it is equally essential to take care of these peoples' needs. Having the right people strategy since inception is critical, else one will always be seeking solutions for disengaged workforce and high attrition. Thus, every organisation, whether small or large, must have a clearly defined talent management strategy from the very beginning.

Focus on 'HiPo'

'High Potential' programmes have been one of the most preferred ways of Talent Management since long where organisations identify a set of high performers and focus



on their growth and development. But, Talent Management is not merely about focusing on and developing a minuscule employee percentage. Spending a disproportionate amount of energy and resources on a set of select people not only demotivates the remaining employees but also makes the organisation overlook the potential solid performers. While it is not wrong to focus on high performers, the hunger and ambition of others also needs attention.

A recent survey by Mercer & Mettl on HiPo programmes suggested that close to 40% of organisations do not know whether the results of their HiPo programme were successful or not. This also stems from the fact that these talent management programmes do not have a consistent definition of 'potential' and each organisation coins its own. A model that hinges upon 'potential' and 'performance' as two critical factors, having a wrong definition or measuring

criteria of potential can be detrimental. It is therefore essential that the talent management framework clearly defines talent and has a clear line of sight on the desired outcomes from the programme.

Talent management is expensive

Another interesting myth about talent management is that it adds an additional burden on the budget. In fact, the absence of a talent management framework can prove to be highly detrimental for organisations. For instance, it is important for organisations to invest in the growth and development of its people because unskilled or semi-skilled workforce decelerates you and reduces the quality of your output. As a result, you are investing more time in fixing the gaps, and hence, forced to deal with lower productivity. In addition to the visible advantages of having a talent management framework in place, its absence

leaves you with the disadvantage of losing your talent to organisations that have one. This leads to higher attrition and greater replacement cost.

Talent Management cannot be measured

Last but not the least, another myth about talent management is that its efficacy cannot be measured, and HR cannot provide substantial quantifiable data about how it creates value for the organisation. However, this is not the case as there are many metrics available which can help gauge the effectiveness of talent management strategy of an organisation. For example, organisations can measure the effectiveness of onboarding programme, learning initiatives and employee engagement initiatives by metrics like employee retention rates, early attrition rates and turnover costs. Similarly, cost per hire, TAT to close a position, and offer to joining ratio can help in measuring the effectiveness of talent acquisition process.

Talent management is the need of the hour and there are some big trends which are shaping the talent management process today. A robust talent management plan helps improve business performance, ensures retention, builds a strong employer brand, and offers a competitive edge to organisations. One needs to be careful and not fall for the myths! 

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.

Fashion Retail: The Now and the Next

*From examining the transformative shifts in fashion retail to highlighting the silver linings among the clouds, **Vivek Tripathi**, CHRO, BIBA Apparels, speaks with Human Capital about how the fashion industry is facing up to the toughest of times with creativity and agility, which skills will play an even more important role in the post-pandemic era, and how HR leaders can help their organisations emerge better positioned for the future.*

BY ANKITA SHARMA



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

A COVID-19 has caused changes in the fashion industry at multiple levels:

- i.** The product mix has changed given that celebrations and gatherings are a challenge due to the pandemic. There is an emphasis on casual wear, loungewear, and sleepwear.
- ii.** Consumer behaviour is changing drastically. People are much more into buying online and from established brands that can be trusted. Fashion retailers are focusing on enhancing the customer experience online, expanding the product range available online, and using new technology to help customers choose the right products.
- iii.** The traditional method of selling and customer service in stores has transformed. The focus

of store teams has gone from serving walk-in customers to inviting customers through outward calling and becoming their trusted fashion advisors. Our store teams have done some really innovative work by calling loyal customers on their significant days, understanding their tastes (using past data), and helping them choose the right product.

iv. The Store Standard Operating Procedures have been revamped. Safety is paramount for both staff and customers.

Q What are some HR strategies being employed at BIBA to support employees through this difficult time?

A We are focusing on the safety and wellbeing of our employees. Strict safety protocols have been enforced at the stores. Non-store employees have been encouraged to work from home. The strategy is to be transparent and regularly communicate the state of the business. The use of technology for company-wide communication and work-related collaboration has expanded. In the event that an employee falls ill, additional leave and other assistance are being provided. We are also circulating stories of outstanding customer service and collaboration within the organisation. Furthermore, a culture of peer appreciation has been fostered to enhance the feeling of “one team” in these difficult times.

Q Which are the most high-demand skills in the fashion industry right now?

A All fashion retailers are looking to enhance their online footprint and sales. Hence, e-commerce product managers, operation managers, and customer service specialists are required. There's also a need for reskilling in the store staff. They must use digital tools to engage with customers over phone and WhatsApp. They

also need to make intelligent use of data to influence customers.

Q How can organisations continue to upskill and reskill employees on shoestring budgets?

A Establishing a culture of continuous learning has become imperative in today's context. Upskilling & reskilling of talent needs to be done by the line managers and L&D teams, apart from employees on their own accord.

We have found mobile-based e-learning applications, which make byte-sized learning content available on a multimedia platform, to be particularly effective. The platforms allow for learning at the learner's pace and time, and are both scalable and low-cost. The applications make customised content on products, customer service, store SOPs, and other areas available to the workforce. The consumption of content and its assimilation can be tracked. Quizzes can be used to check the extent of learning, and feedback can be taken from the learners on the relevance and usefulness of the content. These need to be supplemented by managers delivering learning sessions and sharing their insights. Employees also need to be encouraged to learn on their own — and there should be linkages between demonstrated learning and career advancement.

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

A In general, flexibility in working — in terms of time and place — is here to stay. It will be ‘work from anywhere’ and perhaps

work at any time’. These trends will affect organisational culture, employee engagement, teamwork, and how performance is measured.

Performance management and measurement systems will need to become much more transparent and objective. Managers will need to hone their influencing skills to ensure team alignment and engagement in a dispersed team setting. Forums will need to be created to ensure that informal interactions between employees who have served to create a community at the workplace are continued.

The use of technology for collaboration and communication is also going to be a lasting trend. For critical roles, where deep expertise is valued, companies may seek engaging employees across geographical boundaries.

Employees will need to learn constantly and be willing to take up new roles to stay relevant and grow in their careers. Digital technologies and data skills will become more vital and valuable in the future.

Q Looking back over the past year and all that you have overcome, what's one lesson from the crisis that you'd like to share with HR professionals in the fashion industry?

A The most important lesson in an uncertain situation is to be honest with one's stakeholders — employees, line leaders, customers, suppliers, and others. A crisis of this kind is an opportunity to build trust, and everyone is eager to help and do his or her part if one is open and has humility. Trust can be built by communicating regularly with the stakeholders, listening to their concerns, and then formulating a response. It is also essential not to commit too early or for too long to a particular course of action, and to be open to changing one's decision as more information comes in. **HC**



Is OD The Future Of HR ?

With a broader horizon, blurred boundaries focused on enhancing the virtual experience, connecting life-work balance and re-building capabilities, we are certainly leaping to the next evolution stage of HR.

BY SHIKHA VERMA

“The pandemic has shifted the priority from employee engagement to employee connect, health, and wellbeing. Today, employees want more and more opportunities to grow and develop their skills.”

HR has come a long way over the last decade, from handling the basic Employee Records & Regulations to Talent Acquisition and Development to acting as the Strategic Partner. The disruption and prolonged uncertainty caused by COVID-19 has hurled a radical evolution of HR across the globe. Organisations have taken cognisance of the fact that we need to transform processes and employee practices at a lightning pace, HR is therefore expected to facilitate and act more as **‘Change Agents’** today.

The current dynamic situation has put forth challenges like mounting stress and anxiety, increased family responsibilities, survival laced with financial uncertainties. To handle the complexity both Leaders and HR have been working hand-in-glove to safeguard business interest through proactive and empathetic communication.

There is an increased acceptance of HR’s role not just as a strategic partner today but also as a **‘Pathfinder’** to manage the crisis and thrive in the future.

As per the ‘Future of HR 2020 Survey’, where over 1300 HR executives participated across the globe, 3 in 5 believed that HR will rapidly become irrelevant if it does not **modernise its approach** concerning understanding and planning for the future. It’s going to be relatively easier and efficient to manage recruitment and employee

management through tools like EAP, HRMS, AI Apps, Zoom, Notion, Slack, etc.

HR-New Dynamics

The top HR Trends of 2020 include People Analytics, Employee Experience, Employee Branding, Cultivating Authentic Culture, and Upskilling to invest in Team and business growth, Providing Holistic Health Benefits, Establishing Work-Life Balance and Flexible Workplace and Workforce.

An influx of technology, Artificial Intelligence coupled with the dynamics on the people front compels us to adopt a **‘New Age Thinking’** in this new normal.

The pandemic has shifted the priority from employee engagement to **employee connect, health, and wellbeing**. Today, employees want more and more opportunities to grow and develop their skills. As per the engagement report, only 25 per cent of workers believe they get ample opportunities to develop.

To add to this, work from home (WFH) which had seemed to be an obstacle earlier is being leveraged on as a business strategy due to its financial impact. A recent study indicated that 3 in 5 employees want to continue with remote working too, in future. There is no doubt therefore that **WFH is here to stay**.

There is a drastic shift in the work canvas, making it an HR’s job to



'offer employees everything they need to deliver their best'.

With a broader horizon, blurred boundaries focused on enhancing the virtual experience and connecting **life-work** balance and re-building capabilities, we are certainly leaping to the next evolution stage of HR.

Some questions to ponder over are-

Q. What exactly will be the role of HR over the next decade? Operational/Developer/Path-finder/Collaborator/Transformer/Strategic Thinker or 'all of these'?

Q. Which roles can be automated within HR and which ones can't?

Q. Is there a Skill Gap in your HR Team?

Q. What are some of the new skills that you would like the entire HR team to be equipped with?

Q. What are you doing to strengthen the fabric of the organisation w.r.t 'People Strategy'?

The crisis demands agility of mind, a fine balance of process formulation, adherence on one hand, and creative people focus on the other, and championing change management and communication too. To identify new skills or skill gaps, it's imperative to state the 'gigantic vision' of the company- 'what we want the organisation to be known for' say 50 years later and then map it to the current skill set.

As per research, 80 per cent of respondents indicated that they believe their company's HR Skills are lacking. Experts and studies emphasise the need to upskill and upgrade the workforce and workplaces to be future-ready too. Cognitive flexibility, analytics, creativity, and social intelligence desired in the new normal are all

“As Human beings (read HR) we are capable of doing something greater. Perhaps it’s time to stretch the boundaries within HR and upskill team members with these future skills.”

Organisational Development (OD) Competencies.

Very often OD is mistaken to be limiting to Talent Development when it is far more strategic and entails **planning and execution of a systematic change aimed towards specific goals or objectives.** It is all-encompassing as it includes Training, Competency Development, Succession Planning, Culture Development, Employee Engagement, and Wellbeing, Enabling Change, Value Alignment, and Employer Branding and Internal Communications.

I’d like to share an excerpt from the 3 Principles and Contribution, as shared by **David Ulrich on HR Future Trends in 2021**, to put things into context.

1. There is a need for increased personalisation by leaders and the focus will be on emotional and empathetic responses
2. Redefining boundaries - where the employees (anywhere, anytime) who create value for the customer will be considered to be ‘at work’.
3. People and organisation’s need to not just tackle uncertainty but harness it

Based on these principles, HR professionals need to be clear about their unique contributions to value add and create an impact on businesses. Hence their contribution needs to be on the below facets:-

a) Delivering improved individual talent: Employees will continue to be the key ingredients of any organisation. There will likely be an increased focus on soft skills (e.g., goal setting, engaging people, respecting differences) and even more attention to the employee experience through meaning (believe), learning and growth (become), and relationships (belong).

b) Reinvent organisation capability: HR and business leaders will be charged to build organisation capabilities and the right culture. In our research, these organisation capabilities have 3 to 4 times the

impact on business results that individual competencies (or talent).

c) Create better leadership: Leaders will likely exist throughout an organisation at all levels who not only have the right basic leadership skills, but also the **skills that create value for customers and investors.**

Most of it falls in the lap of OD Function (includes L & D) . . . the systems collaborative approach backed by the humanistic values adopted by OD with the unique ability to harness uncertainty makes me ponder - **‘If Organisational Development is indeed the future of HR?’**

The best way to describe this point is through a Welch term – ‘Hiraeth’. It represents the unrelenting existential tension between the ‘already’ and the ‘Not yet’. It’s a recognition of the fact that as Human beings (read HR) we are capable of doing something greater. Perhaps it’s time to stretch the boundaries within HR and upskill team members with these future skills.

An OD Mindset means working tirelessly on improving business and people experience, venturing into unknown territories, Innovative mindset, emotional resilience and intelligence, steering the company through change, digital literacy, social media proficiency, developing people competencies aimed at **fostering the culture muscle** which holds the potential to put an organization back on the growth trajectory.

Why limit ourselves When we can Develop Organisations as HR!! 

About the Author

Shikha Verma is a State Council Member of WICCI. She has 17 years of rich acumen in HR & Learning & Development space across IT and Manufacturing Industry. She has acted as a change agent in diverse businesses, spearheaded culture building projects, strategic planning &, standardisation of HR & Training processes & policies.



Why Is Inclusion Needed ?

BY RAJIV SHARMA

“I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.”

–Maya Angelou

A very powerful thought by the multi-talented Maya Angelou. Though the context in which she said this is unknown, I am certain that she has been quoted multiple times while talking about Inclusion and Diversity (I&D). Today, this quote is more relevant than ever especially with a heightened emphasis on Inclusion.

But let us explore why is inclusion important and what can organisations do to create an inclusive culture?

Business Case for Inclusion; The Need For Inclusion

Many companies are still scratching the surface when it comes to their I&D agenda. It primarily is the right thing to do and appears like a bright shiny narrative to share in your annual earnings call and be a responsible employer. Yet, many others have been able to embrace Inclusion in their DNA, culture, and their way of being.

A recently published study by McKinsey & Company stated that I&D is a powerful enabler for business performance. In their study of 1000 companies across 15 countries, they found that companies in the top quartile of gender diversity on the executive team were 25 per cent more likely to experience above-average profitability than peer companies in the fourth quartile. This is not only true of gender diversity but true for several other forms of diversity like racial, sexual orientation, people with

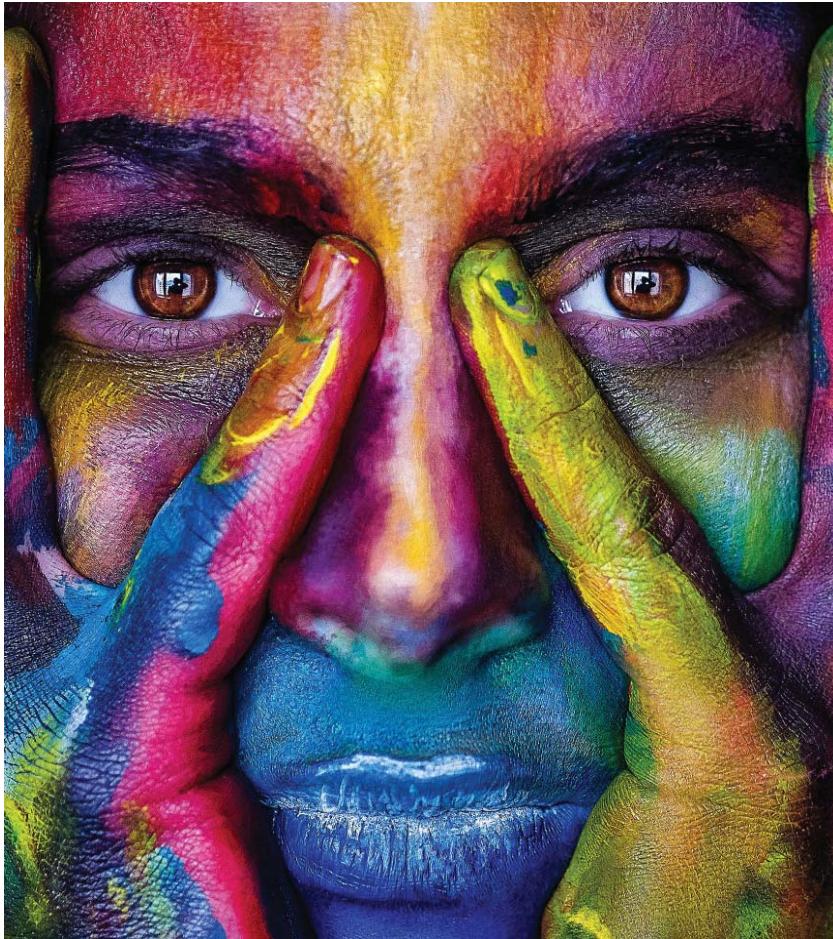
disability, and generational among others. In short, diversity wins, now more than ever.

However, these are studies, and I am sure laggards can refute the findings or find faults in their analysis. Therefore, it becomes imperative to anchor the Inclusion agenda for those who think inclusion is a luxury that they cannot afford.

Take for example – Singapore. The nation makes for a great case study. The Island nation with just over a five million population is a melting pot of highly multicultural and ethnic mix of people of Chinese, Malay and Indian descent - following different religious faiths including Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism.

In 1965, when Singapore achieved independence, its founding fathers took measures to intentionally nudge people to cohabit. Through their housing policy, they ensured that every public housing complex followed a national quota of racial percentage, thereby forcing people of different ethnicities to learn to live with each other. The result? Today, Singapore ranks amongst the top countries to live in.

Another example worth mentioning is Mattel Toys, a manufacturer of Barbie dolls. They released new designs to broaden the diversity of its range to include dolls with no hair and one with a skin condition – vitiligo. They are currently working with Jordan Reeves, a disability activist aged 12,



born without a left forearm, to create a doll with a prosthetic limb. To launch a line of dolls for their African-American consumers, Mattel leveraged their internal African-American Employee Resource Group to advise and guide their Marketing team's efforts to remain culturally sensitive. Today, it is one of the company's best-selling products in its minority-focused brand range.

The business and economic case for LGBTQ+ inclusion exists on three levels – economic, business, and individual performance. Open for Business in their research amongst the United States and the United Kingdom consumers towards companies doing business in countries with anti-LGBTQ+ laws, indicate popular support for inclusion. The survey findings showed that companies support boycotts of doing business in countries that support anti LGBTQ+ laws.

Therefore, the rationale for inclusion can be varied for companies. It may mean launching a product line or attracting a new customer segment or simply having access to superior talent. The power of diversity can no longer be ignored by companies.

After having established the need for an inclusion journey, organisations need to move in this journey, and I like to believe that the inclusion journey is a continuum. One end of this continuum is a commitment to no-discriminatory policies and at the end is an inclusive culture where each person brings their authentic self to work. It is a journey that needs to be intentionally planned and thoughtfully implemented.

Planning Your Inclusion Journey; How to Move Ahead

Companies may decide their end state on the inclusion continuum and may plan their journey accordingly. However, in my opinion, there is not a fixed end state, and this goalpost continues to shift given the ever-evolving demographic, cultural, and socio-political factors. The leadership teams need to take a considerate approach as they plan the inclusion journey for their companies.

I believe the following four considerations are vital to begin your inclusion journey:

I. Define and get everyone aligned on your business case – The significance of defining a business case for diversity has been described above. The leadership teams need to get together and define one for their own business. The Executive Sponsor (ideally coming from a business team) should ensure they have allowed everyone to voice their views. The dissenters need to be paid special attention and their concerns need to be appropriately addressed. The time spent on committing to the cause will ensure a unified voice for people and will emphasise seriousness around the matter.

“Companies may decide their end state on the inclusion continuum and may plan their journey accordingly. However, in my opinion, there is not a fixed end state, and this goal post continues to shift given the ever-evolving demographic, cultural, and socio-political factors.”

II. Making the commitment visible and remaining intentional – It is one thing to commit to a cause and an entirely different thing to make this commitment intentional and visible to the organisation. I believe a commitment to inclusion is like “integrity”; doing right when no one is watching. Let me give you an example.

You are a male hiring manager and you have a position open. Only two male candidates appear for an interview and one of them is a very good fit for the position. Will you go ahead and offer this candidate? An intentionally inclusive manager may insist on a more gender diverse candidate pipeline to ensure they have assessed candidates who will approach problems differently and thereby intentionally introduce varied perspectives that are essential for successful decision making. The outcome may still be the same but insisting on a gender diverse candidate pipeline emphasises the intention and makes the commitment visible.

III. Fostering a culture of Allyship – An ally is any person that actively promotes and aspires to advance the culture of inclusion through positive, intentional efforts that benefit people. Everyone has a unique ability to be an ally, therefore men can be allies to women, cis people can be allies to members of the LGBTQI+ community, people with able bodies can be allies to those with different disabilities so on and so forth.

A successful ally is one who recognises that they have had a privilege. They do not shy away from having uncomfortable conversations with their selves. It is eye-opening to recognise your privileges, (that you may take for granted) and then leverage them for others who do not have them can be a journey of self-discovery on its own.

IV. Culture of Empathy – The diverse talent pools in the organisation are not looking for sympathy from

others. They are expecting acceptance and empathy. Each person has different levels of empathy and their empathy levels may also vary according to the situation. The good news is that empathy can be built over time and the leadership teams can pave the way to build a culture of empathy. Listening is an important cornerstone for honing empathy.

Many organisations today follow reverse mentoring to create opportunities for their CXO's and their direct reports to talk to lower echelons of the organisation. The practice of reverse mentoring is a significant visible cue for the organisation. It reinforces that leaders are intentional about listening and are committed to building their appreciation for different situations and perspectives. The foundation of an inclusive culture is built on the premise of remaining curious and asking questions from a point of gaining awareness.

The journey of inclusion is no longer a question of why or when. It is existential for companies to survive - not only for attracting top talent but also for servicing customers and expanding their market share. Being vulnerable, asking for help, accepting mistakes are powerful signs of an organisation that is evolving, and continuing to build its muscle of inclusion. Companies need to remember that – losing is not failing, but giving up is certainly a failure. 

About the Author

Rajiv Sharma heads People & Culture for Aristocrat Technologies for its India offices. He also leads the D&I agenda for APAC. Rajiv has close to two decades of HR experience and began his career in the Middle-East. He has been associated with companies such as Dell International Services, Encore Capital Group and has International Coaching Federation Certification as a Leadership Coach for its leaders.



What to Measure While Hiring

What makes someone an effective hire boils down to three characteristics. Do they have the knowledge to do the job? Are they motivated to work hard (on their own)? Do they have social skills that will make it easy for them to work with others?

BY ABHIJIT BHADURI



I am not going to use HR speak by using terms like competencies, competency maps, skills vs traits etc. I will attempt to put it in business language even if it is not a 100 per cent accurate as per the pundits.

What makes someone an effective hire boils down to three characteristics. Do they have the knowledge to do the job? Are they

motivated to work hard (on their own)? Do they have social skills that will make it easy for them to work with others?

1. Are they learners and problem solvers?

Assess for actual problems that they will need to solve in the role. Ask them how they would go about solving the biggest problem they will

“Curious people are great learners. Leonardo da Vinci wrote and drew on subjects including geology, anatomy, flight, gravity and optics, often flitting from subject to subject on a single page, and writing in left-handed mirror script. He ‘invented’ the bicycle, airplane, helicopter, and parachute some 500 years ahead of their time. Elon Musk literally taught himself rocket science by reading every textbook on the subject.”

have to solve when they start. Assess their approach to problem-solving by giving them a problem that was solved and compare their approach to what was done. How do they react when faced with a question they do not know? Do they bluff their way through or will they teach themselves?

Curious people are great learners. Leonardo da Vinci wrote and drew on subjects including geology, anatomy (which he studied in order to paint the human form more accurately), flight, gravity and optics, often flitting from subject to subject on a single page, and writing in left-handed mirror script. He ‘invented’ the bicycle, airplane, helicopter, and parachute some 500 years ahead of their time. Elon Musk literally taught himself rocket science by reading every textbook on the subject. Then he cold-called experts and learned from them.

2. Are they willing to work hard?

Energetic people who are self-driven are an asset. In the scenario when everyone is working from home this is a particularly valuable trait to look for in people. When they are on their own, will they continue to set equally high standards and drive themselves just as hard? There will be deadlines to meet that need extending beyond the usual. There will be a crisis with a team member that needs everyone to pitch in.

People who set high standards for themselves also set the bar high for others. They are comfortable perfecting their routine over years. Or spend a day polishing up a short speech until it is perfect. Willingness to work hard matters. It matters a lot. Consider two cricketers who started their careers at the same time—Vinod Kambli and Sachin Tendulkar. Kambli did better than Sachin in school and college cricket. He scored two double centuries and two centuries in his first few international Test matches. Kambli also had a better ODI average than Sachin when both were playing. It was Sachin who became a legend. He just worked way harder than anyone else.

3. Are they likeable and pleasant in their interactions with others?

Satyajit Mohanty, CHRO of Crompton, a consumer goods company (and a client) told me that when he became a CHRO for the first time of a company, he sought advice from various CHROs. One common advice he received was: ‘The CEO has to like you and should be able to talk to you.’ Likeability comes from the ability of the person to understand others’ emotions and needs. Being able to adapt to the emotions of the others makes us likeable.

We feel good after interacting with them. They are pleasant and easy to understand. Emotionally agile people are often viewed by others as being very tactful and even ‘politically savvy’. If the term ‘political’ makes you uncomfortable, replace that word with ‘influential’. People with high EQ can work with many different kinds of team members because they can build trust and because they are predictable. Likeable people are able to take large groups of diverse opinions and interests along on their own journey. Likeable people can give someone disappointing or difficult news without demolishing their self-worth.

Very few people are equally strong in all the three areas, but to have a really successful career, the person must be extremely strong in at least two of the three areas. 

This is an excerpt from Abhijit’s newly released book ‘Dreamers and Unicorns: How Leadership, Talent and Culture are the New Growth Drivers’ published by Westland Publications.

About the Author

Abhijit Bhaduri is a strategic advisor and an executive coach to business leaders and organisations. He is the former Chief Learning Officer of Wipro and alumnus of Microsoft, PepsiCo, Colgate, and Tata Steel. With more than 800,000 followers on LinkedIn and Twitter, he is one of the most influential voices on talent management. Follow him on LinkedIn and Twitter @AbhijitBhaduri.



Employee Value Proposition With Added ‘Value’

BY HARINI SREENIVASAN

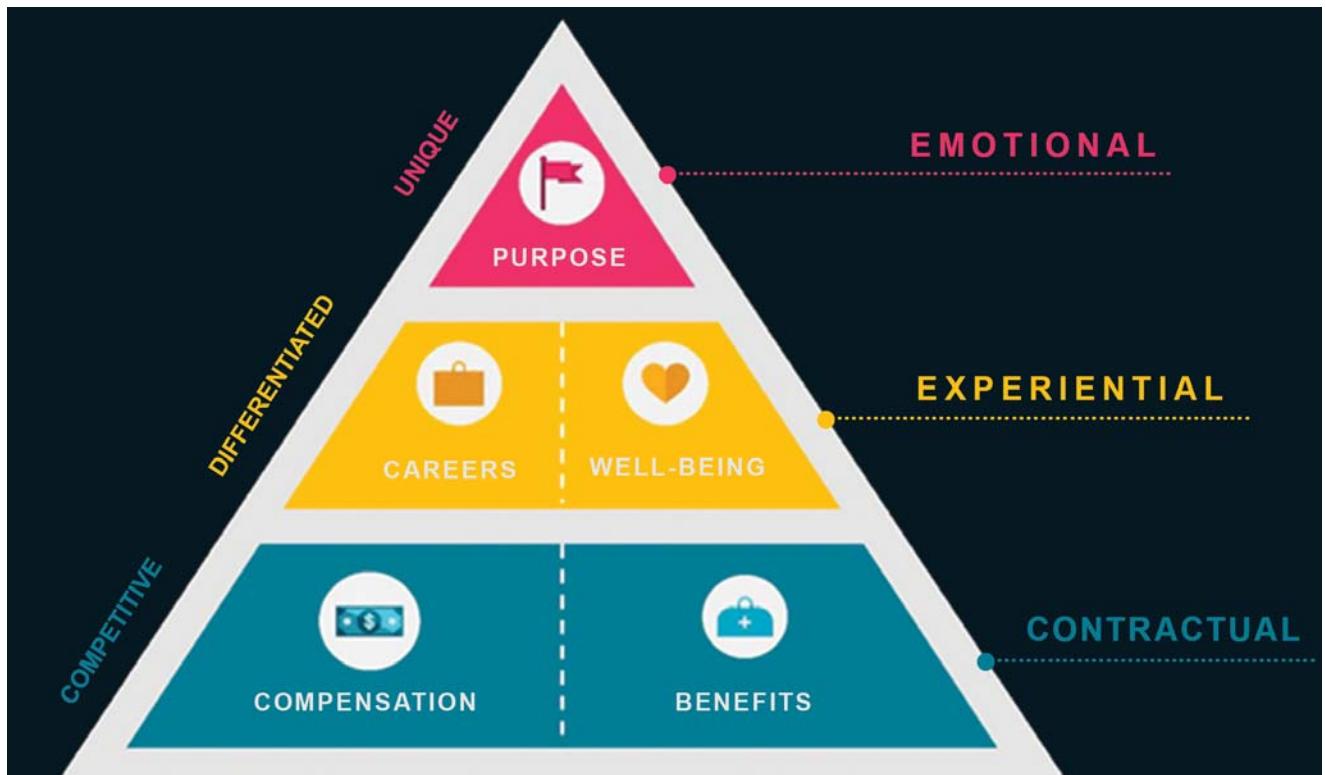
With businesses gradually returning to normalcy as the world emerges out of the pandemic, the definition of the employee value proposition (EVP) is also changing. “Here is what we want to give you in return to what you give us” is what EVP has been defined as, traditionally.

Let us take a walk down the EVP lane to see how the metamorphosis has been happening.

An article¹ in 2018 by Dan Fries, member of Forbes Human Resource Council elaborates how 2019 is

waiting for a more flexible EVP. He talks about a client for whom he had advised that an EVP that was created a decade ago could still be kept relevant. He clarifies that over the years the EVP was periodically tweaked to meet its requirements of attraction and retention of talent.

Fries highlights a few important caveats. He questions them around how the tweaks were made, whether based on data or by engaging the workforce to test the changes. He challenges organisations as to whether they have enough



courtesy: Mercer Thrive research



information to review the EVP as it is critical to align with the needs of the business and its people.

If one was to look at the concept of EVP in the light of what Fries is talking about, it is important to understand the context a little more. What is an EVP all about? How does one design an EVP and also make it evolve to be meaningful to the business? Mercer's 'Thrive Research'² gives this simple pyramid of the evolution of business and alignment of the EVP with it. The core message in this research is "Putting people at the heart of change".

The EVP continuum progresses from the contractual to experiential to the emotional stage as the business progresses from being competitive to differentiated to unique in its offerings.

When the business is at the competitive stage, attraction and retention of the right talent is the need of the organisation and EVP

caters to the parameters of paying competitively and also providing employees with the right kind of benefits. At this stage what matters to attract candidates is "Are you paying right?" The EVP here is simple and represents the compensation and benefits deal for the work performed.

Finding the Right Formula

As the business grows, it starts looking at how differentiated it is from its competition. At this stage, the formula of right remuneration will not be enough to keep its attrition low.

Here is when the EVP gets tweaked to add aspects of 'employee experience' by including items of wellness and well-being. While wellness includes health and benefit programs, well-being also directs towards career progression. An employee would want to stay with an



“While wellness includes health and benefit programs, well-being also directs towards career progression. An employee would want to stay with an organisation that shares its vision and helps create a career roadmap for its people.”

organisation that shares its vision and helps create a career roadmap for its people. A competitive business, with well-differentiated offerings that have been through the growth pangs, reaches a stage of being unique.

That is precisely when ‘purpose’ emerges as a key ingredient for the EVP. Purpose is driven by connecting the dots of the employee lifecycle to the vision and mission of the organisation. Alignment of purpose is what an employer would expect while finding a purpose for self is what an employee would expect. An intersection of these purposes is the appropriate design of the EVP.

A well-designed EVP is something that represents everything of value that an employer provides to its employee including remuneration, career path, wellness, and above all, purposeful existence.

Traditional EVP design starts with assuming that the organisation knows exactly what to offer to the employee and each employee knows what to deliver to the organisation. Since a real value-added EVP is all about

being people-centric, how about applying some design thinking (DT) here? This is all about flipping the whole thing over, completely!

DT encourages starting with asking questions like “Can you tell me more?” and not with statements like “I know it all”. Instead of saying “This is why we are a great company”, DT asks the employees, “What makes you happily stay with us?” It is quite evident here that insights are sought and instructions are not given. Empathy is the main ingredient of DT and for that, it is important to be comfortable with being vulnerable. Teams that are designing the EVP are required to be ready for honest and candid answers while doing empathy map conversations.

I am reminded of an organisation that was transitioning from being a family-owned small business to a more professionally-managed acquired entity of a large multi-national; a valid situation for redesigning the EVP. Talent retention strategies had to be re-chartered. The best way to go about was asking the

“In order to enable employees to see value for themselves, leaders would be required to go through a transformational journey themselves.”

employees, “Why do you like working with us?” Several such conversations helped in identifying that the most valuable parameters for this organisation were familial bonds, flexibility in working, simple implementable practices, and regular rewards and recognition. And that was how the redesigned EVP helped in creating an employer brand.

Yet another organisation had a peculiar story. While all procedures and practices were well in place, there was still increasing dissatisfaction, leading to attrition. On probing deeper, the design thinking team realised that the employees valued autonomy and were dissatisfied with micromanagement. In such a situation, an effective EVP would be one that allows employees freedom of decision making without any fear of consequences and that ‘creative solutions’ are recognised and rewarded.

With organisations having to adapt to remote working during the pandemic, psychological safety has become an important aspect of EVP. The three concepts at the core of psychologically-safe work culture are:

- a. Democracy over bureaucracy
- b. Common sense over rigid rules
- c. Alignment of purpose

With these forming the foundation of the new EVP, psychologically safe workplaces can be built and sustained³.

As psychological safety directly impacts performance, the following components may be considered while designing the EVP for the new normal.

1. Vulnerability at Leadership

In order to enable employees to see value for themselves, leaders would be required to go through a transformational journey themselves. This is to equip them with learning to communicate with trust and transparency and with a belief that everyone is an adult and adds value to the business. This lays the foundation of psychological safety at the workplace.

2. Inclusive decision making

When leaders learn the art of coaching and facilitating, decision making would become a shared responsibility. Group members tend to respect and value each other’s viewpoint and collective wisdom prevails rather than an unnecessary war for attention. This further enhances psychological safety.

3. Challenge status quo

Once psychological safety is established, asking ‘Why’ would become a habit. Challenging the status quo enables organisations to come up with path-breaking ideas and discuss them openly.

4. Innovate On-the-Go

What more does an organisation need, when path-breaking ideas are emerging from psychologically safe groups. Innovation on-the-go would automatically happen.

Abra-ca-dabra! The result is a purpose-driven organization.

When the above components are blended appropriately the resultant EVP would add value to both the organisation and the individual. Of course, results will speak for themselves. This is the calling. It’s time to rethink and redesign our EVPs. 

1. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbeshumanresourcescouncil/2018/07/31/the-evolving-employee-value-proposition-moving-to-a-more-flexible-evp-for-2019/?sh=7c6312ed41cc>
2. <https://www.mercer.com/our-thinking/thrive.html>
3. <https://semcostyle.com/5-steps-and-15-work-practices-to-enhance-psychological-safety/>

About the Author

Harini Sreenivasan is a Business Transformation Evangelist, a Neuroscience enthusiast, Design Thinker, Storyteller, and Behavioural Scientist. Unlocking human potential is her forte and she practices resilience as a life skill. With her ability to drive engagement with people and power of positivity, she is an influencer both to industry and academia.



Deepti Varma, Director – HR for Amazon in APAC and Middle East, is a natural with people. With an innate urge to spread light to others, perhaps she draws inspiration from her name, which means “bright flame.” Her background of professional endeavours across diverse sectors forms an interesting biography of an HR leader who has worked wholeheartedly to bring out the best in everyone. She possibly imbibed a poised temperament and the ability to adapt to ever-changing scenarios from her mother, who once told her that “the greatest form of creativity is the recreation of oneself.” Passionate about diversity, equity, and inclusion, Deepti currently leads crucial initiatives for a creative and diverse workforce at Amazon – a company resilient enough to thrive amid any number of disruptions and nimble enough to take advantage of any opportunity that arises.

BY ANKITA SHARMA

Bringing Out The Best In People

Q One of the key sectors to discuss in light of the pandemic is e-commerce, which has been seeing accelerated growth since the past year. From an HR standpoint, how did Amazon India overcome the slew of challenges in the initial days of the crisis, such as dealing with a surge in demand and supply chain disruptions?

A At Amazon, the pandemic has been an opportunity to embrace change and innovate processes. Despite the challenging situation, we were nimble and quick to react, which helped us optimise process efficiency and the employee/candidate experience.

As an example, by mid-March, we had conceptualised and implemented a virtual onboarding program that started as a pilot at Amazon India and has since been scaled globally. Virtual onboarding at scale was a novel experience. We had to adapt fast to the dynamic environmental shifts, which meant making changes to our onboarding processes, new hire documentation, IT enablement protocols, and ensuring that new hires continued to get a great onboarding experience. Our culture of moving fast by taking quick two-way door decisions helped us react well to the fast-evolving situation.

Q Even before the pandemic, the global concern about mental health at work had reached such proportions that it had been dubbed the “trillion-dollar taboo.” This term references the World Health Organization’s pre-COVID estimate that depression and anxiety cost the global economy \$1tn in lost productivity every year. In recent months, work-related stress and burnout have been off the charts. What are some ways in which Amazon supports employees’ holistic wellbeing?

Employee mental and physical health is of paramount importance at Amazon. Our wellness initiative ‘Svasthya’ includes health check-ups, an Employee Assistance Program (EAP), online wellness webinars/support, and diet and nutrition counselling. The Employee Assistance Program forms a key part of our wellbeing initiative and supports us in managing stress an employee might be facing.

We have many guidelines that allow employees to choose their working hours and take breaks when appropriate. Apart from that, most leaders are creatively trying to find an approach that works well for their team as we have a

Rapid Fire

• **Favourite quote:** *The greatest form of creativity is recreation of oneself.* My mom wrote this. I truly resonate with it.

• **A movie title that best describes you:** *Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara.*

For me, it’s not the end but the journey that is most important. I enjoy what I do and have fun while doing it. At Amazon, we say, “Work hard. Have fun. Make history.”

• **Complete these sentences:**

i. If not an HR, I would have been... enabling women to be self-reliant. On a lighter note, I would open a dance school.

ii. I strongly believe in... what Rumi says: *You die only once but you must live every day.*

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

i. Resilience: Makes successful people stand out. While it grounds us, sometimes it also gives us wings to fly.

ii. Curiosity: Have the curiosity of a child, and you will never have a dull day.

iii. Setback: It gives us a green field to start things over. The only way from there is to find a solution.

diverse workforce, and one size cannot fit all.

Q What role do leaders at Amazon play in creating and sustaining a company culture that is wellbeing oriented?

A While Amazonians work backwards from customer needs, we make sure to understand the pulse of our employees, too. We’ve launched a daily feedback survey called ‘Connections’, to understand the factors that influence our employees’ day-to-day experience on a real-time basis. Team leaders leverage this program to understand employee experiences and build action plans to address the focus areas. During these challenging times, we have leveraged ‘Connections’ questions to understand employee wellbeing better.

Q The pandemic has exposed whether organisations view D&I as a nice-to-have box-ticking exercise or as a core value. Has the post-COVID future, which heralds a hybrid way of working for many companies, rendered DEI more critical than ever?

A Irrespective of COVID, Amazon has always believed diversity is important. Jeff Bezos has said, “It’s not only that diversity and inclusion are good for our business. It’s more fundamental than that — it’s simply right.”

Diversity for us is a combination of unique skills, experiences, perspectives and cultural backgrounds that make us who we are. A few programs that we rolled out before COVID-19 include:

- **Rekindle** — an initiative designed to encourage women on a professional break to resume their corporate career through structured onboarding, focused mentoring, and on the job training
- **A Virtual Contact Center (VCC)** that enables employees to work from any location, such as

smaller contact centers, branch offices, retail stores, and home.

We are always looking at creating more opportunities within Amazon for diversity and inclusion. During the pandemic, we orientated our managers on how to interact with teams virtually and promote inclusivity while being sensitive to their own needs, as managers need to be enabled, too.

Q What are the recent initiatives taken up by Amazon India to level the playing field and support women, LGBT+, people with diverse abilities, and underrepresented groups to flourish at work?

A We are constantly working to create an environment that promotes diversity. We recruit diverse employees across the company — from entry-level roles to the most senior positions. Several initiatives promote women empowerment and gender diversity amongst the local communities. Additionally, we launched our LGBTQ+ affinity group called ‘**Glamazon India**’ in 2017. It has employees from the LGBTQ+ community and allies passionate about building an inclusive environment by providing support through peer-to-peer mentoring, networking, creating enabling mechanisms, and raising awareness around related topics. We have also hired transgender associates and will continue to focus on this group.

In the last couple of years, we have enhanced our focus on hiring persons with disabilities (PwD) across India, including those with speech and hearing impairments, as well as locomotor disabilities. We intend to broaden our scope by hiring more individuals with diverse abilities in the coming years, working in partnership with our PwD affinity group, and preparing our infrastructure from an accessibility standpoint. We have also started a pilot program for hiring people with learning disabilities (e.g., autism).

Up-Close and Personal

Q What is your most significant learning from the pandemic experience?

A My key takeaways from this experience are building agility, being empathetic in order to understand your team, enhancing the ability to learn and change, and being willing to own your mistakes and learn from them.

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

A I want to get fitter and try bungee jumping.

Q How do you set boundaries between personal life and work?

A Personal life and work go hand in hand, and some days one of them takes precedence over the other. However, I usually block out a few hours on my calendar for my family and personal interests.

Q What would we be surprised to learn about you?

A My husband and I have been learning to dance, and it is a great stressbuster.

Furthermore, Amazon made a public commitment of globally hiring and training former defense service personnel and their families to create fulfilling alternate career opportunities for the military community. We have an affinity group called ‘**Amazon Warriors**’ to help ex-service personnel make a successful transition from the Indian Armed Forces to meaningful roles at Amazon.

“Work hard. Have fun. Make history.”

Q To what extent does the highly digital and fragmented workplace of the COVID-19 era aid or hinder psychologically safe work environments? What are the top strategies employed at Amazon India to create psychological safety for

employees — be it for the on-ground teams across your supply chain and delivery networks or those working virtually?

A We have always promoted a culture of ‘ownership’ at Amazon, where every employee is empowered to make decisions instead of following instructions, thus creating psychological safety.

In January, when Jeff Bezos came to India, he made a commitment of investing \$1 billion in SMBs, enabling exports, and creating one million jobs by 2025. Although these are increasingly difficult times, when employees know that we are working towards a larger purpose and allowing them to shape the future, they feel charged up.

Also, we recently announced the deployment of ‘**Distance Assistant**’ across our operational sites in the country, following the successful rollout of the technology in the US and a few other countries. The AI-powered innovation will remind on-site associates to maintain a minimum distance of 6 feet from others by providing social distancing feedback in real-time. With social distancing continuing to be a preventive safety measure amid the pandemic, this smart solution is another step to ensure the safety of tens of thousands of associates in the buildings. The self-contained standalone units will be stationed across entrances and high people traffic areas across Amazon India’s fulfilment centres, sort centres, and delivery stations. As employees walk past the camera, the monitor will display a live video feed with visual cues to show if associates are within 6 feet of one another. The on-screen indicators have been designed to remind associates to maintain an appropriate distance from those around them. Individuals remaining 6 feet apart are highlighted with green circles, while those closer to each other are highlighted in red. **HC**



The Hierarchy In HR

Platform organisations are ending "The Hierarchy in HR". HR's job will be to engage the (gig) workforce by creating Employee Value Proposition, creating an employer brand, designing conversations, incentive plans, and intuitive platforms.

BY HARJEET KHANDUJA

Raj was worried. A group of 100 people was arriving for a month-long training programme. He had never handled such a big batch before. So, he consulted Anu who advised him to divide the group into ten sections and make a person from the group, responsible for each group. Then Raj would be required to only manage those 10 people since they would manage the rest.

Hierarchies have been very effective in people management since the very beginning. Hierarchies come into picture because a human can effectively manage anywhere between 7 to 25 people depending on the nature of work and interaction. Hierarchies are one of the most fundamental components of Human Resources. Hierarchies solve many important problems for organisations. They solve it using a manager.

“A manager is responsible for controlling the outcome by ensuring the availability and productivity of employees. This can be done by hiring, training, engaging, allocating work, guiding, reviewing work, and coaching the employees.”

What is a Manager?

A manager is someone who manages or takes charge of something. The origin of the word manager is from the Latin word “*Manus*” which means “hand”. The Italian word *menagerie* means “to control”. From an organisational standpoint, a manager is responsible for controlling the outcome by ensuring the availability and productivity of employees. A manager can do that by hiring, training, engaging, allocating work, guiding, reviewing work, and coaching the employees.

How do hierarchies help?

Societies and countries have been using hierarchies to manage people for ages. If one were to look at the constitution of any country or study any civilisation, one will realise that each one of them is hierarchical with defined responsibilities and accountabilities for each role. Hierarchies help in: -

1. Decision Making: The speed of decision-making differentiates an organisation and makes it more efficient. Hierarchies provide a clear chain of command. Whenever there is confusion, people know who to approach for a decision.

2. Communication: Communication is critical to the success of any organisation. If an organisation launches a new feature in its product, changes a process, introduces an incentive plan, or decides to go for digital transformation, the speed with which it can communicate to its people will determine the success of the organisation in the marketplace. Well-defined hierarchies ensure that communication reaches the last level.

3. Getting things done: Social psychologists like Stanley Milgram and Philip Zimbardo had proven that people obey others of a higher status. Hierarchies leverage this trait of human behaviour to get work done.

4. Career Path: When hierarchy is created, the hierarchical levels are differentiated on the basis of the kind of decisions people at various levels

can make. The complexity and business impact of decision-making increases with each level in the hierarchy. Privileges are attached to each level based on the business impact. This creates aspiration for people to move to the next level. It also acts as a retention tool, since people are able to see a clear career path within the organisation.

Problems with hierarchy

Hierarchy creates managers. These managers are power centres as well as information hubs. The managers also, at times, have the potential to become counterproductive and affect the efficiency of the organisation.

1. Communication Flow: If a manager in the chain of command withholds communication, he/she not only creates an information imbalance but also affects the capability of the organisation to get things done.

2. Listening: Interestingly, communication is a two-way street. Organisations are supposed to keep adjusting their strategies based on the feedback gathered at various levels of hierarchy. If a manager in the chain of command stops listening, it affects the agility of the organisation, which creates bigger problems down the road. A few decades ago, the lack of listening pushed the manufacturing sector into a whirlwind of unionisation.

3. Incompetence: If the manager in the chain of command is incompetent, that is, either the manager does not know how to make the decision, or decides not to make decisions promptly, the entire chain below the manager becomes inefficient.

4. Maintenance: At times, hierarchy defeats the very purpose for which it was created. With the passage of time, some decision points become redundant, but they continue to travel across levels leading to an unnecessary delay. Hierarchy needs to be reviewed regularly and the bottlenecks need to be identified and rectified.

Solutions

For years, organisational scientists have been trying to solve problems to

make hierarchy structure work using the following methods:

1. Creating parallel communication channels:

Organisations create matrix structures so that if one chain of command fails to communicate then the employee receives instructions through another chain of command. This is further supported by creating parallel communication channels. An example for this are the central communication teams. Listening can also be done through dipstick surveys or suggestion schemes.

2. Managerial Development: The entire framework of assessment centres and development centres is built around the concept of improving the quality of managerial roles. Many organisations invest in formal development programmes for decision-making roles. Some organisations conduct transition training at the time of elevation of people to the decision-making roles.

3. Culture Building: In a joint family, the younger ones are taught to respect elders. In the same manner, organisations teach people to respect authority. This is the process of culture building. Certain rituals are put in place to shape the behaviour of individuals to make the organisation efficient.

4. Re-engineering Exercise: Whenever a big festival comes around, we clean our houses. Re-engineering exercises do something like that for businesses. They weed out the unnecessary workflows, processes, and bottlenecks. These exercises are called by different names such as business process re-engineering, organisation restructuring, Certification on a new standard, revamping IT systems etc.

5. Information Technology: Embedding organisational rules in IT systems is another approach followed by organisations that reduce decision-making dependence on managers.

Paradigm Shift

Until recently, companies were focused on robotics and allied technologies to

reduce the dependency on front line jobs. In the last two decades, there was significant growth in the service sector. At the same time, machine learning, artificial intelligence, data science and analytics improved leaps and bounds.

The paradigm shifted when organisations changed their focus from optimising front line jobs to optimising routine decision-making managerial jobs. Focusing on optimising managerial jobs not only creates a cost advantage but also allows organisations to convert their regular front line workforce into a 'gig' workforce.

If you see the way the Uber platform works, there is no manager. Anyone can enrol to be a driver (employee) on the basis of his driving licence (training). Thereafter, the employee attends an induction, the platform allocates work, the customer reviews the work, and the feedback and development needs are passed to the employee by the platform.

The Hierarchy in HR

Platform organisations are putting an end to "The Hierarchy in HR". The job of Human Resource will be to engage the (gig) workforce by creating employee value proposition, creating employer brand, designing conversations, designing incentive plans, and more importantly, designing intuitive platforms. 

About the Author

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

“The complexity and business impact of decision-making increases with each level in the hierarchy. Privileges are attached to each level based on the business impact. This creates aspiration for people to move to the next level.”



No Longer A FR(O)rg In The Well!

To be a Fully Remote Org, organisations need to make culture a priority, identify a great remote working culture, focus on deliberate communication, planned spontaneity and work visibility, and train Managers in remote working practices.

BY ROHIT SHENOY



As Dhruv updated his mood for the day as *'tensed about my sister's covid test results'* on his team's online stream, he wanted to keep himself distracted from thinking about it any further. His thoughts raced to how StarTech, the IT product company he worked for transitioned from physical offices, which received rave reviews on Glassdoor, to a FROrg (Fully Remote org), and yet, received great reviews on Glassdoor! Though not easy, he sat down to write an article about what helped them to transition successfully to being a FROrg. He

first summarised what made them a great remote org and then went on to elaborate the details.

A. The Summary

- Make Culture a Priority and resume focus on engagement and teamwork
- Identify what a great remote working culture looks like
- Focus on Deliberate communication, planned spontaneity and work visibility
- Train Managers in remote working practices adapted company-wide

B. The Details

Making Culture a priority

StarTech was a privately-owned global tech company with 35 offices in 16 countries. They were one of the pioneers in the agile way of working and were proud of their culture. The offices were known for their informal vibe. To ensure the culture fit of the fresh recruits, as a part of their hiring process, candidates had to undergo a minimum of 9 rounds. This included everyone from a campus fresher to the country head and the founders for mid-senior roles.

When the pandemic struck them, their founder, Estelle, wasted no time in deciding to move work across all countries remotely. Estelle was clear that she needed to adapt her ability to create a sense of purpose and an empowering engaged environment for employees to the remote workplace. Estelle understood the importance of people feeling valued and engaged at work. She had a strong belief that changing the tools and the location of work should not impact StarTech's ability to work closely together. However, she knew that this required a combination of mindset, toolset and skillsets for remote work and she wanted the task force to work on those alone.

She created a task force with people from across the world to set-up newer ways of working in the remote scenario and ensure that their unique culture was maintained during the remote working period. A few months ago, StarTech had carried out an Org Network Analysis (ONA) and Dhruv's name had come out as a 'boundary spanner'. This meant that he was part of diverse groups and well networked with StarTech. This, coupled with his role in HR, made him a part of the Remote work task force.

The task force realised early on that back-to-back remote meetings is not remote work - it is remote work in panic. The task force

realised that they need the below elements for effective work from home:

- Deliberate Communication
- Planned Spontaneity
- Work Visibility

Dhruv looked at his notes from the task force's findings:

Mindset and Skillset -

1. Deliberate Communication

A. In the absence of water cooler and canteen talks, it is essential to deliberately communicate what is happening in the rest of the organisation so that people do not miss out on important updates that have an impact on their work.

B. To deliberately communicate your mood for the day to colleagues (*that's what Dhruv had done right at the beginning!*).

“In the absence of water cooler and canteen talks, it is essential to deliberately communicate what is happening in the rest of the organisation so that people do not miss out on important updates.”

2. Planned Spontaneity

In the physical world, people would spontaneously connect with their colleagues on the way to their workstations, between meetings and also socially. This spontaneity was missing in the remote space. And hence, they came up with various structures to ensure this through planned spontaneity through Friday no agenda informal connects within teams, fortnightly cross team connects, monthly country gettogethers etc. All of these had a lot of employee

interaction and very little speaking from the leaders.

3. Work Visibility

Make your work visible to others. A *101 conversation online* does not give others an opportunity to contribute to the conversation, but the use of online workstreams ensures that the content is communicated to a larger group and others feel involved and can contribute their ideas. They adapted Working Out Loud (*#WOL*) as a movement inside the company. This meant that they create and track visible workflow. This helped them eliminate regular mundane status update calls. They also realised that working out loud need not be noisy!

One big takeaway for the task force was to focus on asynchronous work i.e. people working in their own time and on what gets done between meetings, not just on synchronous meetings. What came about as a pleasant surprise was that this also ensured a reduction in the overall number of meetings.

Virtual meetings

During face-to-face work, StarTech was known for its team collaboration and informal meetings. They gave a thoughtful consideration to taking the meetings virtual. This was not easy and they realised that they could not extrapolate the flow, the engagement and the structure that they were used to in physical meetings. They needed to unlearn the old and relearn the new to design and execute awesome virtual meetings. The task force crowd-sourced best practices of virtual meetings and came up with the below list of rules and roles.

Rules for virtual meetings

1. Avoid meetings unless they are unavoidable!
2. Do not invite everyone and do not leave out important stakeholders!

3. Choose flow and engagement - use liberating structures to unleash group wisdom
4. Tell people in advance if switching on video is mandatory for the meeting
5. Give people pre-read material and reduce the duration of meetings
6. Set-up no meeting time zones to ensure people have lunch etc.
7. Plan for success
8. Document with visibility for everyone and follow-up asynchronously

Roles in meetings

- CEO of the meeting
- Silence Breaker – Speak up first if no-one else is responding
- Designated facilitator –His/her role was of utmost importance. The facilitator would be an expert in content neutral facilitation. She/he would be typically experienced in using Liberating Structures and IAF (International Association of Facilitators) facilitation group processes and SessionLab website.
- Meeting doctor – He/she stepped in when meetings were not going right and called out disruptive behaviours

Some other best practices that Dhruv started to love about their current meetings :

- Always start with a check-in to get people in a positive mood, relate to each other and build physical context with words e.g. 'what do I see outside my window?'

Dhruv noted some toolsets that played an important role in remote work for them.

Liberating Structures

Liberating Structures are a selection of 33 alternative structures for facilitating meetings and conversations, curated by Henri Lipmanowicz and Keith McCandless.

Liberating Structures, are designed to embrace distributed control and include a fairer, larger number of people in shaping the next steps. The use of liberating structures in StarTech resulted in innovation, inclusion, participation, clarity, purpose and fun. They chose Liberating Structures as a method since they are deliberately simple and anyone can lead them which means they can spread virally in StarTech. They ran company-wide sessions to train an initial core group of people on liberating structures. Once people experienced one, it was easy to start experimenting. This along with the IAF's library of facilitation methods and techniques and processes from sessions lab unleashed the power of group wisdom in StarTech.

“Liberating Structures, are designed to embrace distributed control and include a fairer, larger number of people in shaping the next steps.”

Next Steps for StarTech

The as-is state for Star Tech was being a FROrg, but going forward, they would be HyOrg (Hybrid Org) with some employees working from an office location and all others meeting occasionally in offices to connect as a team.

Dhruv worked with the core team to create a Remote Work index (RWI). This helped identify roles that

- Could be done fully remotely on a permanent basis
- Needed people to come to StarTech Offices
- Could be done from a satellite office

As they identified people in each of the 3 categories, he looked forward to the next phase of modifying their way of working to the HyOrg. Just then, he got a WhatsApp message from his sister which brought a sigh of relief and a big smile on his face. The message read “*Negative*” and with a huge smile we went ahead and updated his mood for his team mates, “*Relieved – All is well!*” 

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Mind Over Matter

There is little doubt that reflection improves one's decision-making ability. Through reflection, we are able to evaluate a situation objectively and cognitively with intuition adding the finishing touch.

BY ASHISH PRADHAN

The situation stood balanced on a knife's edge. The negotiations with the union had broken off and the plant was on the verge of a shutdown. As the person heading the negotiations, I was feeling the pressure and there was an intense desire to act. I reached out to my mentor who had a counterintuitive and unexpected piece of advice – sit in a quiet place and reflect.

There is little doubt that reflection improves one's decision-making ability. Through reflection, we are able to evaluate a situation objectively and cognitively with intuition adding the finishing touch. Several inventions and creative solutions to problems have materialised on reflection. The most classic example of this is Archimedes' Eureka moment.

However, many of us find reflection difficult to practice. Human beings, by nature, are action-oriented. We are pre-disposed to act. The flight or fight response to perceived danger is our default even in less threatening situations. Reflection is something that does not come naturally to most of us. We tend to react to situations instead of responding to them. Reflection is the difference between reaction and response. While there is merit in fast reaction in a life and death situation, the situations we mostly face in our work lives give us the opportunity to reflect and muster the appropriate response. Therefore, it is imperative that we try and understand the process of

“Without reflection, we go blindly on our way, creating more unintended consequences, and failing to achieve anything useful.”

– Margaret Wheatley

reflection and evaluate a method that we could employ to embed our habits of reflection.

A mind workout

Reflection is like a workout for the mind. Like the way we use the gymnasium to train our body to become strong, supple, and functional, reflection is the place where we train our mind. And as there is a routine that one follows in the body gym, one needs to do the same for the mind gym. We shall use this analogy to develop the idea of reflection.

As one starts one's exercise regimen with a warm-up to make the body receptive to the work out to follow, one must warm up the mind. And the most effective way to do this is to meditate. Meditation is a practice that trains the mind to be calm yet aware, sharp yet flexible, in the moment – whatever the distractions. A few minutes of meditation – centring – can really put you in a frame of mind to be open to different stimuli, receptive to divergent viewpoints and imaginative solutions. Ideally, meditation is a habit that one must cultivate in order to be adept at it. The time

and energy that goes into the pursuit of a calm mind returns a multi-fold pay back.

The devil is in the Data

Data is the equipment of the mind gym. One cannot reflect without data. Data does not necessarily mean numerical data, but also observations. The process of reflection then moves data through three stages before the point of action. These are information, knowledge, and insights. Information is data that is relevant to the situation at hand, knowledge is information that one can use, and finally, insights is the knowledge that one gleans wisdom out of using one's cognitive and intuitive abilities. This seems simple enough, but have we not seen numerous presentations that get lost in sheer data, mired in too much information, exulting in knowledge, and sorely lacking in insights?

The process is like a funnel. After acquiring data, one needs to ask the question, “*what data is relevant to the current situation?*” to distil it to information. Here, one needs to be ruthless to cast data aside that has little bearing to the topic. “*Can we use this information? If yes, how?*” is the sieve one uses to sift knowledge from information. Insight is the stage where we process knowledge at a cognitive level and then connect to our individual or collective intuition, which is really an accumulation of our experiences that reside in our unconscious, to

arrive at key insights. Insight is the stage we need to attain before we can initiate meaningful action. How do we know if we have attained insights? One practical way is to ask the question, “*So what does this knowledge tell us?*”, to a point where we know that the answer is actionable.

The final stage of reflection is finding a sounding board that you trust. Reflection is essentially an individual activity. Thus, it is only logical that the output would be subject to all the cognitive biases that plague the human mind. It is, therefore, imperative that one challenges one’s results of one’s reflections with an intuitive and knowledgeable mind and play the devil’s advocate. One must be cautious though that in the

eventuality of conflicting intuitive opinions, one should trust one’s gut as in the end, it is the person who carries the can whose gut finally matters.

The 3-Step stop

How do we develop effective reflection as a habit? One recommends three simple steps—

- **Allocate a time:** While managing our back-to-back calls and meetings, we must earmark specific time for daily reflections. It would help immensely if we put this in our calendars so colleagues can see that we are busy in that time and wouldn’t schedule calls. Keeping a log of one’s reflection is also something that works with many successful professionals.

- **Allocate a place:** Man is a creature of habit. We need to have familiar surroundings which the mind recognises intuitively as a place for reflection. It is important to keep the place neat, tidy and with as little clutter. Any object on the table which one is planning to use as a place for reflection will only distract. A physically clear workplace naturally facilitates a clear mind.

- **Decide a payoff:** Decide a payoff in advance. As many experts on habit have reiterated, we need to have a positive payoff to make the habit stick. One can decide the payoff as something one enjoys at the end of reflection. In the end, the high one experiences after reflection is, in itself, a payoff. An alternative payoff may be required till one reaches this level.

I returned home from office, had an early dinner, and then retired to my study. I poured myself a glass of wine and reflected. I found a way out of the conundrum. I have been an ardent champion of reflection as a habit for leadership success ever since.

Through personal experiences, I am convinced that self-reflection is the most underused and underestimated skill that is used for success. It is a pre-requisite for managing our VUCA world. As Margaret Wheatley so aptly put it, “*Without reflection, we go blindly on our way, creating more unintended consequences, and failing to achieve anything useful.*” On reflection, one can only nod one’s head in vigorous assertion! 

About the Author

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



IT Sector Shows A Rise in Demand for Jobs: SC�KEY Report

BY ANUSHRUTI SINGH

Despite the pandemic, demand for job roles in IT sector has remained unaffected. Major job roles that were in demand in November were Project Manager, Software



Developer, Software Tester, Consultant & Digital Marketing lead, out of which in comparison to other sectors - IT sector alone had a demand of 55 per cent, 65 per cent, 60 per cent, 33 per cent and 30 per cent respectively of above roles across India. SC�KEY Market Network's research data revealed that the demand for the above roles in various cities and across different sectors rose. Project Manager role was in highest demand in Bengaluru with 30 per cent, followed by Delhi/NCR (15 per cent) and Pune (13 per cent). Demand for Project Managers was maximum in IT Sector (55 per cent), followed by Construction (6 per cent), Recruitment (5 per cent) & Banking (3 per cent). ■

MSDE, Microsoft, NASSCOM Launch Digital Skilling Program; 1.2 lakh Students To Benefit

BY ANUSHRUTI SINGH

The Directorate General of Training (DGT) joined hands with Microsoft and NASSCOM Foundation to provide digital content for ITI students and also a future-ready employability skilling program for upskilling and reskilling. Nearly 1,20,000 students in around 3000 ITIs across India will benefit from this digitized e-learning module via the Bharatskills portal. DGT, under the aegis of the Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship (MSDE), is responsible for implementing long term institutional training to the nation's youth through its

extensive network of about 15,000 training institutes and 33 National Skill Training Institutes. Dr Mahendra Nath Pandey, Union Minister of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship said, "Through the DGT-Microsoft partnership, we are aiming to impact



thousands of students by enabling digitisation in education and hope it to reach more students and teachers soon. As the pandemic is compelling fast-track digital transition, these new learning initiatives will empower young learners with technical and market-oriented skills." ■

70% Organisations Believe Remote-Working Productivity Gains Sustainable Beyond Pandemic

BY ANUSHRUTI SINGH

A majority of organisations witnessed strong productivity gains in Q3 2020 by allowing employees to work remotely; however, employees are being impacted by the feeling of being "always-on", according to a new report by the Capgemini Research Institute titled, "The future of work: from remote to hybrid." In order to continue realising remote working benefits and manage employee expectations, organisations need to find the right operating model for a more balanced hybrid approach. To do this, leaders need



to question and rethink the effectiveness of existing structures and break down organisational silos and barriers between teams, cites the report. Employee productivity grew at 63 per cent of organisations during the third quarter of 2020 thanks to less commuting time, flexible work schedules and the adoption of effective virtual collaboration tools. IT and digital functions (68 per cent) lead the way in productivity, followed by customer service (60 per cent) and sales and marketing (59 per cent). Digitisation and the use of technologies like artificial intelligence (AI) have helped organisations see improved productivity in these areas. ■



the situation and took up the opportunity to showcase his skills. After completing the project, his work came to notice. He was positively acknowledged as an innovative and creative thinker by the business partner, and Agastya became an integral part of the team.

After the initial success, there was a rapid increase in Agastya's visibility in the department. He was often assigned critical projects, traveling across the country with the team on various client locations. Within a year and a half, he was utterly abreast with the department's services, began to handle the tasks allotted to him individually, and was getting positive feedback from the client. In January 2020, he was recognised as a Subject Matter Expert (SME).

Performance Cycle

After savouring success on a regular basis, Agastya, vying the organisation's performance appraisal cycle in March 2018, was confident that he was ready for the next role and optimistic that he would be promoted.

On the day of his performance review discussion, he experienced 'bias' for the first time. During the meeting with his supervisor, he was told that since he is only an engineer (Graduate), he needs to wait for another year to get promoted. However, no such company policy existed on paper, but was somehow practiced. Though disappointed, he did not lose hope and continuously performed his work with the highest of his abilities. And he regularly received client appreciation.

Education / certification policy

One day, Agastya contemplated doing a certification course facilitated by the organisation, and hence sought his superior's approval. His supervisor denied the request with the reason that he needs to travel to the client's location for

In Letter And Spirit?

BY DR. DEEPIKA PANDITA

Agastya joined Pinnacle Consulting, Mumbai, in August 2016 as a Management trainee. Pinnacle Consulting is a global network of professional service firms providing advisory services. It operates in 200+ countries and has 3,21,000 people working in member firms around the world. Established in India in January 1978, it has rapidly built a significant competitive presence in the country. In India, Pinnacle Consulting has a client base of over 1927 companies. The firm's global approach to service delivery helps provide value-added services to clients. The firm serves leading advisory services and has a

strong presence in India, while doing many market leaders in other industry segments. In 2017 and 2018, the firm was continuously ranked second in the best employee-friendly companies to work. The firm boasts about its people-driven policies and considers its employees as the only valuable assets essential to meet the organisational goals. Initially, for 3 to 4 months, he was kept on the bench doing routine backend and documentation work. In December 2016, he was assigned a critical assignment along with another team member. Even though he did not have enough knowledge and experience on the project deliverables, he embraced

two months, and the certification requires attending the classes in person for a week. After he returned upon the completion of the project, he once again sought approval for the same. However, it was denied again since he needed to complete the deliverables and head for another project on short notice. One day, Agastya was having a telephonic conversation with one of his colleagues in the same team. To Agastya's shock, he came to know that his colleague had completed the same certification that he wanted to meet. His colleague was now traveling abroad related to client work.

The second performance cycle

Agastya was viewing his performance appraisal letter for the year 2019, although promoted to the next position of Associate Consultant, to his surprise, he was given a rating of 'Very Good'. The following day, he enquired with his supervisor about the basis of rating. He received a reply that there are only two people who are given Excellent rating. For achieving the same, a person needs to perform exceptionally; for example, he needs to add value by doing some certification course/degree and performing activities such as business development, etc.

Experiencing such instances frequently, Agastya was demoralised. On one occasion, he tried to reach out to the human resource department, but was communicated by the project manager that such action could impact his career and reputation. Understanding the situation, Agastya decided to focus on his work and leave the problem as it is.

The Gender Bias

As an Associate Consultant, Agastya was relishing the responsibilities he was shouldered with (Agastya's peers were still handling a process) and started handing the client individually. The duties were such

that Agastya was traveling extensively 11 out of 12 months from one client location to another. Tired of such a hectic schedule, he requested that he be assigned on a local project. Agreeing to the request, he was given a local project. One week after working on this project, Agastya received a call from his Director. He wanted Agastya to travel on an immediate basis for an overseas assignment as the person assigned on Agastya's behalf had refused to travel. Agastya enquired from his Director about whether he too can go for such an option. However, to his surprise, he was told that she was a female.

One day, sitting in the office cafeteria, Agastya was having a cup of coffee with his colleague, who was offended by the situation that had happened with him. On elaborating further, it was revealed that his colleague too was replaced with one of the female employees. This time, she was assigned locally, but needed to go home early in the evening. Due to this, the project was running way behind the scheduled time. In the same year, the female employee was promoted to the position of Assistant Manager with an Excellent rating and travelled significantly less in her career span. Once again, Agastya's inner motivation and dedication towards work was taken aback by the unprecedented bias.

Sabbatical leave Policy

The organisation had a policy that a person can opt for a sabbatical leave to study, if he/she has completed 2 years in the organisation. Wanting to opt for the Policy as Agastya aspired to pursue post-graduation, he requested for the same. However, the request was denied as usual, saying that it takes 6-7 months of approval from the top management and the organisation cannot let him opt for the Policy as the organisation was facing serious resource crunch. One day, he inquired about his colleague whom



he had not seen for a long time. To his notice, he observed that the person went on a sabbatical to prepare for his post-graduation as the person was a close relative of the Director. Also, the same Policy was successfully executed by other departments too.

Interdepartmental transfer policy

On completing four years in the organisation in August, 2020, Agastya found the work a little monotonous and wanted to shift to another department (Strategy and Operations). The company policy provided provision for the same, however, when he sought approval for the same, Agastya was promoted to the next level within the same service line. However, Agastya was not shifted to the department which he was eyeing, and was his dream job since he joined the firm, even though the partner of other department was ready to absorb him. **HC**

About the Author

Deepika Pandita, Ph.D. is an Assistant Professor in Symbiosis Institute of Business Management Pune at Symbiosis International University. She comes with an experience of 12 years and teaches post graduate and Executive MBA courses in the area of human resources, organisational behaviour, leadership and talent management. Dr. Pandita has a graduate degree in Management and post graduate degree in Management and Human Resources.

Analysis By **Ravi Mishra**



Pinnacle believes that people are its greatest assets and the true drivers of organisational performance. However, one fails to fathom why Agastya has been tolerating workplace biases for more than four years. And he also did not approach the HR Department and went back into a silo after his project manager shared his personal opinion that it would be counterproductive.

Sometimes, when an employee lacks the ability to deliver or is unable to do so despite being capable due to various reasons, it is observed that they lack the confidence to discuss workplace differences. However, on the contrary, Agastya is able to perform exceptionally well and is recognised by various stakeholders including customers, peers and the other departments. Also, it is surprising that he is continuing to work for Pinnacle, in spite of various hiccups. Agastya is young and at such an early stage in his career, there are abundant opportunities for him in consulting firms.

On the other hand, though Pinnacle is a successful company in terms of growth, it may be complacent over its Performance Management System (PMS) in practice. A good HR organisation does not wait for someone to come forward with a complaint, since they have an in-built process to evaluate the level of conformance, which is

validated by the stakeholders. It is intriguing that nobody from the HR function tried to reach out to Agastya in the last 4 years to comprehend his engagement level with the company.

Employees like Agastya, in any organisation, should not give into presumptions and harbour their frustration in isolation for a long time. If unsatisfied with the Manager, they should come forward and approach the HR department or even the CEO. This will go a long way to enable individual employees and organisations to evolve as a better workplace. The only thing that is called for is a discussion with an open mind and listen to the organisational perspective.

It is possible that Pinnacle is boasting to be a good company when it comes to employee care. They seem to have greater belief in advertising themselves to create a better image rather than working on the ground.

One has witnessed many organisations talking about gender diversity which simply makes no sense. The right perspective is inclusiveness that provides opportunities to those who deserve. While hiring must be done to ensure a fairer percentage of women employees, it should not be done at the cost of competency and capability. Opportunities must be also provided to employees without taking gender into consideration. It is essential for HR organisations to expand their understanding of the horizon of diversity beyond gender.

Pinnacle must undertake a thorough review of its HR processes, and mark those areas that are not functioning as per design. They should create a platform and encourage employees to share their experiences. It must also ensure confidentiality and may choose a

third party to run this process so that people like Agastya can come forward and contribute without any fear of being targeted by their manager or any other individual who matters.

The following steps may be undertaken by Pinnacle :-

- It is the ownership of the organisation, more specifically the HR team for the Performance Management System and Learning & Development to authenticate the process as an enabler to drive results as per design.
- It must create an environment of openness and trust so that employees can come forward and contribute for the betterment of the organisation by providing their candid feedback.
- It must review its growth trajectory constantly before it gets trapped in the 'S Curve'
- As a key stakeholder, employees need to share their experiences and point of view without fear of being victimised by people/manager, who matter in the organisation.
- On the part of employee, despite repeated efforts, if the organisation does not want to listen or act to its employees, they should move on and seek an opportunity that supports to build the career. It is not advisable that the employee remains in the organisation for a long time in the doldrum of conflict with basic ethos that matters. 

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 **Nikhil Mallah**



Pinnacle holds the reputation of being one among the most employee friendly companies to work for and considers employees as the only valuable asset essential to meet organisational goals. It is clear that Agastya did not trust the organisation's people driven practices and neither did he challenge the status quo, thereby succumbing to individual bias.

In the midst of the biases being experienced by Agastya, it appears that confronting and raising his voice to the HR department or the HOD would have been the right approach. He has already proven

his mettle while delivering various assignments and has also received appreciation from his clientele. This justifies that his expectations are only fair while seeking promotion and a better rating during his performance review, and also while seeking the benefit of the sabbatical for higher studies.

Also, he should have raised his apprehensions about him not being granted with the best rating and posting even after proving his credence consistently, and making it clear that the organisation is not having gender neutral policies. As far as his movement through IJP was concerned, he should have raised the same with the HR, stating that he always aspired to get into the role and has been cleared for the same by the new department partner.

Firstly, Agastya is himself primarily responsible for spawning such biases. Not raising his voice for his own right is the prime reason behind it. Secondly, it is equally important that the HR department, who is the custodian of driving such agendas and eliminating such lacunas keeps

educating the new joiner and existing employees on a regular basis to re-assure and instil confidence amongst them that they have zero tolerance for such behaviours. This could be accomplished by rolling out knowledge sessions or know your policy sessions in a periodic manner, either one-on-one or in joint forums - virtually or physically. Lastly, the organisation should ensure that the top management team should be the custodian and role model while demonstrating such behaviours and it should also encourage its employees to raise their apprehension and concern either in closed doors or in open town houses as per their convenience and comfort. The organisation should also take stern actions penalising the accused to curb such behaviour.

The first and foremost reason for the HR to not intervene and provide solution in such situation is due to the lack of communication. There has been no formal or informal communication raised by the employee to the HR department pertaining to the issues and apprehension faced by him. Secondly, he has succumbed to the bias and never raised his voice, which enabled others to take undue advantage and made him the guinea pig. **HC**

About the Author

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ANALYSIS





The Haryana State Employment Of Local Candidates Bill, 2020

BY MANISH DEMBLA AND NACHIKETA GOYAL

The Government of Haryana, with an intention to create greater employment opportunities for the locals of the state, has passed the Haryana State Employment of Local Candidates Bill, 2020 (“Bill”). The Bill is yet to receive the assent of the Governor and hence, is yet to emerge as a law. Once the bill receives the assent of the Governor, the State Government will notify a date on which it shall come into effect. Therefore, it becomes necessary to provide a brief snapshot of the requirements to be complied with under the Bill, analysis of certain provisions of the Bill so as to highlight / remove the ambiguity therein, and the impact of the Bill on the industry at large.

One of the objects of the Bill, as mentioned in its statement of objects and reasons is, “To provide reservation to the local candidates of Haryana in private employment

under various Companies, Societies, Trusts, Limited Liability Partnerships Firms, Partnership Firm etc. situated in Haryana.” The statement of objects and reasons specifically uses the phrase ‘*situated in Haryana*’, not ‘*registered in Haryana*’, thereby, taking into account entities which might be registered outside Haryana, but having offices / factories in Haryana. Therefore, the requirement to employ local candidates is driven by the place of working of the workers and not the place of incorporation of the entity. There may be a situation where the place of incorporation of the entity might be Haryana and the place of work might be outside Haryana. Therefore, in such a situation, the Bill will not be applicable on the place of work.

Key Compliances

i. As per Section 4 of the Bill, every employer, employing ten or

more persons, shall employ seventy-five percent of local candidates with respect to such posts where the gross monthly salary or wages are not more than fifty thousand rupees. The term ‘*Local Candidate*’ refers to any candidate who is domiciled in Haryana. The employer has the discretion to appoint local candidates from any district of the State and can restrict the same to ten percent from any district.

An employer may claim exemption from the requirement of employing local candidates, where adequate number of local candidates of the desired skill, qualification or proficiency is not available by applying to the Designated Officer. The Designated Officer shall, after such inquiry, as he deems fit and after evaluating the attempt made by the employer to recruit local candidates of the desired skill, qualification or proficiency, may either accept or reject the claim of

the employer or direct the employer to train local candidates in the desired skill, qualification or proficiency.

ii. Every employer shall be required to mandatorily register all the employees having a gross monthly salary of less than Rs. 50,000 /- (Rupees Fifty Thousand Only) within three months from the date of the Bill coming into force in the designated portal as notified by the State Government.

iii. Every employer shall be required to submit a quarterly report on the designated portal pertaining to the local candidates employed or appointed during that quarter.

Penal Provisions

In case of contravention of the provisions of the Bill, monetary penalty ranging from Rs. 10,000 /- (Rupees Ten Thousand Only) to Rs. 2,00,000 /- (Rupees Two Lakh Only) and a further penalty ranging from Rs. 100/- (Rupees One Hundred Only) to Rs. 1,000/- (Rupees One Thousand Only) for each day such contravention continues, shall be levied on the employer, depending on the kind of offence or contravention. Further, a fine up to Rs. 50,000 /- (Rupees Fifty Thousand Only) is payable by the employer for providing false records or not furnishing proper information / records. The aforementioned amount can be extended to Rs. 5,00,000/- (Rupees Five Lakh Only) in case of a repeated offence of providing false information or not providing proper information / records.

It is pertinent to note, in case the person committing the offence is a company, the Bill assumes the persons concerned with the management of the company guilty unless they prove absence of knowledge with respect to the offence committed. Thereby, the Bill assumes guilt on part of the employer / its officials in case of non-compliance, unless the persons concerned are able to prove their innocence.

Applicability of the Bill on contract labour

The words used in Section 4 are every “*employer*” shall “*employ*” 75% of local candidates. As per the plain meaning of the said words, contract labour does not appear to be included. The Bill provides for framing of rules by the State Government in respect of various procedural aspects. There may be more clarity once the rules are framed.

Applicability of the bill viz. new / existing job posts

Although Section 4 of the Bill states “*After the commencement of this Act, every employer shall employ seventy-five percent of the local candidates...*”, it does not expressly state the applicability of the Bill to existing or new jobs. However, from the language of Section 4, the Bill appears to be applicable only to new jobs, not the existing employment structure. More clarity is expected once the Rules are framed and the designated officer is appointed.

Impact of the Bill on Industry

Since the Bill mandates employment of at least seventy five percent of the local candidates (having gross monthly wages less than Rs. 50, 000/-) to be domiciled in Haryana, the cost of labour and manpower is bound to increase in light of the majority of migrant workforce being rendered unemployable. The workforce comprising of the local candidates might not possess the requisite standard of skill-set or proficiency as required by the employer. Therefore, the Bill does not propose to be employer friendly as there might be instances that the employer might not find the requisite manpower despite willing to pay a premium amount to the workforce concerned.

Further, in light of the ambiguity viz. applicability of the Bill on contract labour, the employers may be driven to engage majority of contract labour workforce as opposed to direct employees which might defeat the very purpose of the Bill. **HC**



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Q I am a Human Resource Manager with an Information Technology company in Gurgaon. Owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, our company has designed a mobile application to collect data of employees relating to their health condition. However, certain employees have shown their reservation pertaining to the mobile application. Is it necessary to obtain employee consent in light of the Aarogya Setu application being made mandatory for employees by the Government of India?

A Kindly note that Ministry of Home Affairs vide its notification dated May 17, 2020, made the use of Aarogya Setu application recommendatory in nature and not mandatory. Para (9) (ii) of the aforementioned notification states, “employers on *best effort* basis should ensure that Aarogya Setu is installed by all employees having compatible mobile phones.” The data pertaining to the health of an individual qualifies as ‘sensitive personal data or information’ as per Rule 3 of Information Technology (Reasonable security practices and procedures and sensitive personal data or information) Rules, 2011. Further, as per Rule 5 of the Information Technology (Reasonable security practices and procedures and sensitive personal data or information) Rules, 2011, a body corporate is required to obtain prior written consent from the provider of the sensitive personal information. The data in the Aarogya Setu App is being collected

by the Government / agencies authorised by the Government and not a body corporate. However, since your company is a body corporate, it will be covered under the Information Technology (Reasonable security practices and procedures and sensitive personal data or information) Rules, 2011. Therefore, you will be required to obtain prior written consent of the data provider i.e. the employee concerned.

Q I am an HR manager with a multinational company based out of Delhi. Our Company provides various allowances regularly to our employees. Whether these allowances have to be included for the purpose of calculating provident fund of the employees?

A Please note that as per paragraph 29 (3) of the Employees’ Provident Fund Scheme, 1952, (“Scheme”), provident fund shall be calculated on the basis of basic wages, dearness allowance and retaining allowance (if any). The judgment of the Hon’ble Supreme Court of India in Regional Provident Fund Commissioner (II), West Bengal and Ors. vs. Vivekananda Vidyamandir and Ors. [AIR 2019 SC 1240] deals with the aspect allowances to be considered for the purpose of calculation of provident fund. With respect to the aforesaid aspect, the Hon’ble Supreme Court observed the following:

“9. Basic wage, under the Act, has been defined as all emoluments paid in cash to an employee in accordance with the terms of his

contract of employment. But it carves out certain exceptions which would not fall within the definition of basic wage and which includes dearness allowance apart from other allowances mentioned therein. But this exclusion of dearness allowance finds inclusion in Section 6. The test adopted to determine if any payment was to be excluded from basic wage is that the payment under the scheme must have a direct access and linkage to the payment of such special allowance as not being common to all. The crucial test is one of universality. The employer, under the Act, has a statutory obligation to deduct the specified percentage of the contribution from the employee’s salary and make matching contribution.”

Thus, if the allowances provided by you are provided for work done beyond the normal course of employment and as an incentive acknowledging the meritorious work of the employee, then the allowance shall not form a part of the basic wages and need not be considered for the purpose of calculating the provident of the employee. However, if the allowance is provided uniformly across board in the routine scope of employment, the same shall be liable to be included in the definition of basic wages. Therefore, depending on the type of allowance provided by you as mentioned above, the same shall either be included or excluded for the purpose of calculating the provident fund of the employees.





KALPANA BANSAL

Dashboard Enabled Driving

Leaders would be challenged to make behavioural shifts to realise the full power of Artificial Intelligence. Dashboards, insights, patterns are all powerful tools, but they require hours of concentrated dedication and prioritisation.

“Organisations demand leadership that can deliver to multi-pronged objectives which include-interpreting ambiguous situations, creating internal alignment, building trust and momentum in teams, organising resources and managing people.”

The World Economic Forum has designated the current cognitive era as “Industrial 4.0” (Schwab, 2016). This is an era that is experiencing the impact of cloud based, digitised processes and services leveraging the Internet of Things (IoT) and cognitive Artificial Intelligence (AI) based solutions (Ashrafian, 2015; Jarrahi, 2018; Prisecaru, 2017; Schwab, 2016). Organisations are witnessing the implications of scenario-based shifts in their operating model. However, there is a whole realm of unexplored terrain and the possibility of unprecedented changes for organisations and their leadership in the times to come.

Organisations demand leadership that can deliver to multi-pronged objectives which include - interpreting ambiguous situations, creating internal alignment, building trust and momentum in teams, organising resources and managing people. The advent of cognitive technologies has changed the leadership paradigm with its sophisticated mental capabilities. Information processing is presently scaling unprecedented heights, and this has led to massive changes in strategic thinking and leadership requirements of organisations.

Leadership ideologies

Keeping in line with this paradigm shift, the ideologies of leadership

have gone through several refinements and alterations in the course of the digital revolution. Concepts and theories as varying as Emergent Leadership (Carte et al., 2006), Service Leadership (Shek et al., 2015) and Realist Leadership (Reed, 2005) have been argued for and applied to explain organisation principles. In addition, Behavioural Economics has lent a whole new dimension to the challenges of leading in such times. Herbert Simon's concept of bounded rationality proposed that people have limitations on the amount and complexity of information they can process with their cognitive abilities, and decisions made are usually about what is “good enough” at that point in time.

Artificial Intelligence, which simulates human intelligence in machines that are programmed to think like humans, has impacted strategic analytics and will play a major role in decision-making. However, such a sophistication level also presents its own set of challenges. An overload of information implies that a variety of metrics, algorithms, and decision-making points are available at the stakeholders' fingertips, resulting in confusion and increased indecisiveness. There is also a competing need to over analyse and diagnose situations with rational means, vis-à-vis relying on gut and intuition. Augmented reality and pattern detection capabilities



would provide insights that are not normally visible to humans, and rapid, timely access to this would demand pivotal shifts in the mindsets of leaders. They would have to start relying more on what they do not understand and less on their instincts. There could be situations where leaders would have to accept their judgement bias or find themselves intellectually challenged. And thus, calling for great strength and wisdom to be able to steer and command when supplanted.

Leading to wicked problems

While the advent of AI heralds a promise of a new industrial revolution, AI-driven enterprise applications could pave the way to wicked problems. Complex interrelated problems that do not fully resolve themselves, come about as wicked problems. These situations call for dynamic leadership - both transactional and transformative to be able to handle the cyclical nature of resolution of such challenges. At a strategic level, it might require policy development, and at the implementation level, it might require programme development. Leaders would experience a fundamental shift in their personal skills and knowledge requirements to grapple with such problems in the face of technological disruption; further supplemented with sound interpersonal (people) skills and execution driven skills on ground. Since the advent of AI is creating new kinds of challenges, there are no tried and tested methodologies or best practices for leadership to benchmark from. It calls for a more sophisticated approach that involves all relevant stakeholders at the initial stage of deployment and a value system realignment.

The advances made by technology will continue to surprise us. However, they might transform the lives of senior executives only if managerial advances enable them to. Integrity of solutions in the cognitive era is only as good as the data inputs to the systems, while the decision-making potential of algorithms is severely crippled by lack of data.

The leadership paradigm

The leadership paradigm of control can actually be the real stage-gate to the adaption of newer versions of technology. To surrender to machine-driven decisions is to “let go” of control, and to refrain from manipulating data or judgements. If leaders succeed in doing this, they would be able to seize the competitive advantage. Simultaneously, the role of

the senior leader will evolve from control to creative innovation, from transactional management to making leaps into the future. An integral part of good cognitive solutions is the ability to frame the right questions. The vigour of senior leaders lies in their ability to handle exceptional situations and unprecedented crisis using intuitive calls, and human nuances that cannot be deciphered by algorithms. The leader needs to be able to tolerate ambiguity and focus on the “softer” side of organisational development, thus building capacity for self-renewal.

Leaders would be challenged to make behavioural shifts to realise the full power of Artificial Intelligence. Dashboards, insights, patterns are all powerful tools but they require hours of concentrated dedication and prioritisation.

Democratising information in the era of AI would be required to go hand in hand with the ability of the organisation to manage itself without decisions moving upward. From operating models downwards, the sharper insights and pattern recognition would enable quicker decisions, and hopefully, swifter results on their own. This means that leaders down the line have more access to insights, thereby leading to a fairer distribution of power in the organisation. The CEO would shift his focus to ideation and building scale, and complex thought collaborations and synergies. Companies such as 3M and Red Hat (the leading provider of Linux software), have already made those primary moves and unlocked more insightful and actionable competitive strategies as a result of these actions.

The leader of the future would spend time in resolving exceptions. While machines take care of the normative decision-making, it is when data has no pattern synergies that real judgment is called for. While strategic areas such as competitive analysis to talent management would demand more vigour, as there is plenty of information and analytics, the differentiating factor for a leader

would be the reflex time in crisis and being able to sift through mountains of decisions and data points to arrive at true insight. The premium would be on the level of innovation that a human could bring into data mining and sorting.

“Integrity of solutions in the cognitive era is only as good as the data inputs to the systems, while the decision-making potential of algorithms is severely crippled by lack of data.”

Organisation theory attributes the success of organisations and their missions to the leadership aptitude of its members. It is believed that leadership attributes grow with time and mature through experience. The present scenario is such that it does not provide us with enough time and experience to draw from, to build the leaders of the future. Tomorrow’s effective leader might look very different from the leader of today. Cognitive decision making might spare some amount of valuable executive time spent otherwise in transactional decision making, and providing him/her with the freedom to reflect and ideate. Technology might provide the leader with the time to interact with people, and gather finer nuances. While all this sounds liberating, it also raises the bar on expectations over the executive’s ability to focus on people dimensions and create value alignment for the organisation and its teams. 

About the Author

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“The vigour of senior leaders lies in their ability to handle exceptional situations and unprecedented crisis using intuitive calls, and human nuances that cannot be deciphered by algorithms.”



Bio-mimicking For Transformation

The definition of Transformation as per Merriam Webster is 'genetic modification of a bacterium by incorporation of free DNA from another bacterial cell'.

BY RASHMI AGARWAL

With such a scary definition, no wonder the process incites fear in a lot of people undergoing a transformation. The pandemic has triggered many changes in our personal and professional front, which is transforming the way we work. 'Transformation' can be very jazzy to talk in collective terms like an organisation or a team, however, any kind of change incites fear, concern, and anxiety in most individuals. The emotions are legitimate and not to be shunned.

'Fear' is a survival instinct present in all species of the animal kingdom which have survived millions of years of evolution. Any change or unknown encounters trigger the 'fight or flight' rush. The reaction was legitimate in the world when any change could have posed mortal danger however in the present world, most of the changes are not life-threatening. The change in wiring of brain neurons has not kept pace with the change in society therefore millions of years of conditioning of the brain still incites the same reaction to all kinds of fear.

While some changes may be self-planned and some may be induced by external factors but there is no escaping from the changes. The irony is that even escaping from change would require us to go through another change.

In this scenario, it may be wise that rather than resisting change, we adapt to it.

What is the most dynamic thing around us changing for millions of years and still surviving? Nature.

We often think of change as impending loss, but what we can learn from nature is that change and disturbance can be the mechanisms for new possibilities.

“Like nature's web, we should work on building and maintaining our network which can help us understand the internal changes and the external network exposes us to the right opportunities at the right time.”

The process of emulating Nature to solve our worldly problems is called Bio-mimicry. It has been used in engineering, architecture for decades and more recently is being applied to the new world challenges of business, management and leadership. From essential minutia like Velcro to complex machines like bullet trains², turbines, tree climbing robots, gecko-inspired feet for climbing walls, prosthetic arms are all examples of inspirations taken from nature.

So what are the lessons to be learned from nature to sail through

the change³ like a dolphin (Fun fact: Dolphin is the fastest marine mammal @60 km/h):

- **Help Others** - Nature is built on coexistence and all elements of nature are in give and take relationships. For each organism, nature has a way of balancing the give and take equation. In the event of any change, focus on helping others rather than thinking about your problems. In the process of giving more, you are likely to get more. The process of helping others also releases oxytocin, serotonin, and dopamine, which help us in dealing with the stress and therefore adapt more quickly.
- **Embrace new opportunities** - Creepers or vines are focused on their objective to climb. Depending on the type of support, they have evolved to possess their many climbing methods. Also, they can grow in shade as well as sun. We can imitate 'Creepers' and stay focused on our core deliverables, up-skill ourselves to succeed in the new role being offered in a new structure, or equip ourselves with apropos skills to harness the shift towards digital and so on. An entrepreneur can diversify during a pandemic into services/products focused on safety or change the offering from classroom workshops to online workshops which we saw in recent times.
- **Maintain relationships**- Nature is an interconnected web of symbiotic and mutually-beneficial relationships where plants provide



food and shelter to birds and animals and animals help the plant kingdom through nutrition and pollination. The exchange may be sporadic, however, the relationships are maintained irrespective of the changes in nature.

We should also maintain our relationships irrespective of any visible gain. Like nature's web, we should work on building and maintaining our network which can help us understand the internal changes and the external network exposes us to the right opportunities at the right time.

- **Accept rather than resist-**

Antarctica has 3 species of penguins⁴ – Adelie, Chinstrap and Gentoo. With global warming and 3°C rise in temperature in the Antarctic region, the Gentoo species has managed to adapt and is thriving while populations of the other two species are dwindling. This is due to more flexibility shown in the diet by Gentoo versus others. The acceptance of change allows us to escape the whirlpool of stress and shift focus to finding and leveraging opportunities.

- **Over-communication-**

Human body operates on millions

of feedback and feed-forward loops; timely clotting of blood ensures that we don't bleed to death by a pinprick or we shiver to combat cold and sweat on feeling hot. These processes function because of effective communication between various parts of the body.

Similarly, in a state of change, any communication gap can instantly be filled by rumors and speculation resulting in even more fear and uncertainty. Therefore, we must prevent the same by effectively communicating our concerns to co-workers and managers within the organisation and address our anxiety better.

The transient nature of the world can be grasped through the coinage and extensive use of the term 'VUCA-volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity' where three letters represent change and the associated uncertainty. Transformation along with change also brings a plethora of new opportunities in terms of new and bigger roles, new technology, new geography, new teams, and newer processes, etc. Thus, after overcoming the primate response of 'fight or flight', we can choose to

accept the change, stay focused and positive, work towards developing our skills, and in the process grow individually and collectively in the transition. **HC**

- 1 <https://www.health.harvard.edu/staying-healthy/understanding-the-stress-response>
- 2 <https://biomimicry.org/biomimicry-examples/>
- 3 forbes.com/sites/carolinecastrillon/2020/02/26/how-to-cope-with-change-in-the-workplace/
- 4 <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/gentoo-penguins-thrive-while-adelies-and-chinstraps-falter-in-a-climate-changed-world/>

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Measuring The Immeasurable!

The ultimate impact of training gets reflected in the organisation's results. Even if, at times, there is no apparent difference in the results, the training cannot be deemed to be ineffective.

BY S JOSEPH RAJ

A lot of concern is exhibited over the effectiveness of training, and rightly so. Though the investment involved in training is huge, the returns are not immediately visible. Several tools have been put forward to measure the effectiveness of Training - feedback from the participants, from the superiors and subordinates, department's performance and the company's overall results. The closest illustration to measuring the effectiveness of Training is measuring the impact of any of the following things on a person's health - food, water, pure air, daily exercise, work habits and emotional events/ upheavals.

It is a combination and interplay of many elements that contribute to the improvement or decline of any kind. In the case of performance and behaviour, the improvements may depend on the nature of the job content, the infrastructural facilities, the resources made available, the boss-subordinate relationships, the support provided, the reward systems, and of course, training.

- **Nature of Participants:** The Training imparted may be useful and relevant, but it can have differing impacts on different participants due to their own personal motivations, level of knowledge and learning ability. For instance, in a university offering an

“Not everything that counts can be counted, and not everything that can be counted counts.”

– Albert Einstein

MBA programme or a course in Engineering, different students perform differently, although the content and the quality of the instruction offered remain the same.

- **The story of two brothers:** There is the story of a family with two boys, one of whom grew up to be a highly successful Sales Manager, while his brother ended up in jail for heinous crimes. Apparently, the same kind of environment, the same kind of parental influence, but they moved into so very different paths. Influence and impact seem to depend a lot on the nature of the recipients.

Organisational Performance

Subjecting a single programme for evaluation may not be proper. It would be better to evaluate the cumulative impact of all the training imparted during a specific period. The ultimate impact of training gets reflected in the organisation's results. Even if, at times, there is no apparent difference in the results, the

training cannot be deemed to be ineffective. For, without the training, the organisation could have performed worse. It can also be that other organisations are also equipping their employees through training to meet today's needs and challenges. Indeed, training has become a part of the condition required for performance. Akio Marita, the Cofounder of Sony, on a visit to the US was asked, “How do you explain such an enormous expenditure on Training?” His response was, “I don't understand the question.”

Profound things defy measurement

The impact of the profound things in life is beyond measurement. Let us consider the impact of prayer and meditation, positive attitude and enthusiasm, supervision and interpersonal climate, and working conditions, benefits and remuneration. They are hard to measure like how increased remuneration cannot be measured with any degree of accuracy. There have been instances where soon after getting a substantial increase in salary or a promotion, the persons concerned left the organisation as they could bargain better with their new Employers. The outcome would be just the opposite had the Company anticipated it while granting a big increase or a quick promotion.



Even the impact of smoking or drinking on a person's health or success in life is hard to measure. We know of people who drink and smoke but live to a ripe old age. One of Abraham Lincoln's most successful Generals was known to be a heavy drinker. One day, the other Generals went and complained to Lincoln about the General's heavy drinking. Lincoln is said to have responded, "*Please let me know which brand of whisky he consumes. Let me*

supply it to you as well so that you may also begin to win more battles like he does."

Training is done as an act of faith.

Education or learning of any kind is readily undertaken with a fervent hope that the learner will benefit in some way or the other. Therefore, most progressive organisations the world over have made Training – both technical and

behavioural - a part of their routine activity. Several multinational companies literally have training sessions running 365 days in the year! Some even mandate that every employee has to undergo a minimum of 7 training days a year. Jack Welch, the legendary CEO of General Electric, was said to have spent an entire month every year in the classroom – attending some course or the other.

The complex nature of the Impact of Training and Learning

The benefits of training can be direct or indirect. In some cases, the impact of training can be seen in the short term, while in the others it can be seen in the long term. The influence is obvious, and at times, very subtle. Some may use the learning just once and while some others may use it on numerous occasions. And while some may use the learning themselves, and some also impart the learnings to others so that it can be used in their work and life.

The impact of training can be very decisive or just marginal or visible or may remain unseen. The learning can permanently influence the quality of behaviour and actions or just temporarily in some cases. Some apply the learning after a single exposure and some others may apply the learning after several exposures. Some may apply the learnings immediately – partly because the right opportunities presented themselves quickly – and some may apply the learning several years after the training occurred.

Impact of Training

There was a two-day session on 'Negotiation skills' in a multinational company. One of the more experienced participants - a Purchase Manager - actively partook in the discussions, but never let go of any opportunity to express his scepticism about the

usefulness of the learning offered in the programme.

However, on the second day of the programme, he was the first one to put up his hand to comment. *“Last night, I had to speak to a major vendor on an important purchase. Normally I would not allow him to speak, but just dictate my terms, including the price I would be prepared to pay. After yesterday’s session where we discussed the importance of listening, I let him speak most of the time. As a result, he offered me a price which was more than a lakh less than what I would have otherwise “dictated” to him.”*

“While in meetings hardware type information is shared for enlightenment and coordination, in training sessions, software type ideas, perspectives and insights are brought to the table.”

Necessity of Training and Learning

The world is fast-changing. New technologies, techniques, systems, products and services are the order of the day. Evidently, the world has changed significantly in the last five years, and a great deal of learning is needed to adjust and adapt to the new demands. New skills have to be acquired. Mindsets have to be changed. This is accomplished through self-study as well as formal training. The other tools for development are job rotation, membership in task forces, coaching and counselling. We need to keep abreast of new developments in the world, particularly in our respective fields of work if we are to stay relevant

and meaningful. Formal training has a role to play towards this end.

Meetings and Conferences

Would we doubt the usefulness, even the necessity of meetings and conferences, within the company as well as with outside agencies, parties and people? Training sessions are to be viewed in the same way, on the same plane. While in meetings hardware type information is shared for enlightenment and coordination, in training sessions, software type ideas, perspectives and insights are brought to the table.

If a person is going to change his job behaviour, three basic requirements must exist.

- He must want to improve
- He must recognise his own shortcomings and areas of improvement
- He must have a supportive climate

Self-motivation

No one will improve in any way without a strong motivation for enhancing one’s skills and competence, behaviour and performance. The motivation to become better is critical for benefiting from any improvement programmes. The senior the person, the lesser is the need felt to improve oneself.

The persons most in need of development are blind to their own weaknesses and shortcomings. They have such an inflated ego and an exaggerated picture of themselves that there is little hope that they will ever change. There was this MD of a multinational pharma company. In a public forum, he declared, *“What is there that we MDs have to learn from others?”* How could we expect him to become better?

Self-awareness

Without a conscious awareness of where one needs to improve, there

can never be any change or progress. Acute realisation is behind all revolutions in personal life. I must come to recognise how my dysfunctional habits or behaviours interfere with my performance and progress.

“In an organisation, the environment has to be conducive for experimenting with new behaviours. There are bound to be mishaps initially. The organisation has to show tolerance and even extend forgiveness if necessary.”

Supportive Climate

Any behaviour change requires support from those who are close to you, especially superiors, spouse and friends. In an organisation, the environment has to be conducive for experimenting with new behaviours. There are bound to be mishaps initially. The organisation has to show tolerance and even extend forgiveness if necessary. That is how the new behaviours can remain established. All in all, measuring the effectiveness of training falls in the realm of the immeasurable aspects of life. 

About the Author

Joseph Raj is a HR Professional with more than 40 years of work experience in organisations such as NOCIL, VOLTAS, SANDOZ AND ESSAR. As a Consultant and Trainer, he has worked extensively with L&T, HLL, Reliance Industries, Godrej, MRF, Ambuja Cements, Sterlite and several other organisations. Joseph holds a Master’s Degree in Personnel Management from TISS. He has also done Graduate Level studies in Philosophy (Pune) and Social Psychology (USA).

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