Key Contributors

- ☩ Alamelu Dev
- ☩ Anand Bhaskar
- ☩ Aroon Joshi
- ☩ G Inbavanan
- ☩ Ganesh Chella
- ☩ Kalpana Tatavarti
- ☩ Kartikeyan V
- ☩ Kaushik Gopal
- ☩ Krish Shankar
- ☩ Latha Nambisan
- ☩ Nikita D'Souza
- ☩ Noble Powar
- ☩ P S Srinivasan
- ☩ Dr. Pallab Bandyopadhyay
- ☩ Prabhakar Lingareddy
- ☩ Pratik Kumar
- ☩ R R Nair
- ☩ Rachna Nandakumar
- ☩ Ravi Kyran
- ☩ Dr. Saundarya Rajesh
- ☩ Sudha Cannan
- ☩ V J Rao
- ☩ Vaishnavi Chella
- ☩ Vasanthi Srinivasan
- ☩ Vidya Santhanam
- ☩ Vishwanath P
- ☩ Vivek Patwardhan
- ☩ Y Shekar

Are We Losing Our People Focus: The Future of HRM

Are We Losing Our People Focus: The Future of HRM

About the Journal

The National HRD Network publishes a semi-academic quarterly journal where in each Issue is dedicated to a theme.

The Journal publishes primarily three categories of articles:

- Conceptual and research based.
- Contributions from thought leaders including a limited number of reprints with due permission.
- Organisational experiences in HR interventions / mechanisms.

About this Issue

The theme of the current Issue is "Are We Losing Our People Focus: The Future of HRM".

NHRD firmly believes in and respects IPR and we appeal to the contributors and readers to strictly honour the same.

For any further clarifications, please contact:
The Managing Editor
Dr. Pallab Bandyopadhyay, Leadership Architect and Career Coach, HR PLUS
Sri Nrusimhadri, Flat No 303, Third Floor, No 12, 2nd Main, 7th Block, Jayanagar, Bangalore-560070
Email: me@nationalhrd.org

Contents

Contents

SECTION A
Preliminaries

Editorial Note

Dear Readers,

"…….Regardless of what technologies we use, all of our interactions still rely on a basic element: each other. No matter how many shiny tools we have, we can't get things done without other people" commented Harbrinder Kang of Cisco while writing on role of collaboration on fostering innovation in Organizations.

Recently a research study was undertaken by tech giant Cisco on human behaviour to find out the barriers to effective collaboration in organization including the facets of a): how it affects productivity, b) workplace efficiency, and c) even business results. Do you want to know what the findings of the study were? Yes you are absolutely on dot. This study univocally showed that collaboration is grounded in human interaction and relationships. The study in fact identified four key ingredients for successful collaboration, and they all rely on human behaviour. They are described as follows:

1) Build relationships and networks that lead to trust

2) Turn human interactions into results

3) Balance decision-making and consensus building

4) Evolve the culture for productive collaboration

The above findings re-iterate the fact that HR as an enabling function should not move away from people for which the function exists. In the context of recently concluded world cup soccer, I am often reminded about the role of a goalkeeper. Are we as a function often getting compared with the role of goalkeeper? As long as we make valiant efforts to save goals and save the team its OK and one miss, we are blamed for all the disasters. Are we as HR guru Josh Bersin says in a **"no-win" profession: when things go well management takes the credit, and when things go poorly, HR is often blamed? "**

One emerging theme that has crossed my mind many times in my recent interactions with very seasoned HR professionals is that how, in many situations, HR professionals have consistently moving away from our focus on people, which in some sense defines our very existence as a function? I must also admit that these are not stories which are shared in conferences that many of us as HR professionals routinely go to or address. Influenced to a great extent as we are as professionals on one hand by the heady examples of some of the best workplaces in the country, are we on the other hand are often blind to the reality of losing our people focus while attempting various interventions in organizations? Even at the cost of sounding clichéd, I must ask you the question that whether the word **"human resources"** is becoming paradoxical at best in organizations of today. Abraham Maslow believed that humans are living beings of arguably the highest order. Studies after studies have proven that they also have complex

emotional, physical, and mental systems that must be understood and nurtured in order to facilitate their self-actualization. Resources on the other hand are often getting defined as valuable organizational assets that must be maintained, preserved and systematized, and put to use in a way that proves their worth or they are quickly replaced.

Is our profit-focused, pragmatism-lead business management paradigm facing an existential crisis? Is it forcing us as HR professionals to toe the lines of organizational leaders that are beginning to focus on the people as mere resource, and not on the humane side of the business paradigm? Are employees in many organizations today often struggling to come to terms to balance aspects that require them to preserve their own idiosyncratic identity with that of following order and discipline to achieve organizational goals that are compatible with traditional command and control management paradigm?

However, words and reality can be two different things. Your top leadership team can profess organizational values emphasising focus on people but you need a constant reinforcement of those professed values at every level of the organization to ensure they'll really followed in both letter and spirit. As the architect behind all people processes, putting HR in charge of strengthening and infusing values (with full support from top leadership) is the best way to ensure they're fully integrated into your organizational culture. If it is not done, you will be struggling to resolve these questions that have been in your mind for some time. It is this very reason that prompted us to address them in our current issue.

As eloquently put across by management Guru Late Sumantra Ghoshal. who once commented

"This is precisely what has happened to management. Obsessed as they are with the "real world" and sceptical as most of them are of all theories, managers are no exception to the intellectual slavery of the practical men."

Before I end my editorial, on behalf of the editorial board, I would like to thank Ganesh Chellla for graciously accepting my request to guest-edit this important issue on "Are we losing our focus on People? The Future of HRM."

He started his effort to first identifying as well as convincing right set of contributors. Then he and his team consistently followed up with them to make sure that all the write-ups were received in time. After that he edited these articles, interviews and research reports with painstaking effort and catalogued them under various inter-related themes. Thanks are due to Sumathi from Ganesh's team at Chennai as well as Nisha Kurup from our Central secretariat of NHRDN, Gurugram, both of whom worked tirelessly to support to bring the issue in time. Thanks once again Ganesh for this wonderful effort.

I am not only confident that our readers will enjoy reading every piece in this issue but also would like to keep it as a reference for their future use.

As it stands now we have the next issues (October, 2018) on **"Neuroscience and HR-concepts and applications"** being guest edited by Prof Gopal Mohapatra, Professor of Practice (OB &HRM) & Prof Shruti Tewari, Faculty Indian Institute of Management(IIM) Indore.

Those of you are interested in contributing to this issue, please get in touch with Prof Gopal at gopal.mahapatra@gmail.com.

Keep enjoying reading this issue and send us your feedback at me@nationalhrd.org

Dr Pallab Bandyopadhyay
Managing Editor

About the Guest Editor
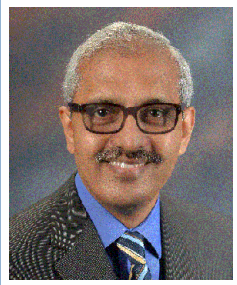
Ganesh Chella

Ganesh Chella has, in a career spanning over three decades, come to be acknowledged for his contributions as a practitioner and thought leader in the field of Organisation Development, Human Resources and Executive Coaching.

After a successful corporate career in Human Resources for 16 years, Ganesh founded totus consulting, a strategic HR consulting firm; Coaching Foundation India Limited, a pioneering institution for coaching and leadership development and totus HR School, an HR capability-building institute.

He has authored / co-authored three books: ***Creating a Helping Organisation:*** 5 Engaging Ways to Promote Employee Performance, Growth & Wellbeing; ***Are You Ready for the Corner Office? HR Here and Now***, The making of the quintessential people champion. He has a very large body of published articles and blogs to his credit.

Ganesh is an alumnus of XLRI, Jamshedpur, a professional member of the India Society for Applied Behavioural Science and trained and certified as a Coach by Dr Skiffington, Australia and Coaching Foundation India.

Guest Editorial

Dear Readers,

When Pallab from NHRDN approached me with a request to be the guest editor for the July edition of the journal, I readily agreed because the theme was close to my heart.

As I thought deeply about it, I realized that the suggested title for the edition was somewhat of a giveaway –a rhetorical question: Are we losing our people focus: the future of HRM. And that was a nice challenge to handle.

I must say that I am delighted with the finished product for several reasons.

Contrary to the fears of many, the team of authors I worked with have managed to transcend the usual lament and produced some original and provocative thought on a wide range of topics related to the theme. In fact, I can say without being modest that for any HR professional reading this edition, it will be life altering.

In this edition of the journal, you will find articles presented under eight sections, each section relating to one theme with one or more articles.

While the first section looks at the future, the second section delves deep into some of today's dilemmas. The third section contains interviews with two veteran HR leaders.

The fourth section argues about the need to embrace technology with grace and the fifth section looks at the development dimension.

The sixth section contains three interesting and original research insights relating to HR and people focus. The findings here are really fascinating.

The seventh section is a polyphonic presentation on the subject – a unique and award winning writing style. The last section contains a review of a recently published book closely related to the theme and an appreciative write-up of another book that touches upon the theme of humanness.

You will also find the visual presentation of this edition somewhat different and perhaps refreshing and we do hope you like it.

I learnt a lot while curating this edition simply because I engaged with very talented authors and they were able to bring so many creative slants to a theme which can so easily slide into self-pity. I am sure you will like that. I thank each one of them for giving their time to produce and share some truly original thought here.

Finally, what is terrific about this edition is the fact that there are so many women authors and so many who are first time contributors to NHRDN. That feels good.

I must confess that there is so much to read and digest that it will take all of a quarter to do that before you are ready for the next issue. I can also say with a sense of pride, that this issue may well be a collector's edition!

Do write in and let us know what you thought of this edition. We'd love to hear from you.

Ganesh Chella

Guest Editor

People Focus
Preparing for the Future

- ▶ The future of HRM – Challenges and Opportunities
- ▶ People Focus in a VUCA World
- ▶ The Unique Role of HR in Need Fulfillment
- ▶ The Way Forward for HRBPs
- ▶ Leveraging Emotions for Future Focussed HR Roles

The Future of HRM
Challenges and Opportunities

R. R. Nair is a doyen in the field of Human Resources Management in India. With over three decades of experience with Unilever, 'RR' as he is affectionately called served on the Boards of Unilever subsidiary companies in India and abroad.

He has several years of experience as a professional executive coach. He also serves as master coach and leadership development facilitator for leading Indian conglomerates. He is a frequent speaker in professional forums.

He was selected for the National Award by the National HRD Network for outstanding contribution to the HR profession in India. He was also conferred the 'Life-time Achievement Award' by NHRDN and by CNBC-KPMG. He contributes to executive education efforts at Indian School of Business, Hyderabad.

'RR' currently serves a few company boards as an Independent Director.

'RR' has Graduate & Post-graduate Degrees and Diplomas in applied Psychology, Industrial Management and Individual & Group Development. He is an Alumnus of IIT Kharagpur and Stanford & Michigan Universities in their advance management programs.

R. R. Nair

The Future of HRM — Challenges and Opportunities

In a Nutshell

Yesterday's science fiction is today's science fact. AI, Machine Learning and IOT are the buzzwords that have entered our common lexicon; and there's more to come. Some view these advances in technology as the next step in our evolution while others are suspicious and fearful of the rapid changes that seem to be the new normal.

So where does HRM fit in the new order? Are HR Professionals (HRPs) headed for extinction? Will machines take over the HR function? Will algorithms determine your next increment? These and more questions and doubts are seeded in many forums. I, therefore, was not surprised when NHRDN mooted the thought of bringing out a special issue on the theme. And, I readily responded to Ganesh Chella who urged me to share my personal perspectives. Let's take a look at the facts, and how they affect HRM and HRPs…

The Role of HRM Today

By virtue of my education, the values that I have imbibed, and as an HR practitioner, I strongly believe in the role of the human capital function, now and in the future. I genuinely believe that the central fulcrum of HRM - how do we maximize the best out of our human capital - will always remain the same. In order to accomplish this, we must understand talent in all its dimensions, besides employee experience, culture and mindset, and factors that enhance organisational competitiveness.

The Challenges Facing Today's HRPs

While the essence of HRM will remain the same, HRPs need to remind themselves that the context has changed. We now know that the VUCA world is the new reality. As we become globally competitive, the way we deliver HR services will increasingly depend on technology and shared services. It's true that automation will take over most of HR operations, or shared service centres

doing most of it, or a combination of both. However, HRPs will continue to handle the strategic role as well as 'centres of excellence'.

HRPs will also realise that business expectations have dramatically changed. No longer are businesses looking to HRPs for talent management only. They want HRPs to add significant value to what the business leaders are doing. They want HR to literally 'shock' them through innovation. Expectations have changed from advising and managing to executing and coming up with breakthrough ideas for business transformation. This indeed is a big shift, locally and globally.

A View from the Top

During the past decade, I have come across a large number of business leaders of great eminence who uniformly believe that HR is a strategic enabler of organizational performance. They encourage HRPs and the leadership teams to focus on individual talent, effectiveness of teams, and competitiveness of the organization.

I have seen excellent examples of HRPs showing their commitment to fast track employee development and engagement and to assess leadership competencies for the future. Together with the business leaders, they are prepared to exploit the potential of new generation technologies, testing out new business models and encouraging innovative strategies to accelerate business and people growth.

Let's look at the Fortune 500 story. Fifty percent of the companies surveyed 12 years ago don't exist in the list anymore. And what did the other 50% do? They recognized that the only real thing is 'non-stop change'; being responsive to leveraging opportunities in demographic profiles, work-place redesign, rapid adoption of emerging technologies, deep mining of current and latent needs of customers, and discovering sociological influences on customer habits and attitudes, to name a few.

More success factors were identified, as revealed by global studies, on the characteristics of those who survived and progressed. In all these, the role of top leadership is crucial. Visionary leaders commit themselves to instilling a shared sense of larger purpose among employees as well as measuring the outcome on economic parameters. They emphasized the need to move away from a command and control leadership style to leadership by collaboration. They championed for business and people strategies in an integrated manner and transformed their organizations, to become future ready within the larger social context.

Equally, HRPs are jointly asking what will businesses look like by 2025? What changes can we foresee about the nature of work? What culture and mindset do we require by then, to win in the market place? And the changes we are witnessing today will auger well in giving a fill up to how HRPs can renew and reinvent themselves to face the future - from an operationally reactive mode to a strategically proactive way.

Enlightened organisations are revisiting their vision, mission, strategy, structure and culture, their future workforce, work facilities, the way people interact and manage their daily work assignments and ways to create breakthroughs. And the role of HRPs will be in establishing direction, developing a vision, and evolving HR strategies for producing individual and organisational changes that are needed to fulfill that vision.

Their task is to develop a human network within and outside of the organization for achieving the change agenda: aligning people, communicating the direction by words and deeds, and inspiring them. They will design and support conditions to promote high performance teams and coalitions that hold the vision and strategies and learn to collaborate. This will ensure the desired outcome, quarter after quarter, year after year. Where we seem to be less effective as HRPs is in execution excellence, as well as in ensuring the desired impact in a sustained and consistent manner. We need to watch out for this shortcoming and take direct ownership.

Future Challenges and Opportunities for HRM and HRPs

HRM must leverage Analytics and Big Data to augment its value and contribution

I recall the days when I had just joined Hindustan Lever. That was some years ago! I enquired around to find out what data they already have about employee perceptions about the climate and levels of job satisfaction and engagement. And there were many views and opinions. When I encouraged managers who came to 'Gulita' to attend various executive education programmes to voluntarily participate in a structured organizational climate survey, they readily agreed. And the Board and senior management were deeply engaged in the survey findings and collaborated with HR in implementing improvement action plans based on real data.

In todays' world of instant gratification and mood analysis and measurements, India's emerging workforce can be managed only though a clear understanding of what energises them, what motivates them, the nature of inclusion and diversity, their learning agility, attitude towards total rewards and the 'emotional connect' that they value with the employer brand. Is it any wonder that the past couple of years have witnessed a plethora of talent management software tools?

HRPs are learning to absorb big data, searching for applications, and new metrics to track lead indicators of employee lifecycles. The trends in big data will obviously provide new ways to prove its value. And therefore, a new breed of well-trained HRPs with analytics skills will emerge: Professionals who can make accurate estimates in real time. No doubt, HRPs who have the flair to drive positive change will be at a premium. And the employees must feel that there is fair play and merit while judging people with least human error.

Transparency is Essential to Employees

HR has always been involved in dealing with sensitive information. Hence, discretion is critical. However, active social media and networks can often make HRPs somewhat apprehensive in honest communication. In the networked world where the millennials constitute a large percentage of the workforce, transparency is the norm. What we say, what we do and what employees' experience – all these have to be congruent. Authenticity is important and reputation risks can have strong unintended consequences. Equally, HRPs have to be open and transparent with potential employees.

The New Work/Life Integration

Another recent finding confirms that social media has made internal culture accessible to the external world. Internal culture has a profound impact on everything we do. Moreover for the millennial workforce, having access to onsite food of their choices, workout facilities, game and recreation rooms to augment well-being, choices in accessing HR services, etc, are symbols of organizational caring. As many studies have pointed out, more than work-life balance, it is 'work-life integration' that is important. This would imply that the workplace should feel much like home.

When we examine these technological changes impacting the nature and future of work, two things are certain:

- Routine tasks will be automated.
- More people will be able to harness their potential to greater heights so that they can engage in more creative work.

Strategic Thinking

To drive growth, the need for both being strategically proactive and excellent in execution cannot be under-estimated. One thing we recognize widely, thanks to NHRD's HR competency model and enlightened HRPs and organisations, is the realization that people have to be aligned with the strategic agenda of the organization. The trend towards smaller, more strategy-focused HR organisations was championed by Dave Ulrich more than a decade ago. A more specific question that's often raised in various platforms is, how can HR professionals add strategic value to the business? And what does strategic value mean?

At the basic level, it is the ability to make a more reliable estimation based on a deeper appreciation of the vision, mission, strategy and goals of the organization. It's about financial skills for evaluating choices for HR interventions. The ability to proactively envision the future and influence key stakeholders to make choices requires courage of conviction, conceptual skills and a desire to excel professionally, ala McClelland's achievement drive.

From a strategic perspective, it's important to highlight the need for a 'People R&D' focus in HRM. Both HR academia and the professionals need to collaborate to learn and discover new ways of addressing human and organizational challenges. Here is an area where NHRD is best placed for taking a lead initiative. The nature of work itself will be changing fast, and the nature of business models and organisation designs will continue to transform. Yet it's unlikely that we will live a leisurely life where robots will do almost everything for us.

What we can say now is that the future of work will have to be factored. The impact of digital technology on every aspect of economy and society, changing demographics, and rapid acceleration of startups in which individuals work for themselves - all these are crucial factors. How to apply AI to source global talent; how to cope with the empowered status of the customer with access to fast growing e-commerce platforms - all these have to be researched further. They represent both challenges and opportunities. Indeed, future-proofing our minds, through insights gained from these 'R&D' efforts, is a strategic imperative.

This strategic role cannot be outsourced because it's a competitive advantage and large organisations will look for internal expertise.

Leveraging the power of Line Managers and the need to collaborate with their success

Line managers play a crucial role in HRM. HRPs are learning to acknowledge the new reality that 'one-size-doesn't-fit-all', given today's employee diversity. Senior line managers' contributions in shaping and co-creating future HRM policies and processes, especially employee relations

strategies, need to be encouraged. They are our primary internal customers. And through them, we want the employees to be motivated to focus on delivering 'magical moments' that the organization promises to its customers.

The line managers' role in recruitment, on-boarding, appraisals, rewards, career planning, talent retention and creating a high performance culture is also well understood. In the absence of consistency in implementing agreed policies and processes, they may adversely impact employee engagement and commitment. We also know that line managers have enough discretion in leading their operations, and employees and the HR climate could vary across functions and organizational units.

Therefore, alignment of organizational goals in ensuring fair play and transparency across the organization has to be a joint endeavor. A common view held by most line managers about HRM is that there is disconnect between the 'rhetoric' of HRM, and the 'ground level reality' experienced by the employees. Ultimately, line managers influence the perceptions of employees towards HRM through their leadership style, communication and attitude and behaviours. Overall, a negative perception held by both partners would adversely impact employer brand equity.

In most organisations, the arrival of 'Business HR Partners' is a clear indication of joint partnering and the recognition that the primary holder of human resources is the line manager. And together with HR, they must carry credibility of employees to succeed with the organization. Intended and unintended consequences have to be managed together while deploying HR policies. There have been discussions on 'devolving' HR, which is to empower line managers to take on greater responsibilities on people issues. This would obviously enhance the speed of decision making on people matters and greater communication and ownership of employees by line managers.

The rationale for discretion, where necessary for both HR and line, needs to be spelt out to enhance collaboration. The partnership mindset is vital because increasingly, the reality of business

pressures makes line managers seek support from their HR colleagues, as well as in exchanging information vital for taking people and performance decisions. The net outcome should be the emergence of a 'symbiotic relationship' between the two, with a unified sense of organizational purpose, goals and values.

A potential area for collaborative work of a developmental nature is in helping line managers to adopt coaching as part of their leadership repertoire. And there are great examples of enlightened organisations where HRPs have taken the lead to define the goals, design and deliver learning interventions, including in house practice sessions to imbibe coaching skills among managers. The adoption of a coaching style delivers achievement, fulfillment and joy. Line managers are realizing the benefits - improved inter-personal relations, enhanced capability to both challenge and support their team mates, improved succession planning, empowered teams to handle the delegated tasks well and a reduction in stress levels. Coaching leads to stronger following and better work-life integration.

The HR Practitioner - Future Capabilities

What about traits and personal attributes that are not always taught, but that which we bring to the table? The most critical of all qualities is one's character. Warmth, empathy, genuineness and respect are vital traits we should see more of in HRPs; equally, the capacity to listen, observe and respond. Personal credibility is non-negotiable. Learning to do more to earn one's credibility and respect as a professional so that HRP can impact the stakeholders. A case in point is our disposition to always deliver what we promise. Are we truly good at it?

In a digital world and with the ease of access for extensive talent data, HRP must build capabilities around technology and analytics. HRP must also have a sound commercial orientation. The capacity to use a 'multi-geography lens' in a global world is vital to appreciating people issues and resolving them. The value of 'cross-functional experience' cannot be underestimated. Taking up stretch assignments in areas like culture transformation, process redesign, leading a

change management initiative, building a new business model, or working with next gen workforce - these must form a part of one's professional growth strategies.

On the job stints, doing substantive assignments in HR or line roles in developed and developing countries would auger well for anyone who aspires to take up international HR roles. Equally, the desire to partner with the leadership and to build the organization as an 'institution' in perpetuity is another dimension that we should value.

While we focus on these capabilities and their continuous development, HRPs should always be self-aware. The ability to reflect is crucial and will require one to accept what one doesn't know and work towards knowledge. A deeper understanding of learning styles and willingness to act on an agenda for acquiring new skills are vital. Matrix structures with the associated challenges in managing ambiguous reporting lines are a reality, especially in a global business. Instead of relying solely on positon power and authority, HRPs will benefit from developing their influencing skills as well as external orientation.

People Focus in a VUCA World

Inbavanan is currently the Founder & Chief Practice Officer at People Dimensions@Work, a firm that he runs along with his wife, Dr Rajani.

Inba as he is popularly known has 28+ years of corporate and 8+ years of Consulting experience in all.

During his corporate career he worked in reputed organisations like Polaris

Software Lab Ltd., BPL Innovision Business Group, General Electric, GEC

Alsthom, B.K. Group, L&T, and Britannia.

Apart from Heading the Human Resource Function, Inba has helped set up manufacturing operations, headed Industrial Relations, led People Integration post acquisition, led Organization wide Change initiatives, authored a blueprint for People Capability

Maturity Model and led Learning & Development globally.

In his last corporate assignment, Inba was with Hewlett-Packard as Director of Learning & Development function of a Global Delivery vertical.

Inba's current consulting practice focusses on Organization Development, Team Effectiveness, Leadership & Talent Development, Executive Coaching, Employee Relations and Employee Well Being.

G. Inbavanan

People Focus in a VUCA World

In a nutshell

Father of modern management, Peter F. Drucker said, *"The greatest danger in times of turbulence is not the turbulence; it is to act with yesterday's logic."*

Human Resources function was the new avatar of Personnel Management and came into being in the early 1980s. It was at a time when the function was readying itself to be relevant in a growing Service based economy that emerged from a predominantly Manufacturing one. It also captured the essence of Scientific Management concepts that were brought into play during that period as opposed to more psychological and behavioural concepts that marked the Personnel Management era.

Even though the concept of VUCA has been talked about in the management domain for more than a decade, the author does not see a significant effort by the HR fraternity to transform the function to stay relevant and contributing to achieving business goals in such a world. This has not only led to questions being asked about the relevance of the function, but also management thinker Dr. Ram Charan asking if HR needs to be split to create value. He generated heated debate in July 2014 by publishing an article, 'It's time to split HR' in the Harvard Business Review. [1]

The last major transformation of HR happened on the back of the Business Partner Model introduced by another leading management thinker, Dr. Dave Ulrich of Ross School of Business, Michigan University in 1995. This led to centralization of HR Services and creation of Centers of Excellence - CoE's. He also introduced the Business Partner role of HR in this model. While there has been mixed reactions to the outcome of these in the last 2+ decades, the moot question to be asked is, 'Will this model serve the Function in the VUCA World, where Agility is an antidote for Ambiguity?' [2]

The time is now ripe to transform the function radically to address the People challenges in a VUCA World and thereby contribute to and ensure organization success. This article is an attempt to generate discussions and make out a case for such a radical transformation of the function.

Human Resources - What Scenarios?

A millennial employee with less than three years' experience is sent an offer by the HR Head of a retail company. The millennial employee believes that the offer is below market benchmark for his skills, experience and past record. When the HR Head is informed of the same, the response is, "We do not negotiate salary with candidates. We have made an offer that we believe is fair. It is now up to you to decide whether to accept it or not." The millennial informs the HR Head that it will be difficult to accept the offer as it is. Within a couple of days, the millennial receives another offer that is 15% higher than the one sent earlier, which the HR Head said was 'fair'.

Another millennial employee is asked to report at a particular time on the 1st day with the Company by the HR representative who is tasked to facilitate the joining formalities in a Branch location of the company. The millennial reports at the specified time and is made to wait in the reception for more than an hour as the HR representative is yet to arrive, even though it is over two hours since start of work time of the office. No one else is aware of the millennial joining.

The above two incidents have happened in the last 3 months and they give you a sample of experiences that people go through while interacting with organizations. I am sure that you can add many more similar experiences that you have been privy to. The two questions that arise in my mind are -

Q1. What is the image of HR of the company in the millennial's mind?

Q2. How will it impact the millennial's attitude towards HR on joining the company?

Human Resources – What's in a name?

There has been considerable debate in the last couple of decades on re-naming the HR Function to reflect the Purpose, Principles and Practices around what is considered to be the function's critical and differentiating focus - its People. While a handful of organizations have introduced the word 'People' in the lexicon of the function and its designations; the Management Thinkers, Institutions and the business world at large continues with the name 'Human Resources'.

Many have alluded to the fact that the name is associated with people being seen as 'resources' to be used to achieve organizational goals. This mindset brings along with it a set of Principles and Practices that may not be conducive to the current context and circumstances. However, this has not succeeded in bringing about a shift in either the thinking or the practices of the function. Hence, when there is a resource crunch and organizations are forced to cut costs, the areas identified immediately are Headcount reduction and Training & Development. While these may meet the objectives for a couple of quarters, it has shown to bring about permanent damage to the organization's image resulting in reciprocal behaviours from the people, which are not conducive to the achievement of the business goals and growth of the company.[3]

It is critical for the very survival of the Function to change its name - NOW.

Human Resources - What's the Mindset?

In the scenarios presented at the beginning of this article, what would you say was the 'Mindset' of the HR professionals? In the first one, it was a belief that the HR Head was doing the millennial a favour by making an offer. In the second one, the HR representative showed lack of respect for the time of the millennial on the first day of work in the company. Can the mindset, by any stretch of imagination, be called People centric?

While there is considerable effort and resources expended in the skill building of HR Professionals, what is done to imbibe in them the appropriate mindset to take ownership of one of the critical component of the organization, viz., its People? The challenge is accentuated by rotating people from business and other functions to head HR without sufficient assessment and preparation of the required mindset. Hence, the person comes in with the mindset of the earlier role and People become the guinea pigs in the experimentations that follow. I have personally been witness to four such instances in my own corporate career.

Hence, the urgent need to articulate the required 'Mindset'.

Human Resources - What's the impact of VUCA World?

There is considerable literature on VUCA and VUCA Prime and it is fair to assume that readers already know of it. The author recommends resources detailed in the references section of this article.[4], [5] & [6]

The qualities required to address the VUCA world, viz., Vision, Understanding, Clarity and Agility are all resident in People - in their mind and intellect. Despite all the technological developments, including Artificial Intelligence and Deep learning, the author does not believe that the People capabilities mentioned earlier can be replicated in 'Bots'. Neither can the building of interpersonal relationships founded on mutual respect and trust be created through interaction with computers. This is the space where Leadership comes in and we have scores of real life incidents that show how Leaders have united and moved their People to achieve goals that were considered unachievable.

Hence, while technology can definitely and should take over the transactional elements of HR work, the engagement and development of People will have to be addressed through the maxim, 'Of the People, For the People, By the People'. The effectiveness of interpersonal relationships will be a critical success factor for the Individual, Group and Organization in the VUCA world. It is this element that will be able to provide the organization the exponential competitive advantage in the volatile market place.

Interpersonal Relationships will drive effectiveness in the VUCA World.

In the backdrop of the above, I believe that the HR Function in general and individual HR Professionals in particular, will have to focus on 3 key elements, viz., People Centric Mindset, Building Interpersonal Relationships, and continuous development of one's Mindset & Capabilities to address the People needs in a VUCA World.

1. People Centric Mindset.

Mr. Vineet Nayar, ex-CEO of HCL propounded the concept of 'Employee First, Customer Second-EFCS' in 2005 which the Fortune Magazine said was "the most modern management idea". He talked about inverting the organizational Pyramid, where the 1st Line employees are in the forefront and the senior management is supporting them. This is especially true for the service Industry where the interactions with the Customers and the frontline employee 'creates value and not the people in the back office'. This has been the most significant intervention by an Indian organization to developing a People Centric Mindset in the organization.[7]

While working in the Telecom industry I had seen a quote that stated, "There are only two types of people in an organization - those who serve the customer and those who serve the people serving the customer. There is no place for anyone else". While this was primarily used to drive 'Customer Centricity' transformation initiative; it also in a way underscores the importance of frontline employees. This made it mandatory for everyone in the organization from the CEO to the frontline employee to identify with either of the two with its attendant role and responsibilities. This organization experienced significant business results as outcomes of the organization wide transformation initiative based on 'Customer Centricity'.[8]

2. Building Interpersonal Relationships.

Effective Interpersonal relationships are key when it comes to working in a collaborative manner with people. While roles and responsibilities can enshrine certain ways of working, the unique contributions that a person can make and the willingness to put in the 'discretionary effort' will happen only when there exists an effective interpersonal relationship between the Leaders and Employees. Being able to establish such interpersonal relationships and nurturing it is a

clarion call for HR Leadership. It connects the Leaders to the 'Heart' & 'Mind' of the employees.

The above becomes a key element when one has to overcome challenges of a VUCA world. Not everything can be foreseen and planned. Even when planned, there will be situations when the plan has to be changed in the eleventh hour. During such times, it is the 'discretionary effort' of the employees that delivers the business goals for the organization.

This can be experienced first-hand in Startups. When the organization is small, everyone knows everyone else in a very significant way. There will be a high degree of understanding and collaboration in the team and practically all the work will happen through 'discretionary effort'. With the growth of the organization, the quality of interpersonal relationships is sacrificed at the alter of short turnaround time where the positional power has to be used more. The challenge for HR Leaders is to maintain the quality of interpersonal relationships and yet deliver business results.

3. Continuous development of Mindset & Capabilities.

Continuous development is 'sine quo non'for any professional to be competent and relevant in the changing scenario. Development will be lopsided if it is focused only on acquiring skills. The development experiences need to renew all the four dimensions of a Professional, viz., mental, physical, emotional and spiritual.

How many of our fellow HR Professionals put themselves through learning experiences to not only stay abreast of new developments in the field, but also to constantly expand their mindset and add new capabilities to their repertoire?

In fact, in many of the programmes that I have been part of, the significant percentage of defaulters have been the HR professionals who enrolled. It will be very revealing if we ask HR Professionals the question, "What developmental programme have you been part of in the last 3 years as a Learner?"

Like any other Profession, practitioners of HR have to allocate time and resources to constantly expand their mindset and grow their professional capabilities. They need to follow the maxim, 'Learn -> Unlearn -> Re-Learn' to remain competitive and contribute to the Functions growth and its stature in the comity of functions.

The HR Function deals with People and hence it becomes all the more critical for an HR Professional to constantly expand the mindset and grow capabilities to be a role model for others in the organization. *What will be the credibility of an HR Head who has not undertaken significant development interventions for oneself, when outlining and recommending development programmes for others?*

The Two Challenges & One Opportunity.

There are two immediate challenges, one for the Function and another for the Functionary.

Functional - HOW do we re-invent the HR function to be relevant to emerging business needs in the VUCA world?

Functionary - HOW does the HR Professional incorporate the 3 Key elements detailed in this article to be effective in the role?

The One Opportunity is the VUCA World.

References

[1] 'It's Time to Split HR', Dr. Ram Charan, HBR, Jul-Aug, 2014

[2.] 'A New Mandate for Human Resources', Dr. Dave Ulrich, HBR, Jan-Feb, 1998

[3.] 'Why Organizations are Re-Naming HR Function', Jacob Morgan, Forbes, Sept 2015

[4.] 'Living & Leading in a VUCA World', Paul Kinsinger & Karen Walch

[5.] 'Adaptive Leadership for the VUCA World: Tale of Two Managers', Knowledge Network, Thunderbird School of Global Management, June 2016

[6.] 'Leading in a VUCA World', Paula Cook, TTM Associates

[7.] 'Employee First, Customer Second: Turning Conventional Management Upside Down', Mr. Vineet Nayar, CEO HCL Technologies, June 2010

[8.] 'Transformation to a Customer Centric Organization', Mr. G. Inbavanan, NHRD Network Journal, July 2008

The Unique Role of HR in Need Fulfillment

Sudha Cannan is the Founder of **One Degree Leadership Consulting** which is an attempt at making a One degree difference in people's lives. She works with individuals and organisations in the area of behavioural training, facilitation and executive coaching.

Sudha is a masters in Commerce and also hold a post graduate Diploma in Journalism. She is certified in the use of a wide variety of psychometric tools and facilitation methodologies like Leadership Circle Profile, CCL suite of Assessments, Hogan, MBTI, NVC, NLP, EQi 2.0, to name a few.

Sudha is also a Grandmaster – Reiki and a trainer of trainers in Meditation and certified PsychoDrama Practitioner.

Sudha has over 30 years of professional experience. She was the Training Practice Head of India's largest HR Consulting company. She has facilitated a number of Leadership Labs for the core leadership teams of public, private and non-profit sector organizations.

She has handled Coaching for Greater Effectiveness and Cutting Edge Leadership for CCL – Asia Pacific, Singapore. She has worked as an Adjunct Executive Coach and Facilitator with Mckinsey.

Sudha Cannan

The Unique Role of HR in Need Fulfillment

In a nutshell

The business of dealing with people is intense and important and highly significant. It cannot be debated whether HR is required or not. It is very much needed in the present world. What however needs to happen is the realignment of HR with the Needs of the Business and its people so that HR can deliver the Value it is meant to. Developing the skills required for HR to shine is as much required as the processes required in sustaining the organisation. Hence an investment in skills, in Coaching and Counselling and proactively adding value will make HR shine in the future.

In the delivery of business results and profits - men, materials and money have been the major contributors. As processes systematically changed over a period of time to accommodate technology as a major player in all parts of life, there have been serious discussions about whether this is true of HR too. This is a relevant question to ask in current times.

There is a difference between a governance oriented function like finance and a development oriented function like HR

Finance and Human Resources are important pillars for the business to run efficiently. As business grows and develops, the need for having robust systems to maintain financial records and statutory compliance grows as well. Finance teams get strengthened, realigned and Information Technology helps them cater to the need of the business to be predictable and robust.

The expectation is that this gets replicated in the HR function as well. Leaders predictably think that what has worked for the other parts of the business with the support of technology will work for HR as well and hence HR started getting automated.

Fulfilling human needs calls for a lot more than human processes. It calls for skills, especially among HR professionals.

Human beings have proven time and again that they respond to NEEDS. Yes they do enjoy the benefits of technology and automation but fundamentally they respond to the simple things like communication, connection and response. They need efficiency in the conduct of business and their own safety and security needs but beyond that today they also need to be recognised and acknowledged. They are all seeking meaning and purpose and so the argument of only efficiency does not hold good anymore. This basically calls for skills in dealing with situations of different kinds. While processes ensure standardisation and replicability and an unbiased approach, HR needs to have skills to implement these with empathy and efficiency. This is where the difference lies in terms of Finance and its application and HR and its application.

The need today is the skills of flexibility and the ability to respond quickly. If HR can do this with empathy and efficiency then we definitely enter a new and interesting phase of HR in organisations.

Need fulfilment is central to performance and productivity and engagement

In the growth and development of organisations, initially it was the Owner who took care of the **needs** of his people and made sure that everyone was paid and looked after. His **need** was loyalty and continuity and the business ran on trust.

Organisations grew and larger organisations had different dynamics. There was a **need** for stability, order and discipline. For the workforce the **need** for stability and hence agreed wages, safety, a Union to negotiate on their behalf and so on was their **need**.

For the organisation however compliance was a big **need**. Laws had to be strictly followed. IR took over. Law enforcement and making sure that everyone punched in and out on time and regularity and discipline in the factory environment had to be ensured for it to be successful.

Then, Business started recognising the **need** for separately focussing on Finance, Strategy and People. Experts in various fields came in with new ideas to strengthen each vertical. Also, came in the era of Managers to manage the workforce. More organisations got created and more people came in to work and hence competition had to be handled as well. Everyone had to be treated differently. **Needs** were more in terms of Self Esteem and retention depended on inspiration and motivation. Performance had to be managed differently. Hence in the last twenty-five years as managing people became important HR derived its relevance.

Businesses have now evolved and so have the people involved in it. SELF ACTUALISATION has become a more relevant **need** today - much more than Safety and Security and hence - Needs for both the individuals in the Organisation and the Organisation itself has become more about Vision and Purpose.

In every situation in the past - roles and responsibilities have been derived out of the NEED for the Business to deliver its goals and processes are created out of the need to enhance performance, productivity and engagement.

Need fulfillment however is not just about processes but also about human skills

What the Business needs and what the People need sounds similar but since there is a mismatch and NEEDS are NOT MET either ways, we find the fundamental question of RELEVANCE coming up time and again. Relevance can be answered in terms of processes and skills.

In an evolving environment we have technology to support us in terms of processes but the skills required are challenging to develop and replicate.

Several human skills are required understand and fulfill the needs of today.

For the Business

Agility	Speed in implementation and response to Customer
Ability	To be able to analyse and present information and predict future trends
Connections	Communication and the importance of maintaining the connections within and outside the organisation
Networking	within the organisation and with the various stakeholders outside

For the Employees

Agility	Speed in Decision Making and Action
Ability	Of the Organisation to understand and respond to their needs
Communication	Need to feel connected and belonged to the organisation
Networking	Connections with all stakeholders in the organisation and outside

The ask from HR

HR cannot merely play the role of being aggregators. While they run processes they also need to be respected in conversations because they can take decisions and don't need to go back to the business for approvals or don't get overridden in conversations in the Management committees.

A lot of CEOs experience them as impediments to the speed and agility of the business.

Truly the question that needs to be answered now is "Why am I here?" "What value am I adding?"

Line functions need handholding and support - but for that HR truly needs to be curious and understand the business and its leaders. Shifting people around in the organisation, matching their aspirations and the needs of the business across functions is one very important need.

They also need to be agile and move as quickly as the competitor and so must have knowledge of what's happening in the external world.

They must read voraciously and conduct multiple conversations on a day to day basis. Most of all they must understand psychology and trends - from fashion to travel and must know what makes the employee tick in today's world.

HR must be the glue that holds everything together - the value systems in the company, the culture and practices. Understanding periodically what's changing in the people dynamics and really having those dialogues continuously in the organisation is the responsibility of HR.

Today the respect for this profession can happen when there is acknowledgement that HR can add value. HR must be seen as an expert in Human Dynamics.

The human skills needed to understand and fulfil needs IN THE FUTURE

HR NEEDS to become RELEVANT and as we acknowledge the emerging role of HR - it has to become PROACTIVE. Some of the conditions, characteristics and skills that will be required going forward are:

- Regaining respect
- Being curious
- Adding value
- Being agile
- The ability to connect
- Bringing in expertise

The Way Forward for HRBPs

Vasanthi Srinivasan is a Professor in the area of Organizational Behaviour and Human Resources Management at the Indian Institute of Management Bangalore.

She holds a Post Graduate Diploma in Personnel Management and Industrial Relations from XLRI Jamshedpur, and a Fellow in Management (Ph.d equivalent) from the Indian Institute of Management Bangalore.

Her areas of interest are women in management and Boards, HRM in rapid growth organizations, Teaching ethics and leadership Development.

Vasanthi Srinivasan

The Way Forward for HRBPs

In a nutshell

In this article, I draw upon historical developments in the field of HRM, and argue that the external context has a critical role to play in determining the emphasis and focus on people. The changes in the macro-economic environment; shifts in the supply chains of large corporations; changing social dynamics; the contested role of unions in employer-employee relationships; the increasing penetration of technology and digitalization in organizations; and finally, increasing uncertainty in the regulatory context all directly impact the field of HRM. The field has coped with these on-going changes by modifying its practices to suit the current context. However, the fundamental assumptions and expectations of HRM have changed and the manner in which HRM gets addressed in the future will determine its relevance. This article has three main sections: in the first section we will trace the historical context of HRM; then we will examine the changing competencies of HR professionals and finally, the future of HRM with particular emphasis on the role of the HR Business Partner (HRBP).

Historical context of HRM

In this section, we focus on the evolution of the HR function and the HR professional. The term HRM was first coined by economist Bakke (1966) who wrote *"The general type of activity in any function of management is to use resources effectively for an organizational objective. The function which is related to the understanding, maintenance, development, effective employment, and integration of the potential in the resource of people I shall call simply the human resources function"*

Bakke's definition, however, did not gain ground till the 1980's with academics asking if HRM was the case of emperor's new clothes (Armstrong 1987) or old wine in a new bottle. For the next 10 years or so, the "personnel" and "human resources" terms were largely used interchangeably. Then, beginning in the early 1980s, strategic HRM began to acquire significance given the resource-based view of the firm. Strategic HRM was seen as being able to create firms which were more intelligent and flexible comparable to their peers, and they did this by acquiring and developing skills and talent among employees. In 1989, for example, the major professional association for personnel administration in the US changed its name from American Society of Personnel Administrators to Society for Human Resource Management. This shift was mirrored in industry with changed titles, as well as in academia with the introduction of HRM as a field of study (Beardwell & Holden, 1994). Even today, in many organizations, HRM is no more than a changed nomenclature to personnel management and the ambiguity on what it is persists.

As the function grappled with these challenges, the emergence of the three stool model of organizing HR function into Shared Service Centres (SSCs), Centres of Expertise (COEs) and HRBPs became influential and changed the contours of practice. It provided a structural solution to the SHRM discourse. After four decades, the verdict appears to be that the SSCs are working well, but the CoEs and BPs often fall short of expectations. Shared services have received a lot of attention and organizations seem to be able to harness the potential from this structure rapidly given the extraordinary cost focus of the SSC and their direct impact on bottom line. However, there is a growing awareness that the other two are not working as well. In fact, in my personal assessment, the HRBP role, with a focus on working with line managers to create impact on business outcomes, which was seen as the most strategic role once, seems to be the least effective now. It is sandwiched between the COE which is intended to do transformational long term strategic contributions and the SSC which is short term cost-focussed and transactional. With significant changes in the environment, the HRBP role becomes a key driver of business growth.

The role of the business partner has been to work closely with the business managers in developing a HR agenda that supports the overall aims of the organization. This role has two salient aspects: meeting the operational needs of the business to

keep it efficient; and a second, more tactical role, to enable the people management processes that can support strategic change in the future. It is at one level a customer centric approach to line managers, but is also a future readiness building role for employees in the organization. This tension is well captured by Peter Capelli, who remarks: *"how top executives feel about HR pretty reliably reflects what's going on in the U.S. economy. When the economy is down and the labor market is slack, they see HR as a nuisance. But sentiments change when labor tightens up and HR practices become essential to companies' immediate success."* (Capelli, 2015)[1]

What is important to reflect on here is the idea that stakeholder perception and satisfaction could drive the HR agenda very differently from its intent. It is important that HR needs to have an independent view within the larger context, unaffected by idiosyncratic behaviours of the CXO's demands, priorities and expectations.

Competencies in a changing world

Since 1985, Ulrich et.al, have identified HR competencies using global data. Several competencies have been added to reflect the contemporary challenges that HR professionals face. There are four big trends that characterize the current context – technological, regulatory, environmental and social. Recent reports from the World Economic Forum find that the Fourth Industrial Revolution brings with it [an] *"acceleration of innovation and the velocity of disruption that are hard to comprehend or anticipate and that these drivers constitute a source of constant surprise, even for the best connected and most well informed"* (Schwab, 2016). The digital revolution is characterized by a fusion of technologies in the field of artificial intelligence and machine learning, robotics, nanotechnology, 3D printing, genetics and biotechnology which are together creating a complexity that is difficult for leaders to understand and predict. The changing geo-political context in many parts of the world along with increasing protectionism related to jobs and visas has a direct impact on how organizations view and harness talent. As our natural resources become scarce and environmental crisis looms

large, organizations are viewing opportunities in new industries in a circular economy where waste is eliminated. Along with this, alternate energy reduction initiatives and making sure that the organizations keep the triple bottom line in sight is causing leaders to examine their business models. Finally, the sweeping social and demographic changes arising out of an emerging middle class in the developing countries, aging in the developed countries, widening inequality between the haves and the have nots in most parts of the world are all putting pressure on organizations to engage with new realities (Srinivasan, et.al, 2017). As Bob Johansen (2012) notes *"Hints of the future are all around us; if only we can learn to listen for them"*.

In this uncertain context, where the future of work and organizations is undergoing transition, employees are concerned about job loss, reskilling and relevance of their existing skills and competencies in the workplace. The requirements of an agile workplace are of continuous ongoing and concerted effort at making sure that one is employable in any organization. The traditional HR competency model is being challenged by these changes in the environment. Acquisition, development and enhancement of a competence is no longer an asset. In fact, as machines become more intelligent, traditional HR competencies may come in the way of HR effectiveness.

Against this context, the role of the HRBP is not just to deliver strategic value for the organization, but to be focused on employee well-being and development.

Way Forward

As the external context changes, HRBPs are likely to influence three broad areas. First, employee development will be about building agility both within and across organizations; next, empowerment of employees will happen through helping them find their voices; and finally, HR professionals will let go of HRM to line managers and equip them to handle their employees with fairness and justice. Let us now explore in greater detail what these three areas will mean in a changed context.

I predict more systemic thinking on employee development. Extensive collaboration between traditional functions of HRM, namely selection, performance management, career development, recognition, and training and development, will occur resulting in a more holistic approach to HRM. This holistic assessment of employees will allow for latent talent and creativity to come to the fore. Ideally, this should result in more innovation at the workplace, which in turn is likely to create more meaningfulness at work for employees. Job rotations will become the norm and the test of performance will be the willingness of individuals to continuously change themselves and be ready for future opportunities. This can only happen when organizations extend developmental practices to employees not just within their organization, but also across organizations. Short-term internships, immersive learning experiences, expeditions to other organizations, learning and development initiatives with other organizations will be the norm rather than the exception.

Employee voice is integral for effective functioning in organizations. Creating working environments where employees bring their best selves to work requires that the communication channels between key decision makers and employees are kept open at all times. The role of communication as a capability for an HR professional has not been adequately emphasized. They are architects and shapers of employee opinion. In this role, they need to have the ability to engage with multiple channels and media of communication. They also need to be excellent digital facilitators who will be able to build constructive conversations digitally to inform senior leaders. Making sure that fairness and justice are enshrined in the nature of feedback given by the employees will be a key capability. Voice also needs to be viewed as an expression of bringing oneself to work. The boundaries where work and life become more permeable, HRBPs will be required to become champions of employee voice to management. Speak ups, facilitated conversations, constructive dialogues, and engaged co-creation spaces could be the mechanisms through which HRBPs can provide meaningful insights to decision makers in the organization.

Finally, we know that line and functional managers have responsibility for their people. The idea of devolution of HR practices to line managers has been extensively discussed in literature yet much less is known about the manner in which such devolution is encouraged or provided to line managers. There is an essential learning and development process by which business managers are motivated to become people managers, both in authority and in the spirit of being a people manager. HRBPs need to build alliances with managers to influence them to take on the primary responsibility of managing people with fairness and justice. Prior research in the context of strategic alliances at an organizational level have stressed the significance of coordination, communication, and bonding in managing a given alliance (Schreiner, Kale & Corsten, 2009). Applying this framework in the context of alliances between HR professionals and line managers, all the three aspects appear to be relevant. Co-ordination in a changing context will require building consensus across the different alliance partners on the HR philosophy and policy; formal and informal communication is the glue that is known to hold relationships together and HR partners need to learn to do this as skilled facilitators, negotiators and collaboration builders. Since they also shape the opinion of the managers, they need to have expertise in providing feedback that will allow for development and self-correction.

Finally, bonding is a key aspect of strengthening relationships and both trust and personal credibility, which are currently strong competencies among HR practitioners in India is likely to be an asset (Brockbank & Prabhakar, 2012). I foresee developmental dialogues with line managers, continuous on-going investment in strengthening managerial behaviours, recognition of exemplar, role model managers, socialization of new and young managers by role models, and stringent penalties for being a poor manager, as the ways in which HRBPs could strengthen effective line manager contribution to people management.

If the HRBPs fail to take up this challenge, we will see the emergence of CHROs with non-traditional

backgrounds who are likely to be more successful. In a study by Boudreau, Navin & Creelman in 2017, it was found that these CHRO's are likely to be successful since their focus is on business results, not only people outcomes. They are observed to push fellow leaders, not just supporting or serving them, they have a desire to embrace opportunity, not only reduce risk and finally, their application of diverse business skills to the role are all likely to give them an advantage. The skills that non-traditional CHROs bring to the table could reflect the opportunities that are available to HRBPs provided they upskill and adapt to changing contexts.

Conclusion

To summarize, it appears that the ambiguity surrounding the current state of HRM is not enabling to the profession and the professional. The role of the HRBP will be the key driver in the future. The changing context will call for innovative ways of thinking from HR professionals including continuous and on-going development of employees so that they remain agile and relevant to the business; ensuring employee voice through a vibrant two way communication system for business results; and finally, building the capability of line managers to be more than just business leaders but also look at the well-being of the employees.

References

Armstrong, M (1987) Human resource management: a case of the emperor's new clothes, Personnel Management, August, pp 30-35.

Bakke, E W (1966) Bonds of Organization: An appraisal of corporate human relations, Archon, Hamden.

Beardwell, I & Holden, L (1994) An introduction to HRM in HRM:A contemporary Perspective (Ed)MacMillan.

Boudreau, Navin and Creelman (2017) https://hbr.org/2017/05/why-more-executives-should-consider-becoming-a-chro last accessed on June 9, 2018.

Brockbank, W & Prabhakar, L (2012) The world's nine major regions: Their business challenges, HR competencies and competitive practices—India in Global HR Competencies: Mastering competitive value from the outside in (Eds) Ulrich, D; Brockbank, W; Younger, J; Ulrich, M. The McGraw Hill.

Johansen, B (2012). Leaders make the future: Ten new leadership skills for an uncertain world. Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

Schreiner, M; Kale, P & Corsten, D (2009) What really is alliance management capability and how does it impact alliance outcomes and success? Strategic Management Journal, 30, 1395-1419

Schwab, K. (2016). The 4th Industrial Revolution. Available online at http://www.vassp.org.au/webpages/Documents2016/PDevents/The%20Fourth%20Industrial%20Revolution%20by%20Klaus%20Schwab.p df, Site accessed on 5th Sep, 2017

Srinivasan, V; Srinivasan, R & Jain, Ankur (2017) Future Ready leadership competencies. National HRD Network Journal. October, Vol 10(4) pp.21-29

Ulrich, D; Brockbank, W; Yeung, A K & Lake D G (1995) Human Resource Competencies: An Empirical Assessment, Human Resource Management, December, 34(4), 473-495

Leveraging Emotions for Future Focussed HR Roles

Krish Shankar, is a HR professional with well over three decades of corporate experience in global organisations like Unilever, Bharti Airtel, Philips and Infosys.

Shankar is currently the Group Head HRD, for Infosys. In his stints in all these organisations, he has been exposed to global experiences and cutting edge practices. He has had stints in business as well as in overseas locations.

He is passionate about people and organisations, and loves exploring new ideas and concepts. He is also the current Honorary President of NHRDN Bangalore Chapter.

Shankar is an alumnus of XLRI, Jamshedpur.

Krish Shankar

Leveraging Emotions for Future Focussed HR Roles

In a nutshell

This article explores the need to shift gear from using an intellectual frame to define HR roles and embrace an emotional framework to define the future roles in HR.

This is based on the view that the future will call for far greater emotional orientation to HR roles than there is today and will need to answer questions like what collective emotions are needed in each part of the business given their challenges and the different stages they are in; what organisational routines and HRM practices are needed to build those collective emotions; what leader emotion management behaviours are needed to support this and how do we coach leaders to proactively manage the emotions needed in their teams?

The article proposes a new framework for HRM by articulating three emotion led roles.

The problem with employee engagement

The word Employee Engagement and the literature surrounding it, often perplexes me. At times, I think this word, and all the accompanying 'research', is more of a commercial creation. Let's go back to the basics: what keeps a person satisfied and motivated (Note, I have not used the word engaged). So what would keep us satisfied and motivated? From research, we know three things matter a lot:

1. The work we do- the challenge and the learning in the work, and the contribution we can make

2. The work environment, which is a supportive manger, colleagues, a team where you like to work, and an organisation which agrees with your values, and lastly

3. The right recognition, which signifies how your work is valued, how fair your think the rewards are for your efforts, and opportunities for growth.

Isn't this all that we need to do? I think we have to keep the basics in mind, and not get our thoughts clouded with the hundreds of secret recipes for engagement!

The place of emotions

There is one word that would keep cropping up when people speak of engagement. Emotions. They would speak of 'emotional' connect. And 'emotional' attachment! As you dig deeper, they would tell you that 'engagement' is all about people's emotions. And I wondered that if emotions are that important, why aren't we tracking emotions? How could we keep emotions at the heart of what we do every day? That set me thinking that perhaps we are missing a trick here? If only we could bring emotions into the heart of our purpose in the human resource function, we might be able to solve the problem of employee engagement.

However, given the current times, with changing people's needs and aspirations, and a dynamic and disruptive business environment, are emotions still important? There are a couple of questions we need to ask- why do we still need to 'engage' people? What's wrong with the design of our HR systems and processes, that engagement is still a core issue in organisations?

One would assume that if our HR systems and processes were designed to keep people motivated, satisfied and engaged, shouldn't it be doing so. There probably needs to be a rethink of how we design our HR processes, as some of our processes probably create threats for people, and that leads to disengagement. We need to question the philosophy behind our design, and to make that happen, we have to rethink the role of HR. The current conception of the role of HR is from an industrial era- we have now moved into a time where emotions and positive psychology have bigger relevance. As the world moves towards a more automated existence, the role of human emotions becomes even more critical for us to leverage. Therefore, we need a new paradigm for HR – something that is relevant for the future.

Affect, or in common man's language, emotions, has a significant impact on people and organisations, but has often been under-

researched and underestimated in the organisational context. Various researches have shown that discrete emotions have an impact on work performance at an individual level and on strategy implementation and business performance at an organisational level. And emotions and emotional intelligence, are becoming more important in the new automated economy.

The strategic transformation process has different stages, and different collective emotions are necessary for each of those stages. First, it is borne out by research that positive emotions of happiness and pride lead to superior performance. I further hypothesise that the collective positive emotions of happiness, pride, gratitude, interest, and optimism, as well as the negative emotions of dissatisfaction and uncertainty, as being necessary for different stages of strategy implementation and execution. For instance, during a start-up phase, emotions of excitement, interest and optimism are more relevant, whereas in the latter stages of scaling and optimising costs, the emotions of gratitude, pride and optimism may be relevant. Leaders have to be thinking more about the emotions of their teams, and consciously ensure that right emotions are created as appropriate.

We talk of the importance of culture, as most people say culture is more important than strategy. But what is culture? To put it simply, it is a mix of organisational routines and behaviours of people. Thus organisational routines are critical to build the right emotions and the right focus for organisations. I also look at HRM practices, as being a subset of organisational routines and therefore they could also impact collective emotions. In fact, the role of HRM practices takes considerable importance as we build emotional capability as a dynamic capability.

A new paradigm for HRM

As I learnt from my past experience, it was clear that the ability to manage emotions at an organisation level was critical for successful business transitions, especially as organisations and teams manage radical strategic change. We also know that emotions have been underestimated and underleveraged in organisations, and that the latest research has thrown up a number of areas where organisations can benefit from our understanding of affect (Barsade, 2005).

Given the strong link of organisational routines and leader behaviour to building emotional capability, and its strong connection with HRM, I propose that HRM takes the lead in bringing this new understanding of affect, collective emotions, strategy implementation and emotional capability for the benefit of organisations.

Traditional definitions of the role of HRM have been very process-oriented and administrative, not focussing on the role as much. The first definition of HRM from a role perspective was proposed by Ulrich in the model of HR Champions. As we all know, the model described 4 roles of HRM- as Administrative expert, Employee champion, Change Catalyst and Strategic partner. While that definition has helped transform HRM in the current day, it has its drawbacks. First, HRM has changed significantly over the years and these roles are no longer relevant at times. With outsourcing and automation, the role of administrative expert is no longer relevant. The concept of change catalyst and strategic partners have been long ingrained as part of the role given the fast changing business context and have now become commonplace. Moreover, in the light of the new literature on organisation and employee engagement and the future business context, the framework for a new role for HRM needs review.

Based on the insights from my experience and analysis, and having observed the importance of emotions and the reasons for most negative emotions, I am proposing a new model to articulate the role of the HRM function in any organisation in the future. The future role of HRM function would be in three buckets:

1. **Designing and executing HRM processes that are just and fair:** As a reflection of the current times, fairness and organisational justice are becoming critical. From my study, I found that the biggest cause of negative emotions was the obvious perception of the lack of fairness in organisational processes. Areas of diversity, gender pay gap, biases in career growth are all gaining a lot of focus. Therefore, the key role of HR would be to design HRM processes that are fair and just and the CHRO should take personal responsibility of creating a fair and just organisation. The following would be the key points of consideration to ensure a fair and just organisation:

   • Does the organisation have fair and just processes

   • Do people have clarity on the processes

   • Does the organisation do a regular audit to check if the processes are fair and just

   I call this role the *Fair Process designer and advocate*

2. **Defining, on boarding and developing the right talent needed to grow the business:** regularly articulating and defining the skills, competencies and mindset of talent needed for the organisation to succeed in the future world, and attracting, hiring and onboarding such talent, and also putting in place a strong talent development mechanisms to develop internal talent in line with future needs would be one of the key roles of the HRM function. The right talent at the right time in the right roles is critical for the success of the organisation. In line with the fairness principle stated above, internal talent should have the same opportunities and means to grow and progress, with respect to external talent. The key considerations for the HRM function in this area are:

   • What kind of talent do we need? When? In which roles?

   • How do we develop them internally?

   • How do we attract, hire and onboard them?

   • How do we renew and keep the talent relevant for the future?

   I call this role the *Talent Diviner and Partner*

3. **Articulating the collective emotions needed in each business unit/team at different stages, and helping create those emotions**: the HRM function has to help leaders and business teams decide the kind of emotions they need given their particular situation, and put in place organisational routines and HRM practices to build those collective emotions, and ensure that leaders demonstrate the right behaviours to support those emotions. As we saw in my empirical study, the right collective emotions at the right stage, supported by leader emotion management behaviours, make a big difference to the organisation's success. And organisational routines and HRM practices play a big role in building those emotions. Therefore, helping create the right collective emotions has to be a key role for the HRM function.

The following would be the key considerations that the HRM function needs to find solutions in this area:

   • What collective emotions are needed in each part of the business given their challenges and the different stages they are in?

   • What organisational routines and HRM practices are needed to build those collective emotions?

   • What leader emotion management behaviours are needed to support this?

   • How do we coach leaders to proactively manage the emotions needed in their teams?

Therefore, I would propose a new framework for HRM by articulating these 3 new roles. The diagram below captures this new framework, which I propose as a guide to all organisations in focussing their HRM function.

I call this role the *Emotions Architect and Coach*

I believe this new focus for the HRM function would enable it to prioritise on the essentials needed in contemporary times.

Leveraging emotions for future focused HR Roles

The Talent Diviner/Partner

The Emotions Architect/Coach

The Fair Process Designer/Advocate
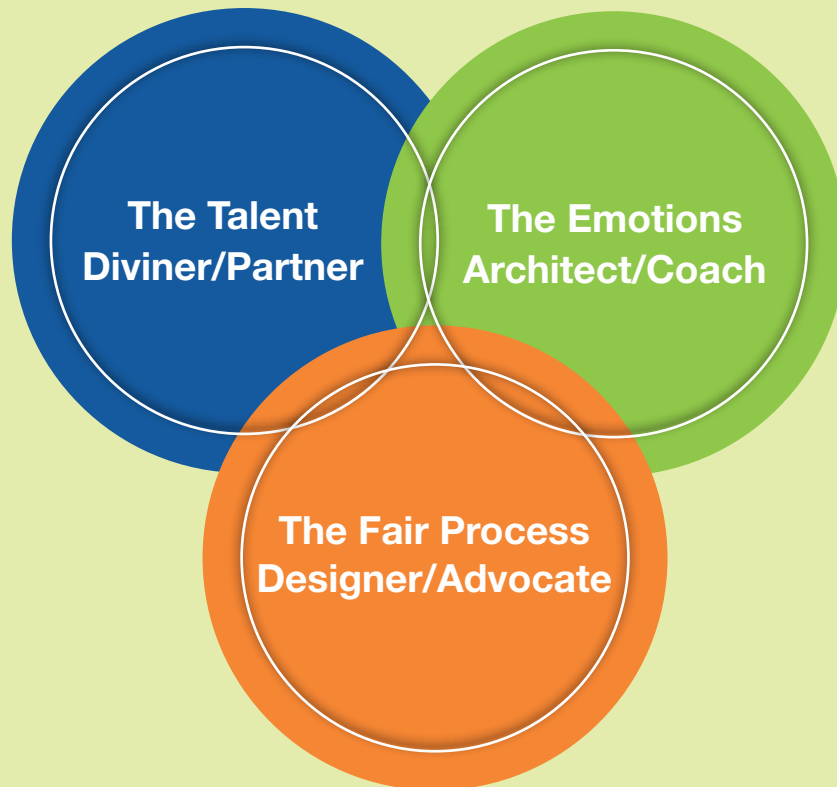
People Focus
Resolving Today's Dilemmas

- ▶ Is 'People Focus' an anachronism in today's HR world?
- ▶ Resolving HR's four existential dilemmas
- ▶ Are we losing people focus or focus on design?
- ▶ Stress, money and gender – what ails society, holds back HR

Is 'People Focus'
an Anachronism in Today's HR World?

Latha is a HR leader with three decades of experience in varied Industry Sectors.

Latha is the founder of Savitur Business Consulting LLP, an HR Consulting firm that specializes in helping organizations with Change and Transformation, working with the leadership team on an agenda for change through Leadership Workshops, Executive Coaching and Talent Development, re-aligning Organization Culture, re-alignment of HR Systems and Processes and other Change initiatives. Savitur is currently engaged with transformation projects in the IT, ITES, Financial Services and the Media Sectors.

Latha's last assignment in the Corporate Sector was with Servion Global Solutions as President - People and Culture. Prior to Servion, as a Principal Consultant at totus consulting, Latha worked on large scale Leadership Development Programs and Talent Management initiatives.

Accredited by the Coaching Foundation of India (CFI), as a Certified Executive and Business Coach, Latha has taken on coaching assignments for senior leaders and CEOs and has guided the work of several Coach Interns.
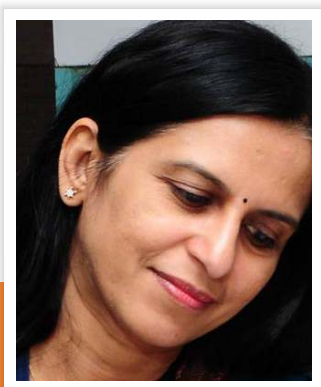
Latha Nambisan

Is 'People Focus' an Anachronism in Today's HR World?

In a nutshell

Is People Focus a dated concept for the HR team?

In a world run on Robotics, Artificial Intelligence and Analytics, is there a context for a humanistic view for the HR function? Would HR be best advised to wear the Business Hat and treat employees as Resources who must be managed for productivity and profitability?

Is the old definition of People Focus still relevant? And are the glorious days when HR was revered and respected a thing of the past? Is there a future for the People focused HR professional?

These are questions this article explores.

Retaining the worker as Man

I don't exactly recall the source, but in my days in the Manufacturing Industry in the 90s I had a favourite quote that I had up on the wall of my office. It went like this:

"It is Man that works, not a human machine. The quest and thirst for freedom lies inherent in his blood – he cannot be chained to work, but must be retained as Man"

And everything I did in HR then, was aimed at retaining the worker as Man – improving his situation in life, understanding his context – social, emotional and personal, taking care of his family – food, health, education and recreation and so on. Those were times when the life of the employee and his family revolved around the Company. (I use the term 'his' very deliberately – women were a far minority in organizations then).

I would say, that the HRM role was perhaps easier to do then – those were times when HR Managers or Personnel Managers were revered, respected and deferred to. Those were times when we did not need to do surveys to understand what employees want – those were the days of 'roti, kapda aur makan' (a popular Hindi movie translating to food, clothes and shelter). The employee was greatly dependent on the organization and the HRM role of being 'a bridge' and 'a dispenser of discipline and fairness' was taken seriously by Employers and Employees alike.

So what has changed? Has the HR mindset changed? Has the 'R' gained ascendancy over the 'H' in HR? Are the new generation of HR leaders a far cry from the HR leaders of 25 years ago? Or is it a case of changes all around that has got the HR function in a tizzy? And given the prediction that the changes that we will see between 2016 and 2022 will be greater than the changes in the last 100 years, perhaps this is a good time to discuss the value proposition that HR will have to offer to employers and employees in these interesting times.

To find out more, I spoke to Business Leaders, HR Leaders and employees.

The Business Context

The Business Leaders in discussing the definition and expectations on People Focus for the HR profession, raised the question - "Is the HR function today prepared for the shifts that are happening in the world?"

Here are some of the changes they spoke of

1. There is a leadership shift at the top in most Organizations. In most established organizations the last ten years has seen a new generation emerge as the older generation has hung up its boots. Be it the family managed businesses or the MNCs, we seem to hear talk of a generational shift more often these days. The new generations of leaders manage very differently and seem to have a different set of expectations from their teams.

2. The CEO's office is no longer sacrosanct – there are very public and drastic differences in view points at the highest levels – our Business leaders spoke of the impact on organizations and its people of Tata vs Cyrus Mistry and Infosys vs Vishal Sikka kind of situations at the leadership level.

3. The growth of the multinational culture with family managed firms going global and the growth through acquisition of global / overseas organisations in India. This has also changed the way people are managed in organizations – with the focus seeming to shift to more on process than relationships to manage the scale of the business.

4. We are likely to see many more Flipkarts happen. The overnight changes of culture and expectations post an acquisition is an HR minefield of opportunity or risk depending on the company doing the acquisition.

5. Organizations live perennially in the glare of publicity. Therefore the incidents where employees demonstrate for compensation increases or against layoffs go viral in no time. Similarly customer service situations where employees have behaved inappropriately have gone viral in no time. All of this also has an impact on stocks and valuation and of course customer and public perception of the organisation.

6. Leaders too live constantly in the glare of public scrutiny. An Organization's reputation can break overnight with the exposure of a possible contravention of what is ethically and morally correct.

7. Business growth today is not accompanied with commensurate growth for the employee in terms of career opportunities and employment. With automation, the opportunities have shrunk and many organizations today do far more with the same employee strength they had a few years back. Organizations are also defining career growth as horizontal movement rather than vertical movement.

8. HR is a core member of the leadership council today. Business leaders therefore seem to expect HR leaders to question Business and bring a 'Business – People' perspective to the table – for example, surface brutal facts with regard to market shifts and the future of the business and therefore the new skills and talent that the Organization will need to prepare for.

9. The context for HR has become situational and not generic. Therefore the HR profession cannot apply a set of generic tools and declare itself as having done a job based on metrics such as acing an external Employee Engagement Survey. Take the example of the Organization that was told post a Survey that in terms of improvement, they would be well advised to introduce benefits such as Paternity Leave and flexi-working – when the context of the organization and the needs of employees were very different. Most Surveys are simplistic and all about benefits and tangibles, while the context for HR is as much about managing the intangibles, as it is about change and dynamic shifts in the eco-system and helping Organizations and employees cope.

One Business leader was of the view that the HR function that is still stuck in a world of Employee Engagement Surveys, fun at work, record keeping and confidentiality and reliance on Intuition is irrelevant! Having said this, he agreed that this is therefore a good time for the function to introspect and redefine their purpose and role in the organization. They also agreed that there are some good role models in the profession who have made the change seamlessly.

We asked employees – what do they expect from HR.

1 Employees expect to be told and kept informed on what is happening in the Organization. They would like to hear from their Organization before they hear from friends, family and the Internet. So Communication and Transparency seemed to be important for employees.

2 Employees expect flexibility. They want an environment where they are able to work from home on a whim if they wish to, be able to take care of themselves – be it fitness or learning.

3 Employees look for meaning. The tolerance for repetitive, non-challenging work seems to have stretched really thin. Young employees do not want to do jobs that can be done by a machine.

4 When asked what will make them stay in a Company, they said 'a challenging environment'. "Fun at work in terms of events and celebrations is all fine and needed as hygiene factors, but what I want is to be excited about what I do and have a feeling of accomplishment". I would like to feel that I am valued and moving up in the Organization.

5 Surprisingly, safety and security also figured, especially among women employees. One of them said that she is looking for going to work with 'peace of mind'

Communication & Transparency

Safety & Security – peace of mind

Flexibility

Challenge

Meaning

Given the above context our question to HR was – what are some new expectations that organizations have from you? Is it time to throw people focus out of the window? We especially looked at some role models and here's what the successful role models seemed to say

'People focus' is no longer about 'getting along with people'. It is about inclusion and understanding the needs of an employee we have never met face to face. We have employees scattered across the globe, many of them on a 'work from home' basis and it is critical for me to keep everyone of them in mind when I design and execute HR plans in my Organization.

As a People Focused HR leader I see my role as training, empowering and monitoring the way Business leaders and Team Managers interact, manage and empower their teams. It is as much about assessing and improving the People Management skills of the Business leaders as it is about the people skills of my HR team.

A big ask of me seems to be to help my CEO in driving a Culture of Innovation. With increased automation and the need to reinvent business processes to remain agile, even as we grow and the challenge of keeping pace with competition, my challenge is to ensure that we tap the creative talent of our employees and provide a platform that is conducive.

My CEO tells me she wants me to be an Intrapreneur. I translate this as meaning that she wants me to be good at Strategy and at Execution. My HR Mentor says that as I move up in the Organization I should be more strategic than operational but my boss insists that in today's world the demarcation is thin – and she would like me to be both hands-on and futuristic.

Everything has become more complex. Business wants me to hire faster and faster and yet be very selective in hiring, but prospective employees have multiple choices and are difficult to persuade onboard. Bots and automation have taken over new employee orientation, but with more employees working remote, establishing an emotional connect has become even more important. Performance Management is no longer a smooth standard process across organizations – I am expected to have a say in goals, metrics and designing innovative reward systems. I have to juggle challenging expectations from the Business and find the best way to keep employees motivated and performing.

Business leaders are demanding and vociferous in their demands. Employees on the other hand seem to want little from HR – mostly they want to be left alone to do their jobs and come across as independent and confident of being able to take care of themselves. In such a situation, how do I play a balancing role? How do I ensure that I keep the employee firmly in focus even while Business is strident in its demands? (Author's note: I asked myself at this stage – has the plate completely changed? In earlier times, Business may or may not have been clear about their expectations from HR, but employees certainly knew what they wanted from HR!)

[The Future Workplace and Beyond.com study entitled "The Active Job Seeker Dilemma" found that 83% of HR leaders said "employee experience" is either important or very important to their organization's success, and they are investing more in training (56%), improving their work spaces (51%), and giving more rewards (47%). Companies are also driven to focus on creating a compelling employee experience as the war for talent heats up. Mercer predicts that 90% of employers anticipate more competition for talent, especially in India, North America, and Asia]

My personal view – the balancing act

In my 30 years of experience both as a Corporate citizen and an HR Advisor and Consultant, I have had the occasion to work closely with Business leaders, HR professionals and with employees. As I consider the shifts that have happened in the HR world, one aspect that strikes me very strongly is the imbalance in expectations. An added complexity to the situation of the HR Professional today is the fact that unlike in the past, Employers and Employees do not seem to share the same set of expectations from HR.

Employers expect HR to play the role of Business Partner. HR has a customer in Business who is demanding, offering the function a seat at the table, in exchange for advice on how to manage the People function in the most 'Business value-adding' way. Business is greatly appreciative of a HR leader who comes with a Business perspective. 'I like working with people and get along with people' is no longer acceptable as an HR competence.

Employees on the other hand, seem to be more inward focused and demanding – they care about their own careers, their flexibility and work life balance, their compensation and their perks. The employee today is a much more independent individual, someone who knows what she wants in life, has enough choices not to give Organizations a second chance once she thinks something has not worked for her. And therefore engaging with her today is much more of a challenge.

So that's the tight rope the HR function today needs to walk – be Business aligned and yet bring that unique perspective to the leadership table of looking at Business through a People hat and be Employee aligned by helping to create an engaging value proposition for the employee within the contextual setting of the Business.

Conclusion

There is no gainsaying the fact that the People lens is even more important for HR professionals in the world today. The context is about managing the intangibles, change and dynamic shifts in the eco-system and helping Organizations and employees cope. There is no single easy formula – and HR needs to walk the fine line of helping Businesses leverage people and helping employees see the connect between what the Organization offers and what they seek. HR must help employees become more innovative and enjoy what they do and not trivialize being people focused to activity based initiatives.

While the old meaning of People Focus may not be appropriate today, the new meaning as it is popularly understood also needs re-interpretation. These are truly exciting times and HR has an opportunity to be a tremendous differentiator for Business and Employees alike by being a People Champion, in a wholly new avatar from the past.

Resolving HR's
Four Existential Dilemmas

Dr Pallab Bandyopadhyay is a Leadership Architect, Career Coach, Change and Transition Specialist. A doctoral fellow in HRD from XLRI, Jamshedpur, he has received training at various human process and organization development interventions at NTL, USA. Dr Pallab has thirty five years of successful professional experience in managing entire gamut of Human Resources Management with proven expertise in managing multicultural globally-distributed knowledge professionals as head of HR functions at Country/Regional/Global levels at Citrix Systems, Dell services, Perot systems, Cambridge Solutions, Sasken Communication Technologies, Ashok Leyland Information Technology and National Dairy Development Board (NDDB).

He is currently engaged in providing HR consulting to many large Indian and MNCs and start-ups and has worked with diverse set of people and business leaders from organization like Dr Reddy's Laboratory (DRL), Honeywell Technology Solutions (HTS), KPMG, The Hindu, CGI, Unisys, Novartis, Mercedes Benz, SanDisk, Sears, RP-Sanjiv Goenka Group, Emami Group, Schneider Electric, Asian Institute of Technology (AIT) Bangkok , Symbiosis Institute of Management Science (SIMS) and Indian Institute of Management (IIM) Indore.

He is a visiting faculty at XLRI, Jamshedpur, IIM Kozhikode and Shilong in the area of HRM/OB. Dr Pallab is a research guide for PhD students under the Faculty of Management Symbiosis University, a member of the governing council of St Joseph Institute Of Management (SJIM), member of the academic advisory board at Christ University Institute Of Management and an external subject matter expert in the doctoral committee of CMR and Christ University. Dr Pallab is also a certified executive coach and spends considerable time in coaching and mentoring both senior business and technology leaders as well as HR professionals across the country. He has published several papers in leading HR journals and also the Managing Editor for NHRDN Journal.

Dr. Pallab
Bandyopadhyay

Resolving HR's Four Existential Dilemmas

In a nutshell

A lot has changed in terms of growing in the HR profession.

While many of these are welcome, these changes seem inadequate. I am convinced that we are moving away from our core people function. My arguments are centred on two themes. Our understanding of our roles and the choices we are making.

In my article, I have focused on four existing dilemmas that are impacting performance of HR professionals in today's organizational context. Resolving these dilemmas can't wait anymore. Because sweeping changes all around our businesses are creating a new context for success, for both HR profession as well as HR professionals.

I must admit that we have changed quite a bit in terms of growing in HR profession. First and foremost I have seen that there is a definite shift in terms of how we measure HR's presence in organization today. Many organizations today are confining HR to a role that is largely operational in nature. When I meet some of these proud HR professionals, I am reminded of this quote from perhaps the best known transformational leader in corporate history "HR is an engine of an organization's hiring, appraisal and developmental processes……….. too many companies relegate HR to the mundane busy work of Newsletters, Picnic and Benefits……… Every CEO should elevate his HR to the same structure of his CFO." These are lines from one of Jack Welch's Business Week columns.

With the onslaught of HR tech tools, many organizational leaders have started believing that by using tools and technology alone they will be able to build long term sustainable people engagement. They believe that engaging employees in honest dialogues and placing them at the centre of life changing decisions that impact them are time consuming and may not work on the ground. Are we then moving towards an age when tools and technologies can completely replace the HR function?

I must clarify that like many of you, I too believe that today's employees want to receive services from their employers seamlessly without having to deal with lengthy paperwork or waiting for long to hear from HR service providers. With the advent of technologies, there is an app available for every transactional HR process today. Self-service is the most sought after mode among employees, not only in their day to day personal lives but also at their workplace. But I think we are missing a point here. Embracing technology should not mean moving away from people. You can have the best tools at your disposal and yet you may still fail because employees are not inspired enough to use them. At the end of the day, we must remember that, tech tools are facilitators, not solutions.

Our orientation towards technology gets me worried and leaves me convinced that we are moving away from our core people function. My arguments are centred on two themes. First, have we understood our roles? Second, are we making some wrong choices and therefore facing a huge credibility issue.

Based on my experience as a practitioner, academic and researcher for three decades I have come to the conclusion that in order to remain focused on our core agenda to facilitate human resource development, we need to resolve four major existential dilemmas.

In this article I am going to discuss these following four dilemmas:

- Technology as means VS Technology as end
- Employee Experience VS Employee Engagement
- Being Smart VS Being Authentic
- Working For Business VS Working with Business

Technology as means VS Technology as end

As technology emerges to dominate human life and life-style at an exponential pace and redefines the way we work, live and even think, we as HR professionals need to explore many myriad unasked questions. If I am a HR professional who is not only curious but also an ardent technology buff it is time for me to get challenged and inspired to take stock and rethink the way HR can play a role in building systems and processes in organizations. With technology/tools that are not only innovative, user-friendly and fast we need to take stock whether they are also humane enough in the way they are deployed and offers choice to their users. Because more often than not, the challenge is not in the tool; the challenge lies in collaborating with user-employees that enables them to get maximum benefits for which they were deployed in the first place. This is aptly summarized by Daniel Ospina (2016), an organization designer when she professed *"What we need to do is create the organizations and systems that work for all the inconsistencies, irrationality, and emotional behaviours that people are capable of. That is where innovation and progress come from."*

Technology and HR shouldn't be viewed as a binary war between two worlds. In today's workplace context, technology is about enhancing HR performance. Most of us would agree that HR enabling technologies will have an increasingly significant role in how people will be managed in organization in future. In every organization that is forward –looking, we are witnessing deployment of new tools that are aiding in managing/monitoring significant HR processes like employee communication, engagement, reward and recognition, work-wellness, learning and development, attendance- tracking, goal- setting and feedback-capturing. So where is the issue here? The issue is about the role that HR plays here. I believe HR can play three significant roles that will help them solve this dilemma.

1. Facilitating meaningful interactions between employees and IT to rightfully capture user-requirement/pain points in the current system.

2. Work with business leaders to help them communicate to the employees, the need to change and the possible outcome.

3. Enable organization leaders to understand the fact that successful transformation is all about supporting employees through change, not imposing it on them

Let's take the case of digital transformation about which everybody is talking. I am sure in your organization too a number of such initiatives are going on. But do you know that research indicates that two thirds of digital transformations are said to fail in organizations. In an interesting 2016 Forbes Magazine interview by Bruce Rogers of Michael Gale, a renowned researcher who undertook extensive research in analysing the drivers of digital transformation success factors in organization found 84% digital transformation efforts in organization have failed. Let me quote him to drive home my point;"…. *the underlying tonality is that you can do a strategy once, you can borrow the technology once….. I think a large part of that 84 per cent that fail is because they're not prepared to change behaviour. They think they can have strategy and technology and it just doesn't get them there fast enough or in a good enough way."*

So HR can play a huge role here provided they have role clarity. I would like to end my argument by quoting Vitalka Hlupic (2016), a professor of business and management at Westminster Business School who said *"The future is not about people vs. machines, it is about people and machines collaborating in harmony, with complementary strengths and weaknesses in the context of intelligent organisational design."*

Employee Experience VS Employee Engagement

Employees today have more power over their careers than ever before. As career researchers indicate that all over the world it is moving from an external (Organization-driven, rational and objective) to internal (Employee- driven, intuitive and subjective) perspective. The days of an employee staying at one company for life and retiring from there is over. A survey done by Bureau of Labour Statistics, USA (2016) reported that *"The median number of years that wage and salary workers had been with their current employer was 4.2 years in January 2016, down from 4.6 years in January 2014."*, and this frequency is rapidly increasing with the rise of millennial in the workplace. A similar study done by executive search firm Executive Access India quoted by Singh (2015), indicated that as many as 64% of the respondents it surveyed have held their current roles for less than five years and almost 35% of the respondents have held their current tenures for less than two years. In contrast, a minority of 12% have served tenures in a single role exceeding ten years. Just about a decade back, the statistic around people who held their tenures for more than ten years was double this number.

And this millennial workforce is much more demanding in terms of what experiences they would like to have in their workplaces. The underlying believe among many HR professionals is that they're much less likely to stick around with the organization if their demands aren't met. This means HR needs to create a series of unique workplace experiences to keep these millennial engaged starting the day they get inside an organization. So creating employee experience is considered the new mantra in the quest to achieve sustainable employee engagement. And lot many in HR profession believe today that these employee experiences are created only through a combination of building smart infrastructure, curating and integrating tools into customized HR transactional processes and extending generous freebies. I am not questioning the

emergence of the *"Employee journey" /"Candidate journey"* where the learning's from consumer marketing are getting transferred to the HR domain. My problem lies in the fact that many of us started believing that creating these digital enablers will help us achieve sustainable employee engagement much faster than what we had achieved in the past through long term, face to face, emotionally connected soft interventions. But how many work-place experiences like a beautiful cafeteria, ethnic day celebration, a beer party and unlimited Pizza has been able to create a sustainable employee engagement? And especially when the chips are down for the organization in terms of revenue, profit or lack of investments. (for smart start-ups.)

The available data proves my point.

Gallup report (2016) found millennial are the least engaged (29%) generation in the workplace and the latest Aon Report (2018) found across the globe, out of the total workforce only 27% are highly engaged. In another interesting Study of Indian BPO Employees, Bhatnagar (2007) reported *"low engagement scores at the beginning of the career and at completion of 16 months with the organization. High factor loadings at intermediate stages of employment were indicative of high engagement levels, but the interview data reflected that this may mean high loyalty, but only for a limited time."*

The current scenario is aptly described by Dr Vivek Hallegere Murthy (2017), the 19th Surgeon General of the United States who wrote in HBR, *"In the workplace, new models of working — such as telecommuting and some on-demand "gig economy" contracting arrangements— have created flexibility but often reduce the opportunities for in-person interaction and relationships. And even working at an office doesn't guarantee meaningful connections: People sit in an office full of co-workers, even in open-plan workspaces, but everyone is staring at a computer or attending task-oriented meetings where opportunities to connect on a human level are scarce."*

I believe this is where HR professionals are making a mistake. We are making *"Employee experience leading to Employee engagement"* process simply too causal and too simple.

Looks like we have forgotten the dual-factor theory, which was penned by Frederick Herzberg way back in 1959. Based on his research, he developed the theory that people's job satisfaction depends on two kinds of factors, factors for satisfaction (motivators/satisfiers) and factors for dissatisfaction (hygiene factors/dissatisfiers). In his theory, Herzberg proved these factors function on the same plane. In other words, satisfaction and dissatisfaction aren't polar opposites. Taking away an employee's dissatisfaction – for example by offering a higher salary – doesn't necessarily mean the employee will then be satisfied. Adjusting the hygiene factors, often have a short-term effect that doesn't last very long. Changing the motivation factors on the other hand often has a more lasting, long-term effect on employee performance.

Now take a deep breath and think for a moment. If we replace the construct of job satisfaction with engagement today, aren't we as HR professionals committing the same mistake? Gallup research overwhelmingly proved that organizations with high employee engagement are co-related with strong company culture. In order to excel in employee engagement, organizations must be deliberate in building strong and differentiated work culture. Needless to say building such a work-culture is a long drawn humane process which requires caring, empathetic leaders who have the ability to connect with employees at a much deeper personal level. I would like to end this argument by Quoting Dr Murthy (2017) again *"Our understanding of biology, psychology, and the workplace calls for companies to make fostering social connections a strategic priority. A more connected workforce is more likely to enjoy greater fulfillment, productivity, and engagement while being more protected against illness, disability, and burnout."*

Being Smart VS Being Authentic

Influencing internal clients has never been easy for human resource professionals ever. Emerging from a role which historically played a second fiddle it has always been difficult for HR folks. But as we all realise in this challenging time, the unique stressors like growing numbers of assertive and aspirational millennial workforce throughout the world today call for a completely newer approach for HR professionals to succeed at workplace. But what we are embracing to succeed? Ideally a combination of being smart and authentic would be a best approach. But my experience is that today many HR professionals lack the clarity while they grow and hone –up their skills in their professional career journey. The bigger problem that is further jeopardising them is also the lack of support and direction that they receive from their HR leaders. Many HR leaders today lack the maturity of understanding the deeper connect between authenticity in HR professionals and their sustainable role-efficacy in spite of ample research evidences. Let me narrate some compelling research evidences to argue my hypothesis. Researchers Avolio and Walumbwa, (2006) argued that to build enduring organizations and motivate employees to provide superior customer service and create sustainable value for their organizations, they need HR leaders *"who know themselves, who lead with integrity and demand conformance to higher ethical values."*

Robin Ryde and Lisa Sofianos (2014) who authored the book titled "Creating Authentic Organizations: Bring Meaning and Engagement Back to Work." puts it most eloquently; *Authenticity is an anagram of employee engagement – It's not really, but if you want to know what really gets people to lean in, buy in, and get involved, it's the opportunity to do their work in their own way, to learn and grow within an organization they believe in. According to them, "coming years authenticity will be understood as a key variable that separates successful from failing organizations, happy from disengaged workforces, and adaptive from inflexible organizations."*

So the question to ponder over is - can you build an authentic organization without being authentic yourself first?

The most credible survey done for competencies required by HR professionals has been executed by Ross School at the University of Michigan and The RBL Group along with 22 regional partners around the world. One of the most consistent findings of the survey is the competency called "Personal Credibility/Credible Activist". The point to be noted is that this competency a) is the only one that cropped up every year since it was done from 1992 to 2016 (the next one will probably be done in 2019) and b) according to the 2016 report which covered more than 30,000 respondents out of which more than 26,000 respondents were non HR professionals who took this survey as HR's internal clients rated that as the top most competencies that is required by HR professionals to become successful. Let's look at this definition of this competency. It is defined as (2016) *"the extent to which HR professionals achieve the trust and respect they need within the organization to be viewed as valued and valuable partners."*

The components of this competency are as follows:

- Shows a genuine interest in others

- Acts with appropriate balance of confidence and humility

- Seeks to learn from both successes and failures

- Demonstrates personal integrity and ethics

Please look at them and tell me that as an HR professional is it possible for you to become a credible activist without being authentic.

Working For Business VS Working with Business

Ever since Dave Ulrich (1997) professed a "Business Partner" role for HR professional to become effective in their roles, a lot of water have flown down the river Ganges. In my professional career I have played and help sculpture at least three distinct versions about what a business partner role should comprise of and what it should not. But what is saddening is the debate still continues and form seems to have taken over substance in these debates. So let us go the core of the issue. The word Partner is defined by Cambridge Dictionary (2008) as *"to join with another person or organization in a business activity."* I hope my readers are able to get the point here.

While reflecting on this model Dave Ulrich and Wayne Brockbank (2008) wrote *"This approach focuses on HR's role in the creation and maintenance of the capabilities that an organisation must have in order to deliver value to its customers, shareholders, employees and communities."* Deliberating further they opined that *"the human side of the business emerges as a key source of competitive advantage. Therefore, specialists in the processes of human and organisation optimisation become central to business success. These specialists should reside in the HR department as business partners."* In order to deal with this expectation HR professionals have to deal with a) Firstly with their mind-set and b) Secondly by building different capabilities. As you can see until and unless you change your mind-set first, you will not be able to get the direction for the second.

According to one of the most admired HR Guru Josh Bersin (2017), *"As I talk with HR teams around the world, it occurs to me that fundamentally HR professionals have two essential jobs: the "hard things" and the "soft things."* While he defines the "*hard things*" are the "*transactional*" issues at work, "*soft things.*" are the "*people centric*" challenges at work. However he also has been more prophetic when he said *"Most of my research shows that today*

the Soft Things matter more than ever". He goes on further to elaborate his point as follows" you'll see a clear trend: the more time you spend on non-transactional work, the more impact HR will have." I hope my readers will not find it difficult to understand what I am hinting at? In today's world most valuable organizations are driven by their ability to generate newer IPs, and customer centricity. Both are driven by people at the end of the day. And therefore all aspiring HR professionals need to understand, regardless of the business they are engaged in, one can definitely add value to its growth through improved people practices. But to do that as HR professionals we need to change our mind set first. In order to become a successful HR business partner would mean believing in a joint ownership of both the creation and delivery of the people strategy in the organization. This can become a reality only when a HR professional a) believes in the efficacy and value of HR function, b) professional competence to have a strong point of view regarding important people issues that are impacting business, c) articulate them with facts, figures and behavioural–science expertise and evidences, and d) express them in an assertive manner even if it proves unpopular.

Am I asking for too much?

But let's look at the list of unique HR competencies that emerged from 7th (2016) round of the HR competency study (HRCS) which was conducted by the Ross School at the University of Michigan and The RBL Group. I am not looking at all of them but those six, which according to me will enable an HR professional to get a legitimate seat at the table as a true partner from whom advice are sought on people issues by business leaders. These are as follows:

Strategic positioner: Able to position a business to win in its market

Credible activist: Able to build relationships of trust by having a proactive point of view

Paradox navigator: Able to manage tensions inherent in businesses (e.g., be both long and short term, be both top down and bottom up)

Culture and change champion: Able to make change happen and manage organizational culture

Human capital curator: Able to manage the flow of talent by developing people and leaders, driving individual performance, and building technical talent

Total reward steward: Able to manage employee wellbeing through financial and non-financial rewards

The list is long and there are still many more delivery enabling HR competencies that are focused on managing transactional elements of HR. I am not undermining them. But frankly speaking, in order to become a true business partner, HR professionals need to first move from a subservient mind-set of **work for** framework to an enabling and self-confident **work with** framework.

In my article, I have focused on four existing dilemmas that are impacting performance of HR professionals in today's organizational context. Resolving these dilemmas can't wait anymore. Because sweeping changes all around our businesses are creating a new context for success, for both HR profession as well as HR professionals. As aptly put by Dave Ulrich and Wayne Brockbank (2008) *"The reality is that HR professionals must evolve into being the best thinkers in the company about the human and organisation side of the business. The nature of business is dramatically changing. Changes are occurring in virtually every element of the social, political, and economic environments that affect business. They include technology, globalisation, communications, regulations, competitiveness, demographics, shareholder demands and a tight labour market for key talent"*

We need to act and act fast before it is too late. It will need acting from a deep sense of purpose and meaning, and knowing why you are doing what we are doing. As Oscar Wilde once said, *"Be yourself. Everyone else is taken."*

References

1   Aon (n.d). 2018 Trends in Global Employee Engagement. Retrieved June 2, 2018 from Aon Website: https://insights.humancapital.aon.com/talent-rewards-and-performance/engagement-2018?utm_source=Ceros

2   Avolio Bruce J., and Walumbwa Fred O. (2006), Authentic Leadership: Moving HR Leaders to a Higher Level, in Joseph J. Martocchio (ed.) Research in Personnel and Human Resources Management, Volume 25, Emerald Group Publishing Limited, pp.273 – 304.

3   Bersin Josh (2017, October 6). Work: Disrupted... What Should HR Do? The Seven Practices of High-Impact HR. (Blog Post). Retrieved from https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/work-disrupted-what-should-hr-do-seven-practices-josh bersin/?trackingId=OYsr%2F2LkYwBkX48z TPklRA %3D%3D

4   Bhatnagar Jyotsna (2014) :Talent management strategy of employee engagement in Indian ITES employees: Key to retention, Employee Relations, Vol. 29 No. 6, 2007 pp. 640-663.

5   Cambridge Dictionary (n.d.). Meaning of "partner" in the English Dictionary. Retrieved 2nd June, 2018 from Cambridge Dictionary   website: https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/partner

6   Edwards Z. Colette (2014, October 2). Be Yourself and No One Else: Leading with Authenticity. (Blog Post). Retrieved from https://www.hrexchangenetwork.com/hr-learning-development/articles/be-yourself-and-no-one-else-leading-with-authenticity

7   Hlupic Vlatka (2016,October13). HR technology: It's not about people versus machines (Blog Post). Retrieved from http://www.hrmagazine.co.uk/article-details/hr-technology-its-not-about-people-versus-machines

8   Meister Jeanne (2012,August 14). The Future Of Work: Job Hopping Is the 'New Normal' for Millennials (Blog Post). Retrieved from https://www.forbes.com/sites/jeannemeister/2012/08/14/the-future-of-work-job-hopping-is-the-new-normal-for-millennials/2/#33b5fd827fb9

9   Murthy Vivek H (2017). Connecting at Work Available at https://hbr.org/product/connecting-at-work/BG1705-PDF-ENG (Accessed: May 18, 2018)

10   Ospina Daniel (2017, Apr 11).Technology Vs People (Blog Post). Retrieved from https://medium.com/conductal/technology-vs-people-b268056745ee

11   RBL GROUP (n.d.). 2016 HR Competency Model. Retrieved 2nd June, 2018 from website: http://www.apg.pt/downloads/file954_pt.pdf

12   Ryde Robin and Sofianos Lisa (2014) : Creating Authentic Organizations: Bring Meaning and Engagement Back to Work, Kogan Page, London

13   Rogers Bruce (2016, January 7). Why 84% Of Companies Fail At Digital Transformation. Retrieved from Forbes Website: https://www.forbes.com/sites/brucerogers/2016/01/07/why-84-of-companies-fail-at-digital-transformation/2/#3c5d06483193

14   Rigoni Brandon and Nelson Bailey (2016, August 30th). Few Millennials Are Engaged at Work. Retrieved from Gallup Website:http://news.gallup.com/businessjournal/195209/few-millennials-engaged-work.aspx

References

15   Singh Namrata (2015,September16). Only 12% employees spend 10 years in a job. (Blog Post). Retrieved from https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/business/india-business/Only-12-employees-spend-10-years-in-a-job/articleshow/48979609.cms

16   Ulrich, Dave (1997). Human resource champions: The next agenda for adding value and delivering results. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.

17   Ulrich Dave and Brockbank Wayne, (2008, November25).The business partner model: 10 years on - Lessons learned. Retrieved from http://www.hrmagazine.co.uk/article-details/the-business-partner-model-10-years-on-lessons-learned

18   United States Department of Labour : Bureau of Labour Statistics. (2016, September 22). Employee Tenure in 2016. (Economic News Release) Retrieved from https://www.bls.gov/news.release/tenure.nr0.htm

Are We Losing People Focus or Focus on Design?
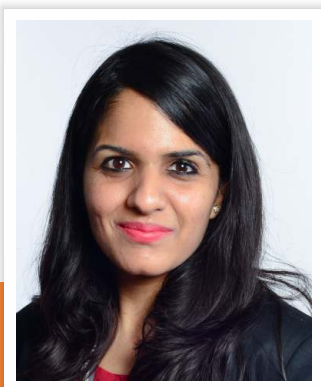
Vidya Santhanam is an Organization Development practitioner, Executive Coach and learner at heart. Over the past 15 years, her value has been in the design and deployment interventions around Culture and Leadership building. She headed the OD and Leadership building team at Mindtree Ltd. and more recently has set out on her entrepreneurial journey in the HR Tech space.

She is a graduate in Commerce from Ethiraj College Chennai and a PG Dip in Human Resources from Xavier Institute of Management and Entrepreneurship, Bangalore and certified by the Coaching Foundation of India (CFI).

Vidya Santhanam

Are We Losing People Focus or Focus on Design?

In a nutshell

As a HR professional who has spent considerable time in talent management, there comes the metaphorical moment of facing the mirror and ask, 'What does future look like for me?'

Business stalwarts have called out that HR could be dead by 2020, and the real value is beyond the more obvious reporting, coordinating and running countless appraisals and surveys.

There have been multiple inflection points to a HR professional's role. I remember how being operational executors was celebrated, the time when compliance ruled! Then came the era of designers of people practices be it top talent programs, driving culture or riding on the power of praise. We probably are at this stage and sharpening the saw as we speak.

Then there is a lesser known tomorrow. With Automation, Augmentation and Autonomous making the rounds, the prediction is more than 70% of our roles can be displaced by our friendly CO- Bots, leaving us with time to exercise the higher order skills which we most wanted.

This article is not about blame and shame, rather an experiential point of view on how HR professionals the crafters and designers of practices can design to the future.

> *My quest to make an impact, therefore I am*
>
> *I start my day with meetings and bedlam*
>
> *The panel to coordinate, the appraisal woe*
>
> *The award function's day after, we must put on a good show*
>
> *Hmm, what's wrong in that team? The scores are low*
>
> *I need to get that report out of the door!*
>
> *It's tea time, I need a break*
>
> *I see a huddle, smiles! A B'day, a cake!*
>
> *I stop by to speak on careers and growth*
>
> *Oh dear, panic bells, it's a resignation we loathe*
>
> *Let me step in (I assure) to do my best*
>
> *I put all my learnings to test*
>
> *– An ode to the HR Manager*

People are my greatest Asset. Happier People, Happier Customers. People engagement is our top priority. We've heard and read these subject lines time and again.

There is definitely truth to the matter with billions of dollars being invested in people programs year on year. Then, there's always the quintessential engagement survey which paints a very different picture, leaving us baffled with a ton of power point graphs and charts. In search of the holy grail we ask ourselves– SO WHERE ARE THESE ENGAGEMENT DOLLARS REALLY GOING?

The debate is not whether organizations are losing people focus, but to really ask ourselves is there a need to challenge the way we think and act when it comes to designing people practices.

Here are three E's which we as a community can keep in mind as we adorn the very important hat as HR professionals:

Envision future models

Every company prides itself of High achiever's club, Thank god It's Monday Jams, Wellness programs or Learning investments. Each of these are important and serve a certain purpose today. If we envision the organization of the future, which would be interlaced with a virtual, fluid and intergenerational workforce it would force us to re think and re wire.

Let's illustrate this by taking an example to the design of a First-Time manager program. The reason for investments is quite obvious. If we invert the pyramid, the touch points people have is with their microcosm of teams. Managers, peers, reportees who are the family like structures.

The intense research done Google's Project Aristotle looked at 180 teams, over 2 years to look at whether there are ways to build the perfect team. While the study had many detailed findings, a key point which stood out is that team success came to those work together and where people respect each. They called it psychological safety to 'say something' without facing repercussions.

The design of a first-time manager program would probably look at competencies which are required for managers to be effective in their roles. Most likely, we would throw in the magic formula of giving and receiving feedback, negotiation skills, recognition or goal setting.

The design of tomorrow shall challenge us to think beyond structuring programs around principles of management. It would probably force us to think about first time managers to be coaches, overcoming unconscious bias, displaying empathy, understanding psychology, building long term relationships, ethical decision making or displaying emotional balance with teams.

Experience, at Scale

When organizations are small, everybody knows everybody. Caffeine conversations fuel people pulse, across the cube decisions solve problems. Happy faces are testimony to Best Workplaces.

With growth comes the need to elevate and create levels. Decision making becomes peck order, and the feeling of distance sets in. HR teams are divided 1:500 to drive engagement, to know people beyond names and employee numbers.

If we look at designs of today, they are plagued by mass commoditization of practices leads to generic / broad brush approaches to drive engagement with people. It's a trade off between coverage vs customization, where the greater the scale the impact of customization decreases. The challenge of experience at scale kicks in, leading to a diminishing return of impact. **Business leaders wish to increase impact at scale!**

As we think through the design of tomorrow, the intriguing book Small Data, by Martin Lindstorm comes to mind. The author takes readers through a journey of uncovering trends by painstaking attention to tiny clues. There are engaging examples of spending sufficient time in learning and understanding cultures and sub cultures before designing brand and marketing campaigns. If we draw a parallel to our lives, people focused organizations look for micro patterns to help design what best works.

As practice designers, it's a rare combination to personalize experience at scale, by looking below the iceberg on what kinds of people co-exist in an organization.

With AI being the future, the ability of organizations to deep sense employees to engage and personalize experiences is already a reality. Chatbots interacting with employees to get frequent check ins, rather than survey led approaches.

The Entrepreneurial HR

"Is it a painkiller or a vitamin"? The classic question which every investor has for start-ups.

Start ups have a unique way of functioning. They are frugal, they strive very hard to build the right team, are constantly searching for product market fits.

The good old saying, the market always win. They don't jump into building products/ services and start with a Minimal Viable or the Minimal Lovable product before going all out.

Imagine if each HR professional is an entrepreneur living on a shoe string budget. This would drive very different behaviors to make something which people would love and get the feeling of 'product market fit' when people come looking for it, not because they have no choice. It requires a deep investment to be closest to their customers, in this case, employees or stakeholders (internal and external).

Before rolling out practices, they may just start with creating the 5 slider on:

- What is the problem they really wish to solve?
- Is it really a problem?
- How is it different from what they have done in the past?
- What is the value proposition, in other words, what will the employee gain by being part of the policy / program?
- What is the solution? How is it different?
- How will this practice scale with scale?
- What would keep users engaged? What will make them return to it?
- Most important – is it really simple for people to understand?

As a HR professional will recommend the need to identify the **real problems** which are specific to the organization, rather than lift and shift from practices elsewhere.

As we move towards 2020 and beyond, it's a great time for organizations to really experiment and exchange learnings with the future of work, workplace, workforce undergoing a change. While the rise of the gig, Gen Zs, Skilling for the future and AI being themes which are debated in conferences, somewhere out there, is the new HR thinker, the believer and creator who is looking to create memorability.

Reference Read Ups

https://www.drtoddhall.com/post/to-improve-employee-engagement-focus-on-building-bonds-of-trust-not-external-incentives

Small Data by Martin Lindstorm

The Lean Start Up Eric Ries

Project Aristotle: Re work https://rework.withgoogle.com/print/guides/5721312655835136/

Stress, Money and Gender –
What Ails Society, Holds Back HR

Alamelu Dev is Co-founder & Principal consultant of RISE, a global human resources and talent development consulting firm based in Washington DC. RISE supports HR departments with strategy development, implementation of change initiatives & talent development services. www.riseglobaltalent.com

Over the last decade, Alamelu has held key roles in HR and talent development and successfully developed organizational capacity both at headquarters and the country offices of PSI and FINCA. Prior to her roles in international development, Alamelu worked as a strategic HR consultant in the private sector and held HR roles in the IT sector.

Alamelu is passionate about leveling the playing field of work and empowering people to be their best self. She holds an MBA in Human Resources & Information systems, is a certified HeartMath® trainer on building emotional resilience and a certified Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® facilitator. She has travelled widely across Africa and Asia for work and currently lives in the suburbs of Washington DC.

Alamelu Dev

Those Disconcerting Questions

Has marketing lost focus on the customer? Has the legal profession lost focus on the spirit of the law?

We don't often come across such headlines.
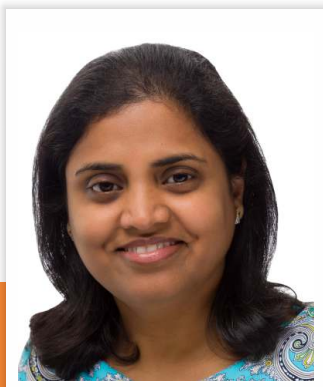
No other profession in recent years has had to justify its existence like the HR profession. Recall the 2005 article from the Fast company – 'Why we hate HR'[i] , and a decade later the 2015 HBR article on – 'It's time to blow up the HR function'[ii]. Several HR practitioners from Dave Ulrich's 'Don't blow up HR, appreciate and evolve it'[iii] to Josh Bersin's 'It's time to embolden - not blow up - HR'[iv] posed excellent defenses.

However, the very nature of such questions being posed decade after decade is disconcerting. It also deters from the mounting evidence that people are the key assets of an organization and the value of intentional strategies in managing that asset. While HR has had what seems like a perpetual existential crisis, the function has evolved and provided increased strategic value to the business in various areas such as human capital strategy, strategic workforce planning, people analytics, leadership development etc. It's also an indisputable fact now that employee engagement is a critical driver of organizational performance.

While I'm an ardent defender of the profession, I'm realistic that the HR profession has its share of issues just like any other profession that has had to evolve with technology and business changes. Therefore, what will be a more helpful dialogue to engage in, is to dig deeper into some of the biases and challenges impacting the profession being set up for success and what we can do about them.

I would also argue that the focus or lack thereof on people cannot be generalized to the profession but is unique to an HR function in an organization. Some key influences on the function within the organization is the culture of the organization and maturity level of senior leadership (i.e. Uber vs Google), the life cycle stage and business challenges of the organization (existential vs growth mode), the value of the function within an organization (i.e. who the function reports to CEO, COO, CFO or further down the hierarchy), the complexity of the function and the credibility and seasoning of the functionaries performing the function.

Given the focus is on setting the profession up for success, I am going to focus on the factors that are reasonably within HR's remit to influence such as the complexity of the function and the credibility and seasoning of the functionaries performing the function.

In that regard, three factors stand out. They are laid out below along with some solutions on what can be done about it.

It's a Complex Function

Consider this:

A colleague who is a 25-year veteran general manager of a global organization with experience launching programs in challenging locations was tasked with leading the global HR function of the organization and confessed it's the hardest job he has ever done.

I recently facilitated a roundtable discussion of over 30 global HR practitioners on the topic of prevention of sexual harassment in the international development sector. When sharing her experience one HR leader urged others to think about what resources can be offered to victims. She shared that sometimes HR can get caught up in ensuring a fair process and internal and external compliance requirements that we can forget about the wellness of the victim.

The HR function has the unique role of aligning the business and the people agenda – wherein the business has huge external pressures and people react unpredictably to pressure. HR also has the unenviable role of managing competing masters (staff and management) and competing interests (compliance and empathy) which are challenging to straddle.

This is amply evidenced in the SHRM competency model[v], which spans 9 main competencies, with each comprising of 6 to 16 sub-competencies. The 9 main competencies are relationship management, ethical practice, HR technical knowledge, business acumen, critical evaluation, global and cultural effectiveness, leadership and navigation, consultation and communication.

As every HR Professional will acknowledge they sometimes experience the least appealing qualities of people and see them at the most vulnerable moments of their life or career. Dealing with emotions and reactions is, therefore, a big part of the HR role, and constitutes 70% of the competencies listed above.

Over the course of a week, an HR Professional may face varied situations from advising management on restructures and reduction in force to advising employees dealing with job loss, to dealing with employees facing a life-threatening illness or to advise on inter-personal conflict. Each interaction is important and unique to the receiver and needs to be treated as such.

Consequently, there results in significant energy drain for an HR professional in dealing with a wide variety of emotions on a continuous basis. Additionally, some of these situations are so emotionally charged that they cannot be easily forgotten once the HR Professional leaves work.

Research[vi] has shown that emotions trigger the autonomic nervous system and, in turn, trigger stress hormones that cause many harmful effects on the brain and body.

While the competencies detail that HR Professionals are required to 'lead the organization through adversity with resilience and tenacity (competency on leadership & navigation)', 'withstand political pressure when implementing and enforcing policies and procedure (ethical practice competency)', there is none on the HR Professional managing stress and building their own emotional resilience.

Like the rule in an aircraft, wear your oxygen mask before assisting others, HR professionals should learn to manage their own stress and build emotional resilience in order to help navigate the organization and staff through adversity.

If not, we are at risk of becoming the emergency room nurse that tends to lose empathy. We also need to then expend more energy to defend our actions!

What can be done about it?

As the role becomes complex, managing stress and building emotional resilience is a key competency for HR professionals

It's under-resourced

Talk to a group of HR professionals across sectors and a common complaint will emerge - their departments/functions are under-resourced. While many support functions experience this, it is particularly telling in HR functions.

Most studies reveal that the career track for the CEO position draws heavily from business, finance or marketing roles. In fact, in a recent survey done by the Korn & Ferry institute[vii] when looking at the career track of the small number of women CEOs of fortune 500 companies, none of them had started out in HR, a profession that is disproportionally female.

This does not bode well for the HR function since when CEOs have not experienced the function as a practitioner; they have less appreciation of what is needed to adequately staff the function. HR leaders, therefore, need to expend more energy in justifying their resource needs.

Like a parent who knows they need to take care of their sitter who takes care of their child, leaders need to be mindful of this simple rule – take care of your HR staff, they will take care of your employees, who will take care of your customers.

What can be done about it?

Adequately resource the HR function - take care of your HR staff, they will take care of your employees, who will take care of your customers.

Gender balance is reversed

The HR function globally tends to be dominated by women. In the United States, 76% of HR Managers are women, according to 2014 statistics from the US Department of Labor[viii].

On the flip side, women hold a very small percentage of CEO roles. Women CEOs of the S&P 500 is a mere 5%[ix] and has languished in single digits for decades. Additionally, as mentioned above very few CEOs have a career path from HR.

While HR leads executive leadership development for the organization, it has failed in developing the profession's executive presence.

What can be done about it?

Develop diversity in the HR profession and in the C-suite. Include the HR function in the career pathway to CEO / high potentials.

Organizations will benefit from having an intentional strategy to build diversity in the HR function and in C-suite roles. As we know, diverse teams contribute to improved innovation[x].

Another strategy is to include the HR function as part of the career pathway for CEOs and a role for high potentials to rotate through. This will improve senior leaders' appreciation and understanding of the function. This may also open the potential of more HR professionals aspiring for the CEO role. This is not far-fetched as it sounds, as a study by Ulrich and Filler on the prevalence of 14 leadership traits across c-suite roles, found that except for COOs, CHROs had traits that were the most similar to those of the CEO.[xi]

Therefore, having more HR leaders assume CEO roles will fix two problems, improve the credibility of the HR function and produce more women CEOs!

References

[i]Hammonds, Keith - https://www.fastcompany.com/53319/why-we-hate-hr

[ii]Harvard Business Review -https://hbr.org/product/harvard-business-review-julyaugust-2015/BR1507-MAG-ENG

[iii]Ulrich, Dave - http://www.hrmagazine.co.uk/article-details/dave-ulrich-dont-blow-up-hr-appreciate-and-evolve-it

[iv]Bersin, Josh - https://www.shrm.org/hr-today/news/hr-magazine/pages/1015-bold-hr.aspx

[v] https://www.shrm.org/learningandcareer/career/pages/shrm-competency-model.aspx

[vi]https://www.health.harvard.edu/staying-healthy/understanding-the-stress-response

https://www.heartmath.com/articles/inside-stressing-out-what-works-and-what-doesnt-in-the-face-of-stress/

[vii]Stevenson, Jane and Orr, Evelyn - https://hbr.org/2017/11/we-interviewed-57-female-ceos-to-find-out-how-more-women-can-get-to-the-top

[viii]https://www.bls.gov/cps/cpsaat39.pdf

[ix]Catalyst. Women CEOs of the S&P 500. New York: Catalyst, June 1, 2018. http://www.catalyst.org/knowledge/women-ceos-sp-500

[x]Frost, Ben: The Gender Pay Gap - https://www.kornferry.com/institute/download/download/id/17733/aid/1246

[xi]Harvard Business Review - https://hbr.org/2014/12/why-chief-human-resources-officers-make-great-ceos

People Focus
Two
Conversations

▶ Whose job is it anyway?

▶ The People Touch: HR Alone Cannot Do It

Whose job is it anyway?

Pratik Kumar has been associated with Wipro since 1991 and is a member of Wipro's senior leadership team, closely associated with Wipro's growth over the years.

Pratik spent his initial years in the IT business before taking over the mantle of HR leadership of the Corporation in 2002.

Pratik assumed leadership of Wipro Infrastructure Engineering (WIN) as its CEO in July of 2010. In the last few years, WIN has taken rapid stride in establishing its footprints in emerging as well as other growth markets and has also focused its efforts in scaling up its nascent business in Aerospace & Defence and Water.

Pratik is member of the Board of Wipro Enterprises (P) Limited as well as member of the Corporate Executive Council of Wipro. Besides his business role, Pratik also provides leadership oversight to the HR function of Wipro Enterprises Limited. He is an active member of the various industry bodies.

Pratik is an alumnus of XLRI, Jamshedpur.

P S Srinivasan is a seasoned HR professional with over 30 years of corporate HR experience and over a decade of consulting and coaching experience.

His corporate experience spans across versatile industries such as mining, engineering, automobile, hospitality, consumer durables, IT and education. In the last 15 years of his corporate experience, he held leadership positions with global leaders like IBM, Whirlpool, ITC and VDO-SIEMENS with job responsibilities at global, regional and country levels.

Through his consulting work, Srini helps entrepreneurial organisations achieve scale and stability. He is also a specialist in the area of Employee Relations, having led several ER projects in his consulting work.

In the last decade, Srini has also added value to several senior executives as an Executive Coach having been certified as a Coach from Coaching foundation India.

Pratik Kumar

P S Srinivasan

Whose job is it anyway?

Srini caught up with Pratik to get his perspective on the contentious question – whose job is HR. Srini got Pratik to answer his questions wearing both is hats – an HR leader and a business leader.

Q: Having led the HR function for a good part of your career and then transitioned into a business leadership role you are probably in a good position to share your valuable insights from both sides of the table about the current state of the HR profession. Specifically, whose job is to focus on people? Is it the line or HR?

This stereotype that the HR function is the sole custodian of all that matters to employees in an organization is little flawed.

Of course, the function has a role to play - it is expected to ensure that from values, culture and people philosophy standpoint, there is an alignment and these are enabled and reinforced in the organization through appropriate programs, polices and initiatives.

However, any attempt to assume a role which is larger than that, is to me a bit pretentious.

It's my been my philosophy right from the time I had my initiation into HR , that eventually people mandate has to be owned & led by leaders who are tasked to manage employees - that position hasn't changed and I do not think that is going to change any time in the future either.

Good news is that people have understood, what enables organization success is the quality of team you have. From my experience, when managers do not take responsibility for the human resources with them and consider it as someone else's task there is a clear lack of ownership and buck-passing.

So clearly it is the line which must lead – there are no two ways to it.

Q: So what should the HR role be in terms of making it happen?

It is a little layered answer.

At the very base level you have to make sure the basic systems and the processes are there for an organisation to be able to scale and grow. Speaking about our organization, when I joined the IT part of the business we were couple of 100 people and today the IT part of Wipro's business is almost close to 1,70,,000 people. Our part of the business is about 20,000 people. Now there is a clear role to ensure that the organization is not at a risk for the lack of systems, processes and policies deployment as it begins to grow & scale up; there is a risk of business continuity at the very basic level which has to be addressed and mitigated.

In other words, a key role of the function is to mitigate all possible risks which could be arising on the people front, be it in terms of people risk, reputation risk, leadership risk, process, system and policy breakdown risks.

Having said this, I think there is a larger role that HR has to play and here I'm not merely referring to having a robust leadership funnel or the ability to get the right kind of people in time, which is understood and is a given. In a fast-moving scenario where things keep changing and evolving, HR has a crucial role to manage and impact change. I think it has a significantly larger role of a change agent as things churn around.

The function has the task cut out in making the organization gear up to embrace the changes and keep pace with it. So what does it imply? The competences and the skills required in the organization need to be constantly refreshed and re-vitalized. Organization's ability to retool, rejig, redeploy and re-skill will be a big differentiator and HR can provide that edge.

The function has a key role of driving the change agenda for an organisation. This to me is very fundamental and it has to be led from the top. Whoever is the HR leader has to be able to drive that right down the organization.

That to me is significant from a leadership stand point and is a big impactful role.

The next layer is to take a long term point of view while making decisions. For example, when we look at incentives and models of rewarding what compensation philosophy do we run with? There is very often a dissonance here. While organizations spout about the need to take a long-term view of business, very often in its actions, it does not look beyond its nose. For example, your compensation mechanism may be based on what you did today and does not allow you to think beyond a quarter; while organizations make people believe that what matters is long-term sustenance of the business, the hard measures are on a cascade from week to week & month to month. This conditioning does not allow to deliver on what it otherwise espouses.

Last, the function cannot remain in an isolated bubble. Thankfully most progressive organizations have HR as a partner, sharing a 'seat at the table'. This also means that the function should seize the opportunity to make a difference, contribute constructively and be able to shape the thinking around the table. So what would it imply? It would need the function and individuals to develop the skills and perspective to go beyond what you believe is expected to be done by HR. You cannot ring-fence yourself to your goals & objectives alone.

HR needs to build insights for the organization to remain competitive. In consumer space, customer insights are drawn from every single engagement. Every interaction with our customers tells us something about his or her likes, dislikes and preferences - that funnels back into the design of our products, services and solutions.

The above applies to HR as much. In organizations with large employee base - even if there are about two or three touch points with an employee on a week to week basis; you are talking about million such data points. What do we do with all these data points? There is a tremendous opportunity to drive insights out of that and help a more targeted decision making right through the organization.

Q: As you look back in your career and the work you have done, what sets the good organisations apart, from an HR stand point?

In my parlance there are good organizations and then there are average or poorly run organizations

For a good, solid organization which has a sustained track record of success, having a culture which is shared deep and wide, a base of past and present employees which associate with the organization with pride – this doesn't get achieved unless the organization did a few things right especially on the people front; it needs to deeply believe in its people philosophy ; demonstrate it consistently at the leadership level and be committed to it in an unflinching manner without getting side tracked by what happens in the short term - month on month and quarter on quarter basis.

For me, the one yard stick I would use to measure an organization and its culture is the consistency of character - how often does it put on a different garb simply because a couple of quarters did not go well. There is a certain consistency which still needs to remain. Does your basic philosophy begin to have shades of change? If it does then that to me it does a plenty of damage in the longer run.

The reality is, there are not too many bright examples of this kind - we will still find that they are more by exception. When I look back and reflect on my organization experience, if we were able to do a few things right, could we have done it without the larger leadership and organization support? Absolutely not. Did we enjoy complete trust and confidence that we could go ahead and do what we believed is right with no fear of the consequence – absolutely. I go on many forums and tell people that you should have the courage to push back and be value driven, and then I wonder if it is simpler for me to say it because I was groomed in an environment which allowed me to actually do that .What if it was an environment which did not naturally lend that kind of support ? I don't have that reference point, so it's not easy for me to say, but I know for sure that it would have been incredibly difficult.

Good organizations cannot continue to sustain, grow and succeed without having deep commitment and belief in its people and people processes led by HR. And no HR function can be successful, if it does not carry the trust and confidence of the senior most person in the organization. You can't deliver "despite". It just doesn't happen

Q: You are clearly suggesting that HR stays close to its philosophy and does what matters. How do we reconcile this with the current trend of the overload of initiatives that HR brings to the CEO's table? Is there a case for HR to better understand business priorities, understand the lay of the land before launching various initiatives?

There is only one caveat here.

We are working with a set of enthusiastic, creative, eager and smart men and women. So we must encourage them to think out of the box, come up with ideas even if it appears crazy to start with. I have believed in the approach that HR should try out things - and at the leadership level use the experience and judgment to feel the progress, sense the impact, anticipate any likely downside and fix it before it spins out of control. The leader while allowing for creativity and innovation also needs to keep an eye on the outcomes.

If an organisation creates the space and platform to try out new things and allows the room to experiment, allows for failures and to learn from them - then that's a good place to be in.

Q: Having successfully managed HR over a long time, you have also made the transition into the business leadership role and have been leading it successfully for over 7 years now. So what makes for this successful transition?

I think I was lucky and I was very fortunate to get this opportunity.

Frankly, this was part of my discussion even before I took up the corporation HR leadership role. I stepped up to play that role in 2002. I was about 35 years old, so I had this discussion with my manager that I have a long road ahead and difficult to see me playing this role for the remaining of my tenure. I expressed my desire to play a business role in future and he was very encouraging.

My best learning happened in that role. While I actually carried the title of the HR leader - I pretty much had a free run to get into any aspect of the organisation or the business that I wanted. Having worked in close quarters with absolutely spectacular leaders had a deep influence on me – one learnt so much by merely observing them. One experienced what MBA Schools typically would not teach.That's the reason I say I'm very fortunate. It does take a lot of things to come together - there are however certain necessary conditions or pre-requisites to make that happen.

A, you should have a desire to play that role for the right reason. That to me is very important. B, when the opportunity comes, you will have to raise your hand and you can't be thinking that someone's going to pick you and offer it on a platter.

The only other point I would like to make, which I have shared internally as well with my colleagues in HR is that one should not see it as a point of arrival, simply because you have an opportunity to move from HR to business. This is the new kind of narrative I'm seeing at least in HR circles. I don't think it's right because it's certainly not what it is made out to be - if you want to actually make that shift, do it for the right reason and not because suddenly your visiting card will carry a title which is more fanciful.

Q: What is it like to be in HR today?

I firmly believe that there couldn't have been a better time for the HR function - it provides the opportunity to make a huge difference and an impact.

People should believe that they have a fantastic platform which allows them to do something deep and meaningful within the portals of HR.

This is truly HR's moment.

The People Touch
HR Alone Cannot Do It

With over 50 years of active service in the field of HR and OD, Mr. Aroon Joshi is perhaps one of the most experienced and senior HR professionals in the country today.

Aroon has worked in diverse companies both in the public and private sector as well as academics and in the development sector. He is the former Group HR Head of the RPG Group and former Director and Board member of Cadbury India Ltd. A thought leader in HR and OD, he has been a Visiting Professor at IIM, Ahmedabad and Bangalore. He is a founding member of the Indian Society for Applied Behavioural Sciences and continues to contribute to the same.

Mr. Aroon Joshi continues to work as a CEO Coach and consultant in Leadership Development, OD and Organization Restructuring. Aroon of course continues to find time for a game of golf in Pune, where he lives.

V. J. Rao, an alumnus of the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, has been an operational HR professional for 40 years with experience in a wide range of industries such as engineering, projects, FMCG, IT and ITeS.

He was Head of HR of GE's joint venture in India, Godrej GE Appliances Ltd and later Head of HR of India's largest IT Company, TCS. He helped TCS obtain a PCMM level-4 rating in 2001, which was a first in the world. He was the Director of the Tata Management Training Centre, headed Tata Administrative Services (TAS) and senior-level recruitment in the Tata Group and was responsible for several initiatives in leadership development in the group.

V. J. Rao was a Member of the Board of Tata Auto Plastics and also Country Head, HR and Head, Global Talent Management at Suzlon Energy. He is currently a Leadership Coach and an Executive Director of the totus HR School.

Aroon Joshi
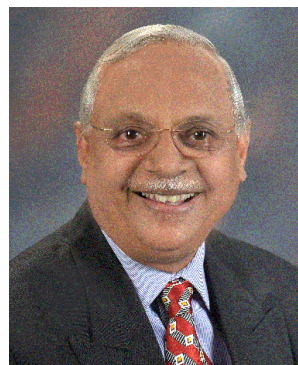
V.J. Rao

The People Touch: HR Alone Cannot Do It

VJ Rao caught up with Aroon to get his views on the topic or people focus, a subject, close to his heart.

Q: You have had a ring side view of the HR function for over 50 years and have also been actively involved in shaping the function. How do you see the evolution of the function and its current state?

In India, HR began as a profession that was in a way thrust on companies and organizations.

Therefore the origins were in some part related to legislation immediately post-independence. The Factories Act 1948 mandated the need for a "Welfare Officer" in certain size of Companies. This led to the appointment of such officers who were also expected to play the role of engaging with and understanding employees and their issues and ensure redressal of the same through appropriate representation with the managements of companies. This being the role requirement these welfare officers walked around the shop floor, spoke to employees, knew their concerns and issues and even participated in their family activities. This was part of their everyday routine. In some companies their offices were right in the middle of the shop floor for easy access. Similarly for the individual worker, given the socio economic environement at that time, these welfare officers along with the production and other shop floor managers were seen as guides, mentors and well-wishers with whom they could share concerns and seek advice. Welfare officers soon gave way to Personnel and Industrial Relations Managers who also continued this tradition and in many progressive companies even appointed Social workers to visit families and counsel the workmen and families on everything from the demands of an industrial culture to being more regular at work and help employees and their families deal with issues of indebtedness, health and alcoholism etc.

Unions too contributed significantly in this engagement processes as they were in constant touch with their members and were aware of the ground realities of their members and families.

All of this led to a certain level of engagement and closeness to the employees.

One of the first things that disrupted this paradigm from an HR function perspective was the creation of two "verticals" within the people function. The creation of HR as a separate, often perceived as an "elitist" function that had a development orientation towards people and Industrial Relations Managers were perceived as the "people engagers". This created a role distinction where the HR managers were probably not expected to play the role of engaging with people on a day to day basis. This got further diluted with the creation of COEs – Centres of Expertise- Talent Acquisition, Compensation and Benefits, Learning and Development, Organization development, Employee Relations, Leadership Development and so on. As these COEs developed the role of engaging with people then came within the ambit of only the Employee Engagement or Employee Relations COE and other parts of HR did not perceive this as part of their role. Worse, there was little mobility between these verticals within HR and the appreciation of the need for engaging at a broader level got lost.

So today, if there is a loss of people focus even within HR it is also because HR on one hand may not even see it as a critical part of their role and maybe given the complexities and challenges that companies face, they do not even demand the same from HR.

Another reason could be that the nature of decision making within HR has changed. It is today highly data driven and based on analysis that is received not necessarily through human interaction but through presentations and mails. The need for therefore taking in inputs from front level employees through face to face interactions and listening to their perspectives has reduced.

Q: How have size, scale, complexity and a multicultural workforce affected relationships?

The size and spread of organizations has meant that HR representatives are not able to visit the hundreds of locations where the company may have its offices. Often the employees are in their client sites. This has led to use of different kinds of communication and engagement through Videos, Webinars, Skype, etc. These tend to be occasions that are for meetings and discussions and many a time do not lend themselves to engagement at deeper levels and not as effective as face to face engagement.

Added to this is the fact that over years, the role of unions has diminished and their own engagement with their members has become more transactional. The loss of power has impacted their ability to influence managements and fight actively for their members. This void therefore needed to be filled by their line managers and HR managers which is perhaps not happenning at the level at which it needs to. The fact is that a majority of today's HR managers do NOT wish to engage with workmen or with unions.

Q: Therefore has HR become a lot more business focussed?

Let me be clear. A lot of the above taking place in HR has been in response to the Business requirements.

Businesses have grown tremendously in size, scope and complexity, the pressures of the market place have become more acute and the need to respond quickly and with agility has become critical. At the same time, technology and robotics has made significant impact on work and working. Added to this is the expectations of the new generation of employees, shorter employment cycles and need for autonomy and convenience. Therefore the contractual, legal, social and other boundaries have changed dramatically and these have also impacted the overall focus on people.

As an example it is not unusual to find companies having over 50% contract labour and 40 % staff on the rolls of outsourcing companies like Team Lease

etc. They are all likely to be highly mobile and likely to leave when they secure permanent jobs elsewhere and therefore actively engaging with such employees is more for smooth functioning rather than for their wellbeing or their long term development. In the interest of costs and flexibility these could be just in time appointments for specific projects after which they leave. Social media has also changed the way relationships are looked at. Employees thus possibly do not NEED to develop relationships or support systems at work. Their fall back on the company is ONLY when there are unexpected contingencies and hence their need to actively engage with their Company or HR has also gone down.

So the organizational stance towards its employees has itself changed quite dramatically. The emphasis of the engagement is more on keeping them productive as long as they are available rather than a longer time orientation towards their career and development.

Q: What would you describe as the state of relationships in industry today?

Given this, HR seems to have shifted its stance to being more accepted as "business partners" rather than employee champions. In their anxiety to be accepted by business as partners HR often succumbs to pressures from business and forgets its role as employee champions and gate keepers of employee wellbeing. Not that business partnering is not important. It is. The balance however seems to have shifted.

What has happened is therefore possibly the way it needed to be. Employees and Employers have different expectations and do not possibly need active engagement nowadays. Employees also seem to be happy as long as HR finds ways to make their life easier. Their emotional support possibly comes from elsewhere.

It is all the more ironical that all of this has happened, as today people are the centre of companies - given the growth of the IT, ITES, Financial and other service sectors and that the companies are doing all that they can to attract and retain employees.

Q: Therefore in today's context is the "people touch" really required?

My feeling is that it is today more critical than it ever was. If you look at the stresses and strains that people undergo today, the 24 *7 workstyles, both partners working, bring up children, the travel involved and the social pressures, the depression and suicide rates, companies need to be much more in touch with their employees. Take the recent example of Google employees taking a stand that the company should not participate in the use of AI and other advanced technologies for use in the development of advanced weapons of war for the United States government. The Company accepted their view and said that it would not participate in that programme. So employees are now asking companies to walk the talk on what the company believes in or advocates. But how many companies would have such employee sensing mechanisms and how seriously do they take them? Given the huge size and scale, how do companies capture such voices?

Similarly, take Diversity and Inclusion as an example. Even 25 years back, most employees in an organization were from local areas around the location of work. Today even in India there is huge mobility and each work place has employees from different states, regions, ethnicity, etc. On top of that is the multi-national and multicultural workforce that is the need of the day, working across time zones, languages and cultures. How do we get such huge diverse workforces to understand and work with each other? The demands of each culture are so different. How do companies become sensitive to, engage with and find solutions to each and every subset of the workforce? How do you even capture the tremendous capability and capacity that exists within such employees for the growth of the Company?

Q: In this context what should be the role of organizations and the HR function in dealing with employees?

The truth is that HR alone cannot do it.

HR has to go back and educate and insist that Managers are responsible for their people. They must take charge of their people, engage with them, develop them and fire them too, when necessary. It is not the role of HR to engage with all employees, or conduct the performance reviews of all employees or even fire people. HR has to go back to its role as a specialist on people matters that helps and supports line managers but does not take over the role of the line managers. This was what HR was always supposed to be. In its anxiety to be perceived as a good business partner, it has taken over these roles but is unable to make an impact because of the complexities and scale of today's organizations. Sadly today, even very senior HR leaders do not seem to see and advocate this distinction.

HR leaders in organizations today therefore must pause and reflect on what they see as their purpose and role in the organization and re-evaluate and redesign their roles to be more effective people champions. There is a huge opportunity for organizations and HR to play a significant role in a world where the boundaries between work and life outside of work are dissolving at a rapid pace.

People Focus
Embracing Technology with Grace

- ▶ Being Human in the Age of AI – can we draw a line?
- ▶ HR vs. TECH or HR + TECH?
- ▶ Rebooting HR: mass customization for the digital age

Being Human in the Age of AI
Can We Draw a Line?

Dr Saundarya Rajesh, the founder President of AVTAR group is inspirational in her approach to tackling systemic issues.

Her first entrepreneurial venture, AVTAR Career Creators, a recruitment and diversity consulting firm emphasises the importance of women at the workplace. After a research project in 2005 revealed the large untapped potential of the Indian Woman Professional, Saundarya increased her focus on gender. In 2011 she set up FLEXI Careers India to focus on women transitioning into a career and in 2017, she extended this into education with Project PUTHRI - India's first ever developmental project that seeks to create Career Intentionality among underprivileged girl students.

She has deservedly received multiple awards: Nari Shakthi Ambassador for the Ministry for Women & Child Development in 2018, #100Women Achiever of India in 2016; the 25 Women Transforming India Award by Niti Aayog in 2016, the FCCI FLO Women Entrepreneur of the Year award in 2012; and the SCOPE Women Exemplar award in 2006, to name a few.
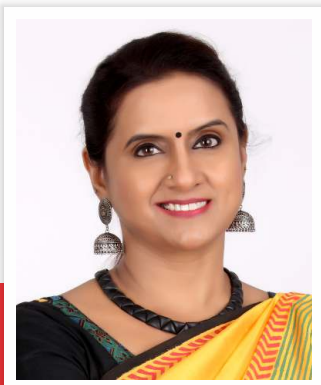
Dr. Saundarya Rajesh

Being Human in the Age of AI – Can We Draw a Line?

In a nutshell

In an era where Artificial Intelligence (AI) has irrevocably penetrated the lives of people, especially users of the new age economy, an important question is this – how much is too much? In today's times, the HR function is no longer limited to managing people and their aspirations to deliver business results. It is managing ecosystems of human-machine co-existence and deploying AI technologies to obtain results, solve problems and enrich employee experiences at their workplaces. How does a human, more specifically a human resource professional, draw the line between utilising technology to create efficient work and actually losing the empathy that the function is built on? Can the HR function strike fine balances between the 'transactional' and the 'emotional' while using AI to deliver experiences? Is it possible to really be human in the age of AI?

> " The real risk with artificial intelligence isn't malice but competence. A superintelligent AI will be extremely good at accomplishing its goals, and if those goals aren't aligned with ours, we're in trouble. "
>
> **Max Tegmark**, Author,
> "Life 3.0, Being Human in the Age of AI"

I first had the opportunity to discuss in detail about Artificial Intelligence when I spoke at a conference on Diversity & Inclusion and one of the attendees, young Santhosh ("Call me Santy"), a freshly minted MBA HR who had got campus-placed into one of the Big Five, stood up to ask me a question.

"Dr. Rajesh" (Yes, the doctorate is usually awarded to my husband for no fault of his) "When you speak about Diversity & Inclusion, is it possible that a more inclusive world can actually be created by machines, because they are by definition, sans emotions and therefore minus biases?"

It was a question that made me ponder long.

The advent of Artificial Intelligence in Human Resources Function in India

18 years since the turn of the millennium, there is an ever growing need to embrace digital/ Artificial intelligence (AI) -powered technologies for solutions, particularly when people like Santy - the millennial generation - are set to take up 75 per cent of the global workforce by 2025[1]. Matching majority employee expectations requires the HR function to be as nimble as a food delivery app that Santy favors, as agile as an ecommerce platform that he is a die-hard loyalist of. However, for the Human Resources Management function to stay true to its existential purpose – that of enabling humans, it is important that technology remains an aid and not the sole navigator of processes. This means that the onus is on managers and

leaders as users of artificially intelligent systems to consciously infuse emotions into what could otherwise become transactional experiences.

But going back to the question asked by Santy, can AI actually remove the flaws in human-driven processes? Or would it, on the contrary, end up contributing to the 'dehumanising' of the human resource function?

To answer this question, it is imperative to scrutinize the permeation of AI in HR. Artificial Intelligence systems by definition are augmented tools that perceive the environment, emulate human intelligence by inferencing vast repositories of data and enable humans to maximize success in achieving their goals. Such systems are fast becoming powerful place holders in business environments – the Human Resources function included. Machine learning tools that are at the heart of all AI systems today, are capable of big data led deep learning. They are significantly faster than humans in drawing case based inferences and creating insights, after processing several terabytes of data. Contextualising to HR, the 4 prominent areas in which Artificial Intelligence will continue to impact are a) Talent Acquisition, b) Talent Management, c) Training and d) Compensation and Benefits.

Talent Acquisition

Talent Acquisition managers today have access to systems that can skim through millions of profiles to identify the best organisational fits. This is a huge benefit as it allows the recruiter to spend quality time evaluating just that select group of eligible profiles. HR units are able to increase the quality of hiring decisions and cut down on heavy costs of screening and selection. Cognizant was one of the earliest adopters of AI based shortlisting systems, throwing in SMAC[2] based processes too to enhance flavour. LinkedIn, world's largest professional online network, recently reported that repetitive jobs within recruiting, such as CV reading and data processing/correlating, will soon be automated – allowing human talent to be better used in more strategic aspects of the HR role.[3]

Fig.1 shows how Artificial Intelligence and Machine learning are likely to impact recruiting activity in the near future. This chart developed by LinkedIn maps Automation Potential (from High to Low) in the X-axis against the Value added with Human Touch in the Y-axis.
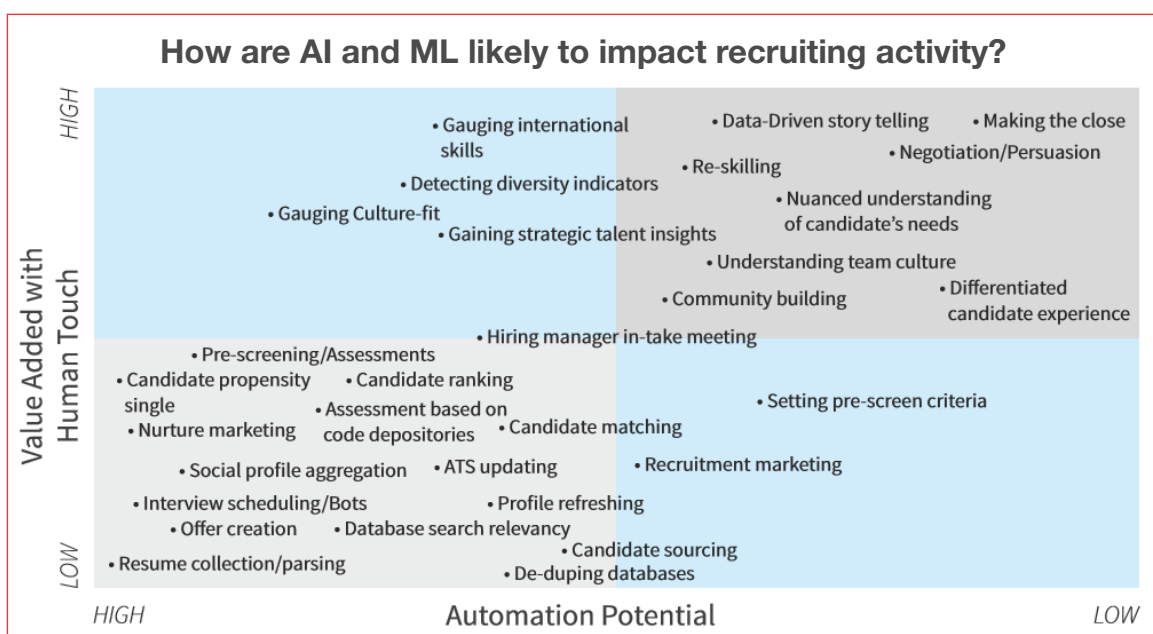

Figure 1: How are AI and ML likely to impact recruiting activity? Source: LinkedIn[4]

Talent Management

AI's role in talent management begins right from the on-boarding process and impacts all employee engagement efforts, a key tactical component in the HR function. Today, AI powered systems can conduct and analyse organisation-wide employee surveys to unveil several workforce trends and preferences. Google[5], world leaders in all things AI, used this tool very effectively to conduct sentiment analysis of their workforce and prepare themselves to gird up engagement. AI also helps organizations examine past performance trends of individuals & teams and give insights to HR on the steps that need to be taken to improve performance or morale as and when the tool spots a potential threat or identifies a problem area.

Learning & Development

The biggest catalysts of career progression of employees, L&D initiatives become more effective when an employee's career progression is mapped to the organizational goals and strategically chartered. Accenture[6] has experimented with AI in customising L&D initiatives for each employee at appropriate junctures in order to provide more effective learning experiences. Remote classrooms and digital classes that are AI powered will expand the scope of employee learning, a vital business prerequisite in this VUCA world.

Compensation & benefits

Compensation & benefits – another pivotal area under the purview of the HR function is also significantly impacted by AI systems. Built on complex, neural algorithms, AI can fast detect patterns that statistically correlate employees' past responses to the organization's comp & ben layout. Such tools will determine the overall workplace morale and recommend relevant actions in the areas of concern. Eventually, such systems will also help predict and project employee behaviour patterns and ensure retention.

Over 58% of the Indian companies are already using AI work at scale, beyond pilot and test projects. The number of AI start-ups has increased since 2011 at a compounded annual growth rate of 86% in the country[7]. AI is all set to revolutionize manufacturing, transport, healthcare, finance and retail industries to name a few. A 2017 report by McKinsey states that much as automation causes declines in some occupations, automation will change many more—60 percent of occupations have at least 30 percent of constituent work activities that could be automated[8]. It will also create new occupations that do not exist today, much as technologies of the past have done. By 2030, 75 million to 375 million workers (3 to 14 percent of the global workforce) will need to switch occupational categories.

So, getting back to Santy's question that started this all, the challenge (and opportunity) for the HR function across sectors would be to effectively manage professional ecosystems where digital intelligence and human intelligence together drive organizational processes. 'Uberisation of the workforce' isn't some distant reality – fluid, dynamic people teams that collaborate virtually are fast becoming the order of the day. And with organizations increasingly moving to a learning paradigm, the onus on HR function is multi-fold – to enable flatter organisations that have cross-functional teams, to find avenues for continual up-skilling and re-skilling, and most importantly help decision makers drive process automation from front.

Table 1 summarises the top-down impact of AI led systems in the HRM frameworks of fast growth organisations today.

HRM sub-function	Current impact	Projected impact	Scope for greater human intervention
Talent Acquisition	• Intelligent access to millions of candidate profiles • Improved quality of hiring decisions	• Bias- free screening of huge volumes of candidate profiles • Projections on potential recruit's future in the organisation	• Train AI systems on quality data that can positively impact hiring decisions • Upskill the HR fraternity to leverage AI tools, in an inclusive manner
Talent Management	• Sentiment Analysis on employee communication channels • Tracking impact and growth of organisation wide initiatives for talent management	• Predict employee retention rates with greater precision • Identify differentials in aspirations of a diverse workforce through nuances in workplace communication and behaviour	• Ensure that employee experiences retain the necessary human touch • Respect employee aspirations around data privacy and security
Learning & Development	• Intelligently conduct training need analyses based on skill deficits • Customize L&D plans for employees	• Deliver virtual employee sessions on massive scales • Conduct continual assessments of training needs to improve business efficacy	• Identify appropriate benchmarks to gauge impact of L&D initiatives • Leverage AI systems to identify patterns in usage of L&D initiatives, to create deeper, wider impacts
Compensation & Benefits	• Correlate employees' past responses to the organization's comp & ben layout to detect aspirational patterns • Benchmark comp & ben schemes against market standards	• Analyse impact of comp & ben components on employee morale & performance, at an individual level • Predict employee aspirations for comp & ben, packing these effectively into annual budgets	• Use AI tools to identify disparities in comp & ben packages • Train AI systems on unique organizational values that drive comp & ben, to improve efficacy

AI in HR: Augmented or Artificial?

When systems are data driven, it is important to identify the 'ethical lines', the crossing of which may result in infringement of privacy. Harvesting of personal data has proven to be a double edged sword, more so in the wake of recent scams. Though having a technology-managed system atmosphere will enable you to perform mundane activities in seconds, having an integrated AI-based HR function can also pose a series of threats or challenges.

HR data is humungous and is often not organized or structured in most companies. For example, a company may have different types of systems to record varied data. To apply a unified algorithm across the systems may result in deceptive interpretations. So companies will have to collect, collate all the data in one integrated platform for an AI system to analyse appropriately and produce the desired results.

The second is how much of the data is personal. The challenge will be in explaining to employees what data of theirs will be used where and how – transparency would be key. Santy would not appreciate his data being used to train a machine. So an AI system will have to put policies and structures in place that will protect employee privacy, and also ensure that the available data is used for positive purposes and results. This also means creating highly secure systems to host such AI tools, breach of which are impossible. With hacking methodologies also becoming smarter with every passing day, this remains a continual challenge.

Finally, we come to the predicament of staying human while being wired. Today there is an increasing emphasis on organizational work cultures, changing demographics and the need to develop equitable, inclusive work environments for diverse workforces. But when we incorporate AI to an already built-in diverse work environment which Santy and his friends cohabit, the humane touch disappears somewhere in the middle. In the race for digital inclusion, human inclusion may become less of a priority.

AI in D&I (Diversity & Inclusion)

The dimensions of diversity in a workplace of today include gender, generation, physical capabilities, culture, sexual orientation, to name a few. Juxtaposing these in an artificially intelligent world, machines and bots could emerge as representatives of a significant strand of workforce diversity. Inventive inclusion that requires thoughtful intervention will become key. In fact not just key, but indispensable to avoid machine-led extensions of structural, economic, social, and political imbalances that would further pronounce inequalities based on different demographic variables.

Exclusion and bias that are by-products of data discrimination will have to be watched out for in an artificially intelligent, diverse world. 'Data silos' will have to be systematically identified and disbanded locally and globally. While the machines do the drudgery of monotonous work, thought leaders and HR managers will have to increasingly focus on training their AI systems on data representative of the organizational agenda on inclusion.

Conclusion

"Santy, let's not imagine Artificial Intelligence systems for HR to be like Tony Stark's Man Friday - Jarvis. We are presently still talking about bots and virtual assistants written using the language R, which pull data about 100 times better and faster than your XL pivot. So, what you feed is what you get. If you feed in biased data, then the machine spews out biased answers. If your training data is bias-free, you can expect the machine to be unprejudiced too. In that sense, AI is like the genie that jumped out of the bottle – if you train and command it to be empathetic, inclusive and sensitive, it will be. If you use it to deepen the divides, then the AI genie will be just as happy to deliver that as well!" – even as I answered young Santy, I realised that AI - a technological marvel of our times – similar to electricity or motorised vehicles in the past – is the equivalent of fire to the Neanderthal Man. You can use it to create, or destroy.

There aren't many facets of life untouched by AI. Such inevitability places great responsibility on us – the users. Especially, all of us in the HR fraternity who will continue to build and burnish organizations to ensure great workplaces. We will be called upon to demonstrate even greater empathy and inclusion than before, now that we have the benefit of machines that take away our drudge work. We will have the power of augmented intelligence to stay more human than ever before.

In conclusion, I would like to quote Max Tegmark again, (whose disquieting quote formed the frontispiece of this article) "Career advice for today's kids: Go into professions that machines are bad at – those involving people, unpredictability and creativity". I think he just described the HR function.

References

[1]https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/global/Documents/About-Deloitte/gx-dttl-2014-millennial-survey-report.pdf

[2]SMACKing Talent Acquisition: https://www.cognizant.com/InsightsWhitepapers/SMACking-Talent-Acquisition.pdf

[3]How is Artificial Intelligence developing HR: https://www.hrdconnect.com/2018/02/19/artificial-intelligence-developing-hr/

[4]How will AI and ML likely to impact recruiting activity? https://business.linkedin.com/talent-solutions/blog/future-of-recruiting/2017/this-chart-reveals-where-AI-will-impact-recruiting-and-what-skills-make-recruiters-irreplaceable

[5]How Google uses data to build a better worker: https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2013/10/how-google-uses-data-to-build-a-better-worker/280347/

[6]Investing in an automated future: http://www.clomedia.com/2018/04/05/investing-automated-future/

[7]Rewire for growth – Accelerating India's economic growth with Artificial Intelligence: https://www.accenture.com/t20171220T030619Z__w__/in-en/_acnmedia/PDF-68/Accenture-ReWire-For-Growth-POV-19-12-Final.pdf

[8]Jobs Lost, Jobs Gained: Workforce Transitions in a time of Automation: https://www.mckinsey.com/~/media/McKinsey/Global%20Themes/Future%20of%20Organizations/What%20the%20future%20of%20work%20will%20mean%20for%20jobs%20skills%20and%20wages/MGI-Jobs-Lost-Jobs-Gained-Report-December-6-2017.ashx

Should HR Feel Insecure?

Anand Bhaskar is a business leader with over 27 years of industry experience with reputed companies such as Sapient, Microsoft, GE and Unilever. Anand is an innovative thinker, avid blogger, ICF certified coach and entrepreneur.

Anand is the Founder & CEO, Planet Ganges, an organization doing cutting edge work in the area Talent Management. With more than 10 world class SAS solutions across the employee life cycle, driven by deep analytics and machine learning, Planet Ganges is one of the fastest growing start-ups in the HR-Tech space.

Anand is deeply passionate about blending Talent Development and technology. His current mission is to blend his vast experience in HR with deep understanding of how technology can enable capability building to create sustained value for Organizations.

A business leader par excellence, Anand is a sought-after speaker, writer and coach.

Anand Bhaskar

Should HR Feel Insecure?

In a nutshell

Never in the history of human civilisation have technology changes impacted the world as much as these have in the last 10 years. The impact of technology is felt in the daily lives of almost every human on this planet.

During such times, the question that we are exploring is how is the role of HR impacted by technology, in terms of people connect. Is HR losing people touch and people focus with the advent of technology based tools that are replacing the traditional human touch?

The article argues that HR is not losing people touch or people focus. Technology on the contrary is enabling more people connect and is not losing touch? by engaging people through multiple mediums. The fear of technology is caused more by ignorance of what technology can do and how it needs to be leveraged vs. technology itself.

Introduction

One of the most debated topics today is whether HR as a function is losing its relevance with the advent of new technology and tools, that are replacing the need for direct human touch?

One aspect that has been very intriguing for me over the last 3 decades I have been in HR is the constant self-doubt first about our role, then our status in the eyes of the CEO and now our relevance itself. Be it the transition from Personnel Management and administration to Human Resource Development or the question of why HR did not have a seat at the table with the CEO and alongside the CFO of the organisation, questions have constantly been raised but always answered.

Now, when a massive technology revolution is disrupting all existing models across the world, there are new fears, whether HR is likely to lose its relevance since there are multiple technology products that are able to keep a pulse of people, how they feel, can track where they go and what they want etc. The core HR role of "people touch and connect" appears to be taken over by intelligent machines & software. Now HR's very existence is in question.

Before I share my perspective on the key question in everyone's mind – "Is technology helping or hindering people touch and people focus?"; I would like to explore with all of you what is actually happening in both the world of Technology and world of HR. Without a deeper understanding of what can technology do or not do, it may be factually untenable for us to either endorse HR's future relevance or write its obituary.

Over the next few Sections, let's explore the following:

Section 1	Technology Disruptions across the world
Section 2	Decoding the word Software and its various forms
Section 3	What is Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning and Deep Learning?
Section 4	Top 5 Challenges that question HR's credibility today?

Section 1: Technology Disruptions across the world

There isn't an iota of doubt that over the last decade technology has evolved fast and it has positively disrupted our lives in almost everything that we do. Some of the biggest developments have been in areas such as:

1. **Mobile phones** – The very concept of a phone has been redefined over the last 10 years. From an instrument that was used to communicate, the phone has become a value adding device for all users. Voice communication is not a differentiator anymore. Phones need to have cameras - a new concept of selfie has taken over life and captured the imagination of the entire world. Phones require to host multiple Apps that make life easier for people – mobile banking, health & fitness, social communication and many more. The list could be unending. This has necessitated phones to have more storage & more powerful processors, with longer battery life in order to support these needs. So a mobile phone has been completely reimagined and I do not think we have seen the last of it yet.

2. **Wearables** – With the advent of devices such as fitness trackers, phone watches, google glasses etc., wearables are the next big thing happening around us. A routine device such as a watch is now expected to do much more than tell us time. If we observe around ourselves, anything we wear today is likely to be reimagined in the future, including our rings, chains, bangles, necklaces, spectacles, clothes and even shoes may end up being reinvented to serve us more.

3. **Software as a glue** – This has become central to our lives. Software has torn down boundaries between different segments of science & engineering. Software has blended fields that were considered specialized, and integrated them seamlessly to create compounded value to humanity. Some examples of blending fields are – self driven cars (requires mechanical, electrical & electronics to work in sync, held together by a software program); Amazon Echo (electronics & software working in tandem); Smart Televisions (electronics, electrical & software working together) and many more around us.

4. **Adding Intelligence to Software** – The single biggest disruption underway around us is the adding of intelligence into software and the inconceivable way in which it could impact us. This is a pretty large part of what I would like to discuss in this article. I believe intelligent software will bring a huge disruptive change over the next decade, which will be 10 times bigger than what we have seen in the last 100 years.

Section 2: Decoding the word Software and its various forms

Software is the most commonly used term by people. There are multiple terms people use to describe software such as – an App, Application Software, Application Platform or Intelligent Software. Let us spend some time to get a common understanding of what is software and how are these terms different, before we explore the impact they could have on HR and our lives.

App

An app is a piece of software designed for a single purpose or a single function. Apps are typically associated with mobile and personal-use.

Application Software

Application software is computer program that performs a specific personal, educational, and business function. Each program is designed to assist the user with a particular process, which may be related to productivity, creativity, and/or communication.

An application, however, is a piece of software that performs a variety of related functions. Applications are considered important to normal business function and are therefore considered to be of higher value.

Applications are associated with the usage on all devices and typically serve personal and business needs. Application software programs are created to facilitate a variety of functions, such as:

- managing information
- analysing data
- constructing visuals
- coordinating resources
- calculating figures

Examples of Application Software

The most common application software programs that are used by millions every day include:

- Microsoft suite of products such as MS Office, Excel, Word, PowerPoint, Outlook, etc.
- Internet browsers like Chrome, Safari and Firefox
- Mobile software Skype (for real-time online communication), Facebook (social communication tool), LinkedIn (professional communication tool) etc.

Application Software vs. Application Platform

Application software is an end-user program typically divided into two classes; applications software and systems software. Systems software provides an operating system and utilities that enable applications software such as database programs, spreadsheets, web browsers, and more to run.

An application platform provides services to an application, and is comprised of the set of tools an application relies on to run. Virtually every application relies on a different software to run, from database management software to the cloud. This group of software together is what we call an application platform. An application platform should support an application in every style, from single-user applications on a device to thousand-user applications in the cloud. Application platforms typically include the following services: an operating system, execution services (such as libraries for running software), data services, cloud services and development tools.

Application Software	Application Platform
Single end-user program	Group of software and services an application relies on to run
Database programs, spreadsheets, web browsers, etc.	Group of services to support use of database programs, spreadsheets, web browsers, etc.

Intelligent Software

An intelligent system is a machine with an embedded, Internet-connected computer that has the capacity to gather and analyse data and communicate with other systems. An intelligent system is also one that includes the capacity to learn from experience, security, connectivity, has the ability to adapt according to current data and the capacity for remote monitoring and management.

In the world of IT, a system is defined as a collection of connected elements or components that are organized for a common purpose. As such, although they are typically spoken of in terms of devices, intelligent systems include not just intelligent devices but also interconnected collections of such devices, including networks and other types of larger systems. Similarly, intelligent systems can also include sophisticated AI-based software systems, such as chatbots.

Intelligent systems exist all around us in point-of-sale (POS) terminals, digital televisions, traffic lights, smart meters, automobiles, digital signage and airplane controls, etc. Built-in intelligence is an integral component of the developing internet of things (IoT), in which almost everything imaginable can be provided with unique identifiers and the ability to automatically transfer data over a network without requiring human-to-human or human-to-computer interaction.

Section 3: What is Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning and Deep Learning?

The three words above are arguably the most talked of today. Everyone is fascinated by AI, ML and DL. I wonder how many of us actually understand what they mean, are they the same, different or interconnected? Before we examine whether AI, ML or DL are likely to take HR jobs away, it would be helpful for us to understand what they mean in the first place and what they are capable of doing.

Artificial Intelligence [AI]*

Artificial Intelligence is a concept wherein machines are able to carry out tasks in a way that we would consider "intelligent". Devices designed to act intelligently are classified into two fundamental groups:

(a) Applied or

(b) General

Applied AI is far more common, such as systems designed to intelligently trade stocks and shares, or manoeuvre an autonomous vehicle.

Generalized AI systems or devices, are systems that can handle any task that are less common and those which require more thought. This is where some of the most exciting advancements are happening today.

Credited to Arthur Samuel in 1959.

Machine Learning [ML]

Machine Learning is a sub-set of AI, wherein machines are given access to data and let them learn for themselves.

Machine Learning applications can read text and analyse for example whether the person who wrote something, is complaining or expressing gratitude. They can also listen to a piece of music, decide whether it is likely to make someone happy or sad, and find other pieces of music to match the mood. In a few cases, they can even compose their own music expressing the same themes, or which they know is likely to be appreciated by the admirers of the original piece.

ML takes some of the core ideas of AI and focuses them on solving real-world problems with neural networks designed to mimic our own decision-making.

Deep Learning [DL]

Deep Learning focuses even more narrowly on a subset of ML tools and techniques, and applies them to solving just about any problem which requires "thought" – human or artificial.

Essentially Deep Learning involves feeding a computer system a lot of data, which it can use to make decisions about other data. This data is fed through neural networks, as is the case in machine learning. These networks are logical constructions which ask a series of binary true/false questions, or extract a numerical value, of every bit of data which pass through them, and classify it according to the answers received.

What can deep learning do?

- Self-driven cars
- Predict outcomes say legal proceedings
- Precision medicine
- Automated analysis & reporting
- Playing games

Neural Network

The development of Neural Networks has been key to teaching computers to think and understand the world in the way we do, while retaining the innate advantages they hold over humans such as speed, accuracy and lack of bias.

A Neural Network is a computer system designed to work by classifying information in the same way as a human brain does. It works on a system of probability, based on data fed to it, it is able to make statements, decisions or predictions with a degree of certainty. The addition of a feedback loop enables "learning" – by sensing or being told whether its decisions are right or wrong, it modifies the future approach

---

How are AI, ML & DL connected?

Deep learning is a subset of machine learning, and machine learning is a subset of AI, which is an umbrella term for any computer program that does something smart. In other words, all machine learning is AI, but not all AI is machine learning, and all deep learning is ML, but not all ML is deep learning. Figure 1 below would give you a clear understanding of how these three connect.
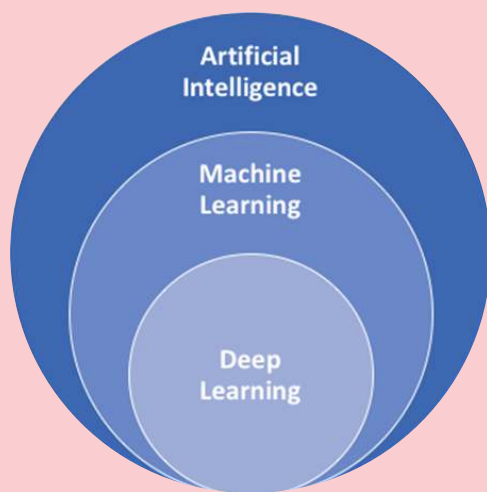

Figure 1: Connection between AI, ML and DL

Section 4: Top 5 Challenges that question HR's credibility today?

In my opinion the following are the Top 5 issues because of which HR's credibility is questioned time and again in Organisations.

1. Hiring right talent – internal or external
2. Inability to assess competence accurately
3. Underpaying competence or Over paying incompetence
4. Lack of data orientation
5. Not having a finger on the pulse of employees

1. Hiring Right Talent – Internal or External

In a market where talent is highly commoditised with quality taking a back seat (on education & skills), sourcing & hiring right is a huge business imperative. The inability of HR to bring in the right talent quickly on-board can adversely impact business outcomes directly. The traditional model of campus hiring and face-to-face interview process based hiring is not scalable anymore. The pressure on cost-per hire is so high that HR needs to reimagine their traditional hiring models to regain lost credibility.

The opportunity here is how can HR leverage the technology to address this challenge? By using a software platform (for hiring) that brings together campus & lateral candidates, HR could digitally connect with thousands of candidates across the country/world; engage and assess them using multiple online tools; evaluate gaps & assign them necessary pre-requisite skill trainings (prior final selection) and make offers online & obtain acceptance. HR can also use a community application software on the software platform to build communities of new hires, track engagement and predict who & how many would eventually join, using machine learning. Through post assessment of candidates and identifying gaps, HR can leverage the deep learning to assess learning behaviours of candidates on the software platform by connecting the behaviour patterns across learning courses and community application software.

This mechanism would address a significant credibility gap that HR struggles with today. HR would not only have access to enormous data on candidates but would also have real-time pulse of thousands of candidates, predict joining ratios and candidate no-shows.

Internal talent mobility is a huge challenge today across large companies. Talent hoarding is a massive problem experienced daily but least spoken about. The issue can be addressed comprehensively if companies were to invest on an inter-connected software platform, wherein data & people behaviour across software applications speak to each other. By use of machine learning and deep analytics, HR could know real-time the online behaviour of all its employees across geographies; have a pulse of top trending issues / concerns (if any); gain deep insight into learnability quotient of each employee; use this data to assess current & predict future potential; calculate current attrition & predict future attrition etc. The possibilities are infinite on what HR could do with an intelligent software platform.

All of this is definitely going to have a positive impact on HR's credibility and grow its reputation as a valuable contributor to the business.

Figure 2 below gives you a visual impression of how an **intelligent software platform** can enhance HR's value to business.

Candidate Enrolment[1] → Candidate Assessment[1] → Gap Assessment[1] → Online Skill Development[1] → Online Community[1] → Online Mentoring[2] → Tracking the Buzz[2] → Short on-going Assessments[2] → Engagement Testing Quizzes[2] → Tracking the Pulse[3]

Application Software Platform   1 Application Software   2 Embedded machine learning   3 Embedded deep learning
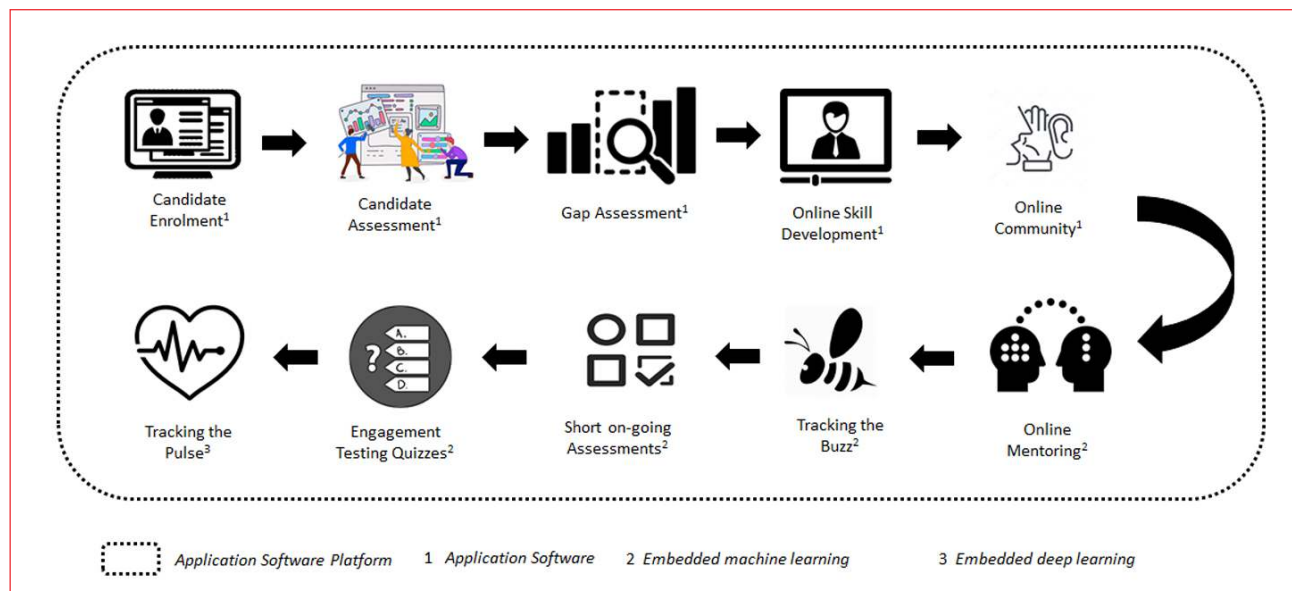
2. Inability to assess competence accurately

One of the biggest challenges in organisations is the ability to accurately assess talent over a period of time. My experience over 3 decades in industry has shown that there is substantial subjectivity in assessment and despite organisations having robust skill and competency frameworks, the element of human bias cannot be entirely removed.

There have been many occasions wherein with the change of Managers or one good/bad year of performance has moved an employee's performance and/or potential assessment substantially from High to Low or Low to high. There isn't a scientific methodology to look at talent, free from human bias. This has led to HR always being challenged on its processes and thereby impacting its credibility. People who do well, endorse the process even if they do not swear by it. People who do not do as per their expectations on self (which unfortunately is the case with majority of the people due to the bell curve) condemn the process as unfair and biased. The taint of bias has been almost impossible for HR to erase off its brand for decades.

With the advent of intelligent technologies such as **AI, ML and DL,** HR has an opportunity to create a uniform process across the organisation, that can provide a strong & credible "**alternate perspective**" to the leadership on talent in the organization vs. relying merely on the People Manager.

HR has long stuck to ancient LMS and HRMS tools which are nothing but data warehousing tools. They are at best **application software** products, that are meant to do basic operations for the function. By implementing an inter-connected **intelligent software platform** across the Organisation, covering all the full-time employees, HR can maintain an eagle eye on every single employee in the organisation from their devices (such as phones or laptops). Innovation has been missing in various devices that a company lends to its employees to perform their tasks. For example: An access card can be leveraged as a "**wearable device**" to track employee movement. It is currently used only to track access to various floors or sections of an office. A GPS tracker on an access card can tell you where your employee is during office and off-office hours. This could also double as a safety device to locate and protect your employees in certain extreme cases.

An **App** on the mobile phone can also track movements, usage behaviour, location, contacts & messages etc. A talent & capability **App** on the mobile can run continuous pulse checks, short engagement surveys, run learning games, operationalise fun quizzes, track views of Internal-job-postings, run skill assessments, build employee profiles, create communities for engagement (such as slack, yammer, fb@work, pgBuzz etc.) All of these engagements can be tracked over a **machine learning** environment running **deep learning** based analytics on behaviour of employees across various software applications.

The HR organisation and company leadership can have ready access to refined analytics on people behaviour "**real-time**". The behaviour could include (few examples but not limited to) -

a. An employee's individual engagement score each day

b. What are people learning?

c. Who is learning the most across employees?

d. Who are the people not adding any skills?

e. What is the learnability quotient of employees?

f. What are people viewing & buzzing about? (Trending topics)

g. Which employees are potentially at risk? (Attrition)

h. Which Manager(s) have the highest number of disengaged people?

i. Who are high potential employees?

j. Who is endorsed as a good or great performer by their peers?

….. and many more

Figure 3: Diagrammatic depiction of multiple software applications hosted on a cloud based integrated application software platform, connected to an ML environment.
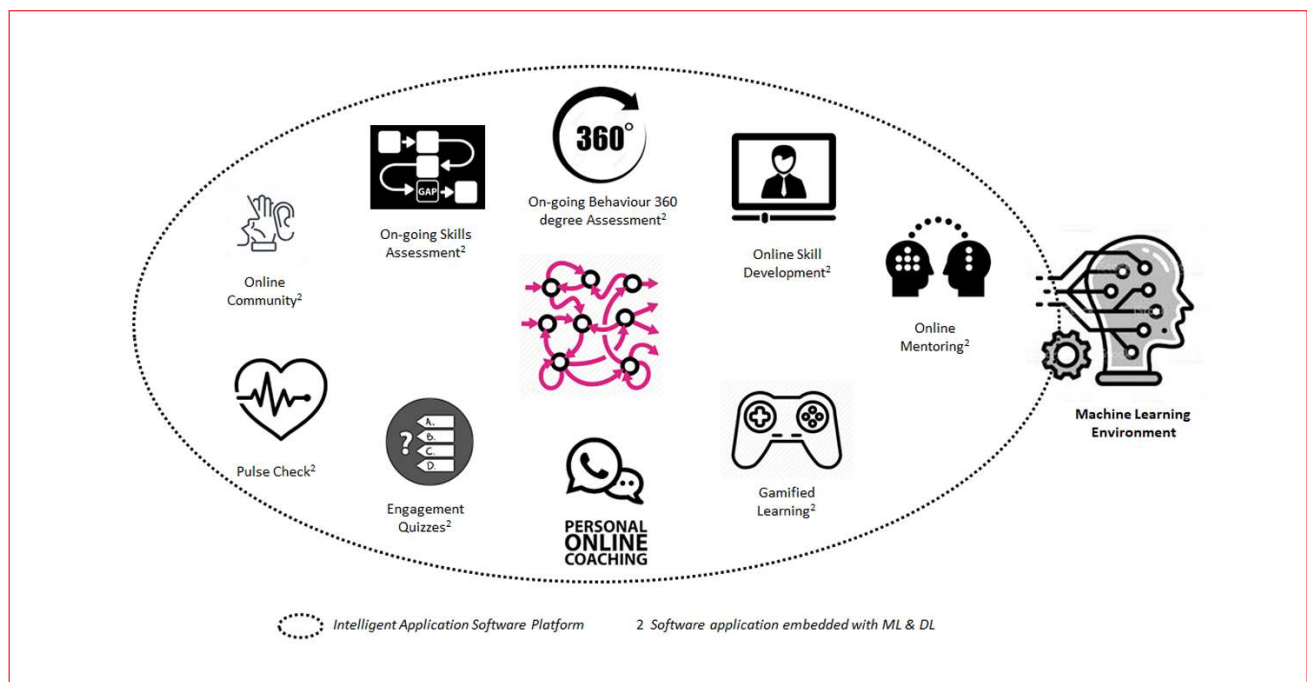
Source: Courtesy Planet Ganges [reproduced with permission]

3. Underpaying competence or over paying competence

This is one of the most sensitive topics in Organisations and HR is super-sensitive when it comes to compensation. The fact however is that compensation is probably the most impactful tool that HR has in order to drive the right kind of behaviour in the organisation. Therefore, if HR cannot establish a scientific mechanism to ensure that it is paying the employees accurately as per competence, the desired behaviour may never be established. I am not saying that compensation is the only driver for desired behaviour in organisations, it is however, one of the top 3 drivers, that can be leveraged to establish the desired behaviour.

One could argue that Compensation & Benefits are very scientifically determined by HR after thorough benchmarking of data across a large set of companies. We also have companies such as Hewitt, Mercer, Towers Watson etc. offering loads of data and analytics in this space. Here is where I see a major gap. Salary data is established based on role & what market is willing to pay for the same. Role definitions are not equitable across companies & geographies. The way the future of work is being redefined, Compensation is moving away from Role, Experience and Industry to "skill and competence". In other words, if you have the requisite skills and competence you are worth a lot, even if your experience is limited. Most new age companies have skewed the model significantly wherein expertise & competence is paid even more than the CEO or other leaders in a company. Whether HR likes it or not, the future of compensation is likely to be anchored in "skill and competence" not role.

In such a situation, the correlation between compensation and competence becomes incredibly important. When people with lower competence level are paid higher than competent people, deep discontent sets into an organisation. Thereby questioning HR's role to be fair & just.

If HR has access to "deep insights" from an intelligent integrated software platform, HR would be able to correlate aspects such as learnability, engagement and value contribution from **machine learning** driven real-time analytics and trends, to compensation. This is what I call "talent economics". The future success of companies will be dependent on how HR can effectively optimise the compensation costs through data driven "talent economics" wherein people can be classified as under paid or over-paid based on their current skills & competence, plus future skills & competence based on predictive analytics by **deep learning**.

4. Lack of Data Orientation

HR as a function has been long accused of being feely & touchy, lacking any data orientation. The challenge with HR having a seat at the table for decades has been its inability to quantify its contribution and impact to the business using measurable metrices. In many companies the HR function has managed to bring in reasonable amount of automation of process using software applications such as HRMS, LMS and attendance tracking systems. The justification for most of these investments has been improving employee experience vs. measurable "impact-based" data analytics. Budgets for automation have relied on improving efficiency and productivity of teams, thereby reducing people costs. An improved employee experience has been central to such investments.

Unfortunately, HR has struggled to provide "impact-based" data analytics. Most often HR has tracked "activity-based" data, which has not enabled it to gain credibility with business stakeholders.

A few examples of activity-based data analytics are –

a. Number of late comers each day / week / month

b. Training man days completed

c. Training feedback scores received

d. No. of employee grievance tickets logged and resolved

A few examples of impact-based data analytics are –

a.   Disengaged employees based on behaviour pattern

b.   Predicted attrition over next month or quarter

c.   Learnability quotient of employees – high / medium / low

d.   Competence improvement due to trainings

With the use of an **intelligent software platform**, HR can not only track activity-based data, it would be fully equipped through a machine learning supported environment to report "**impact-based**" data analytics on a real-time basis. The challenges with current **software application-based** solutions vs. an **intelligent software platform** are as follows:

Software application solutions	Intelligent software platform
Manages data warehousing	Interprets data using algorithms
Runs basic applications & processes	Connects data across multiple software applications and derives insights
Works on a standalone basis	Works in an integrated manner

By adopting an **intelligent software platform,** HR would enhance its connect with people, track their behaviour information on a real-time basis and would be able to intervene in a timely manner.

5.   Not having finger on the Pulse of Employees

Let me stir the hornets' nest here. I do not think HR ever had a pulse of employees in a non-digital world. The claim that HR brings people engagement and people connect is a biggest myth. Most large companies have on an average a ratio of 1 HR : 250 employees. This is a very generous ratio being provided by me. If you consider only the HR Business Partners who work with the business or HR generalists or ER personnel, the ratio is likely to be 1: 500. It is humanly impossible for any individual HR professional to build and retain an on-going connect with all 250 or 500 people, with an average attrition of 10-15% in an organisation. Hence, I believe that the claim HR makes of having connect with employees or its people, is a huge fallacy. The truth is that HR needs to have a connect with the people in the organisation. This is something absolutely necessary for good health of the organisation and its people. HR would not be able to achieve this through the traditional personal connects and Focus Group Discussion models, that have been used and abused over a long period of time.

At a time when organisations are global, structures are heavily matrixed, employees work virtually across the world, millennials are entering the workforce in large nos. and needs/motivations of people are changing significantly; HR has no alternative but to leverage technology to solve for the future. The argument that technology does not have a human touch is probably the most misplaced assumption. Let's explore this paradigm for a bit.

The maximum posts on Facebook are selfies by people, of which solo-selfies out number group selfies. The success of Facebook is anchored around fulfilling the need for social recognition in people. By posting a selfie, the likes and comments are what people wait for. With no companion at arms-length but through a digital medium people feel deeply connected with each other. India has the largest number of Whatsapp users on the planet. Most people use Whatsapp for creating communities and posting their thoughts and sharing pictures. India also has the highest consumption of Voice on mobile devices. People love to talk and engage, which is a reflection of why India accounts for the largest mobile voice calls in the world. None of these mediums have a so-called direct human touch. The interface is digital and millions of people have taken to it as if this is the medium they have been waiting for over the last 100 years.

The manner in which digital medium and technology has redefined the world today, has never happened in the entire history of the human civilization. Like

human voice and emotion is a medium of communication with fellow human beings, digital mediums such as email, phones, chat messengers, online tools etc. are also additional mediums for people to connect.

Therefore, it is foolhardy to believe that with the adoption of technology HR will lose its human touch. Instead, HR is definitely going to improve its human touch by connecting with people using various technological means and also leverage technology to bring equity & fairness in the process of engagement with people.

Conclusion - Is it HR vs. TECH or HR + TECH?

HR is not about the function. HR is about other people. The biggest challenge that we HR professionals have is our constant search for identity. The day we dissolve our identity into that of the people of our organisation, HR would become omnipresent and omni felt.

Is technology a friend or an enemy of HR? If we as HR professionals are competing with technology then it is a foe. If we are looking at technology as one of the tools we will bring to bear, in connecting people with each other in the organisation, then it is a friend. The battle of frenemies with technology will continue in the mind of HR, so long as we do not recognise that any tool developed by us is our servant not our master. The tool is designed to serve us, in the manner we would like to be served.

So, when we talk about intelligent software applications (driven by AI, ML or DL), the key is how are we designing these applications to serve us. When we are designing the tools to extract a service, how can they become our masters? Well it is another matter if we are constantly insecure about our inability to learn and cope with the change around us. Our personal insecurities & incapability, cannot and should not be associated with the HR function. HR as a function has been conceptualised in an Organisational context to serve a certain purpose / outcome. Our endeavour as professionals in the service of the function (HR) should be to make it more effective and impactful for better business outcomes. In this context, technology is one potent tool in our basket of tools to contribute to business.

References & Credits

1. Mar Bernard in Forbes. What is the difference between Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning?.
2. Mar Bernard in Forbes. What is the difference between Deep Learning, Machine Learning and AI?
3. Planet Ganges Learning Resources. Software Platform Solutions from Planet Ganges.

Rebooting HR
Mass Customization for the Digital Age

Noble Powar has worked in Human Resources for over 35 years, both as a line manager as well as an external consultant across diverse businesses viz., Financial Services, Engineering, Pharmaceuticals and Medical Services in global organisations like Atlas Copco, Hoechst, Citigroup and Abu Dhabi Islamic Bank.

He has worked in India, UK, US and the UAE for businesses across Asia, Africa, Europe, North America and the Middle East. At present he works as an independent Consultant based in London and focuses on advisory work related to aligning HR Strategy with Business Strategy and for developing effective Talent Management 'eco-systems' by applying appropriate technology, tools, policies and processes.

Noble is an alumnus of T.I.S.S, Mumbai.

Noble Powar

Rebooting HR:
Mass Customization for the Digital Age

In a nutshell

With the advent of the Digital Age, substantial changes have occurred to the nature of work, the employer-employee relationship, as well as the interests and expectations of members of the workforce. If HR professionals hope to add value in the new paradigm, they must take responsibility for and deliver technology that enables the mass customization of HR tools and services for every member of the workforce. Failure to deliver will marginalize HR to a specialist niche with little influence in the drive for organizational effectiveness.

Analog to Digital

The Digital Age dawned in the 1970s and by the mid-1990s burst into public consciousness - via the wide availability of personal computers, the Internet and commercial web browsers - to have a profound and continuing impact on the personal and professional lives of people around the world.

The pace of change has noticeably accelerated with the introduction of mobile computing. Working hours now span our waking hours and 9-5 is considered passé. The Gregorian calendar year of 12 months has given way to the web-year of 90 days. The workforce has fragmented as a result of outsourcing and offshoring. Frequent restructuring and 'right sizing' of organizations have contributed to the erosion of trust between individuals and institutions.

Coping with change

A choppy ride on the seas of change has driven talented people to take greater charge of their own fortunes and now rely less on their employer – they have become 'free agents'. Fortunately, as the digital age has progressed, information, the prime building block of intellectual capital, has become ubiquitous. More and more people are able to access information relatively freely and use it to further their interests.

Compressed time horizons and increased choice have contributed to decreased stability of the workforce and presented new challenges for effective people management.

HR's Response

How is HR responding to the transformation from the stable 'command and control' structures and mindset of the Industrial Age to the dynamic 'free agent autonomy' of the Information Age? What policies, processes, tools and technology can HR deliver to retain the 'personal touch' with these 'free agents'?

Unless HR has a vigorous and creative response to these challenges, it faces the prospect of becoming a marginalized specialist function. For those HR professionals willing to face the challenge head-on, it will be useful to first examine the extent to which they have been able to support their organizations to effectively manage Talent across the employment cycle.

The Employment Cycle

Acquisition

Organizations that successfully compete in the labour market have had to make the talent acquisition process very user friendly. Talented people have access to many options which has forced employers to up their game by seeking to attract the talent from all sections of society - gender, ethnicity, age-group, socio-economic background, as opposed to restricting their search to certain pre-defined sectors of the labour market. However, reaching out to the wider labour market requires the ability to process a much larger volume of information which itself can be overwhelming for HR unless they have been able to deploy the right technology to deliver mass customization.

Assimilation

Effective organizations do not just acquire talented people; they also put in substantial effort to assimilate joiners by making sure that they have easy access to tools, information and

support to become productive in the shortest possible time. In contrast, some organizations are unable to provide even system access to new employees for the first week or two of their joining, leaving these employees twiddling their toes and feeling that perhaps they were hired by mistake. Given the tendency for high turnover among new employees, such behavior by organizations can only be described as self-inflicted injury. Employees who are effectively assimilated tend to be more productive and also more likely to stay with their organization.

Communication

It is quite natural to expect that in the information age, communication can have a substantial impact on employee productivity. Given the deluge of information that seeks the individual's attention, it is critical that employers achieve mass customization in delivering and receiving information to and from the employee. Furthermore, feedback between both employer and employee has to be regular, timely and focused for it to be effective.

Performance

Managing and assessing performance is one the most challenging and high impact aspect of a manager's role, which if handled consistently across the organization can lead to sustainable success. The normal experience of many organizations is that the performance process involves a frenzy of activity at the end of the business year leading to acrimony, suspicion and a general deterioration of morale without necessarily leading to improved performance. Here too, mass customization can be useful in enabling assessment across the full year, based on data from multiple sources to aid objective evaluation.

Rewards

Without credible performance assessment, it can be counterproductive to give performance awards. However with a credible performance assessment process, it is possible to slice and distribute the rewards cake in a manner that enhances the overall motivation of the workforce to improve performance. Robust tools are required to generate analytics in support of the

most effective distribution plan. There is never enough money to satisfy everyone, however a transparent and evenhanded approach can result in a productive outcome.

Development

Development of the workforce is often the most talked about (at least by HR) and the most unevenly implemented aspect of talent management. Sometimes, large portions of development spend is directed to a tiny proportion of the workforce who have been anointed as 'high potential' often on untested criteria. Sometimes 'squeaky wheels' are oiled by sending them on offsite events without an adequate assessment of development needs of the nominees, or the effectiveness of the intervention. Moreover, assessment of these interventions are often restricted to the 'touchy feely' aspects of the experience thereby perpetuating the delusion of development. Luckily for the careers of those involved in these wasteful decisions, there is very little accountability for the results of such 'investments' in talent development – nevertheless since participants are happy for the extra time off, the charade thrives – while the organization s-l-o-w-l-y weakens.

If the development effort started with a mass customized understanding of development needs and priorities of the workforce, widespread development effort can be executed for the customized development of the workforce keeping in mind organizational needs as well as individual needs, interests and motivation. Individual development plans along with individual development spending accounts, can direct the development effort in a precise and result oriented manner. An evidence-based approach is likely to improve return on investment.

Advancement

The perceived lack of opportunity for advancement is often cited as the prime reason for talent flight. Organizations that do not make a concerted effort to keep employees informed of opportunities are doing themselves self harm. The lack of textured data about existing talent, forces organizations to approach staffing as a

transaction to 'fill an open position' and therefore seek talent from the market. This lost opportunity for advancement for existing employees has to sometimes be supplemented by promoting people in their current jobs resulting in increased employee costs without increasing intellectual capital. If such decisions are repeated often enough, they can have a substantial adverse impact on the bottom line as well as a debilitating effect on the well being of the organization.

Some questions to consider: How do employees come to know about opportunities for career advancement? How easy is it for employees to express interest in and pursue these opportunities? How risky is it for employees to show interest in another role within their organization? How easy is it for employees to be released to other roles? Is the internal market place for career advancement as friendly and risk free as the external marketplace?

Administration

Reference to HR administration can often set off a 'rolling of the eyes' by HR professionals who are already preoccupied with 'higher value' activities. It is quite easy to overlook the fact that employees primarily interact with their employer through administrative processes e.g., payroll, attendance, leave, medical, taxes, loans, pension and the like. Since these processes underpin the employer-employee relationship, they must work efficiently if employers want to demonstrate their concern for the well being of employees and their families. While there is little praise if these processes are handled effectively, they can be a source for substantial grievance if handled poorly. A question to consider: Can employees access and execute most administrative transaction on their mobile phone?

Analytics

Despite the substantial improvements to information management technology, organizations still struggle with getting a grip on real time data and analysis. Many organizations are still unable to provide real time data to their decision makers in a manner that facilitates decision-making. Even basic data like headcount is often disputed between the business, Finance and HR. Notwithstanding the routinely repeated mantra that 'people are our most valuable asset' many organizations still struggle to develop usable information on the competencies, aspirations and motivations of individual members of their workforce. The paucity of useable information forces Management to make organization wide decisions regarding the workforce, based on anecdotal evidence, estimates and intuition. What could possibly go wrong?!

Today it is technically feasible to have interactive dashboards -customized for individual supervisors, managers, HR and senior management, to assist in making decisions about the workforce. The ball is in HR's court.

Networking

Despite the ubiquitous presence of social media, employee networking within the organization is often restricted to 'water cooler chats', 'coffee mornings' and 'brown-bag lunches'. Networking can be useful for exchange of information and ideas, as well as, for building bonds of trust and friendship across the workforce. However, in the above examples, networking is limited to people working in close proximity to each other. Building and maintaining professional networks among employees who cannot meet regularly, but whose work is complementary, is essential for leveraging intellectual capital across the organization and for strengthening bonds with the organization. Ignoring this tool is detrimental to building intellectual capital for the organization.

Attrition

Exit of talent from organizations is inevitable and natural. However, the ability to manage talent exit in a pro-active and productive manner can represent a source of competitive advantage to organizations that handle it well. Some questions to consider: How well managed are exits of employees i.e. do these exits cause disruptions? Are exits planned or do they come as a surprise? What relationship does the organization maintain with ex-employees? Are there programs in place to manage ex-employees and to re-hire them? How is data on exits captured at the organizational level and how is it used?

Mass customisation

One theme that is common to the effective management of the processes outlined above is mass customization – the ability to deliver tools, information and services in a targeted manner, to every employee to enable them to participate productively in the organization. To achieve this capability it is essential to use appropriate technology, without which, mass customization remains an aspiration.

HR Technology

In the face of these compelling and competing challenges, even the most accomplished, dedicated and professional HR team will falter without the support of appropriate technology.

Since technology is such a critical success factor for HR, it is essential that HR professionals take a more hands-on approach to the selection and implementation of 21st Century HR technology.

Current state

When an HR system is capable of delivering tools, processes, analytics and transactional capability, to each employee on their phone it can provide the foundation for effective management of organizational Talent.

However, in many instances, reality consists of fragmented, 'legacy', narrowly focused (specialist) systems that do not 'talk' to each other and cannot deliver real time capability to every employee in accordance with their role and position in the organization. In such instances, an upgrade is overdue.

Taking charge

Acquiring the 'right' technology is absolutely essential if HR aspires to add value to the workforce in this digital age. It is therefore incumbent on HR professionals to take the lead in defining user needs, developing an RFP (request-for-proposal), evaluating system capabilities and driving selection - rather than leaving these critical decisions to colleagues in Technology, Finance or even to the CEO.

Handling objections

It is quite normal that such 'radical' ideas will immediately give rise to objections. Technology colleagues may insist that they are 'comfortable' with existing enterprise-wide systems even though these were built for tracking inanimate objects – materials, goods, furniture, or cash. For continuity and simplicity they would prefer to tweak existing systems for use by HR. However, if HR can share detailed user specifications for a mass customized people management system, it will be possible to convince Technology of the need for an upgrade as it will become apparent to them that existing systems are not fit for purpose. Finance colleagues could take the view that systems are 'too expensive' relative to the current cost of HR, which typically would be about 1-2% of total employee cost. They may even say that the current sub-optimal HR system has not yet been fully written off, so spending on a new system will have to wait. However, if HR can quantify the true cost of people management incurred by the business due to fragmented systems – necessitating replication of information and resources in many silos across the organization, it is possible to convince Finance and the CEO to invest in the 'right' technology. Similarly the cost of semi-manual administrative processes and the opportunity cost of failure to effectively harness the intellectual capital of the workforce across the organization can provide additional strength to the proposition for an upgrade.

The 'right technology'

It is critical for HR professionals to have a good understanding of the capabilities of HR systems available in the market. As a first step, they can reach into their pocket or handbag for their mobile phone and examine what they can do with it as a private citizen. The next step is to compare the functionality/capability of their organization's systems with that of their mobile phone. In most instances the wide gap between the superior capabilities of their private system and their organization's legacy system will become strikingly apparent. This realization should be sufficient motivation for the HR professional to spend a couple of hours every day for a few weeks to search the web and seek professional advice regarding effective HR systems. SaaS (software-as-a-service) or 'cloud' based systems could present an attractive option as these systems

tend to be available on a pay-for-use basis with a ready-to-use infrastructure that can be configured to meet organizational needs within weeks – instead of the months and years traditionally required to implement systems. The latest systems should be able to handle processes across the full employment cycle and/or are flexible enough to smoothly interface with other specialist systems, as well as, with email, spreadsheets, word processors, accounting systems and the like.

The bottom line

These systems present a very real opportunity to reboot HR to step up to the challenges of managing people in the Digital Age. However, this will not happen unless dedicated HR professionals take personal responsibility for implementing technology capable of delivering mass customized HR solutions that ensure a 'personal touch' for each member of the 21st Century workforce of 'free agents'.

SECTION F

People Focus
The Development Dimension

▶ Gender Inclusion and HRM: Leading with Human Focus

▶ Growth: At What Cost?

Gender Inclusion and HRM:
Leading with Human Focus

Kalpana Tatavarti, is Founder Director, Parity Consulting & Training with over 20 years' experience spanning Marketing, Sales, Leadership Development and Diversity & Inclusion.

She has partnered with marquee clients across industries to build gender inclusive workplaces in India. As a specialist in women leadership she has trained and coached women executives / leaders across the organizational landscape in building successful careers. Her work in developing women leaders in organizations is distinguished by its holistic perspective and a keen focus on building enabling eco systems.

A Masters in Marketing & Sales, Kalpana is a certified Executive Coach, besides being certified in several transformational frameworks and tools. She sits on boards of companies as an Independent Director. As an Angel Investor, she invests in early stage startups selectively. She is also Founder of Manasvini, an NGO, providing micro credit to economically disadvantaged women.

Kalpana Tatavarti

Gender Inclusion and HRM: Leading with Human Focus

In a nutshell

Gender Inclusion is high on every CEO's Agenda today and increasingly so in India. Though a little late in the journey, a slew of legislations and a growing economy resulting in talent wars, have driven this agenda. Yet the gender inclusion agenda is beyond compliance and business case. It is a larger perspective of social justice and equality, humane and human in nature.

Though a CEO's agenda, the complex and nuanced nature of the journey requires consistent and tireless efforts with a long-term perspective. A social change such as this requires courage, influence and a clear execution focus that HR can provide.

HR should step in to set the strategy and navigate the ship to achieve gender balance in organizations, which are microcosms of society.

In this article, we explore how, as consultants, we have been witness to the role HR has played in implementing Gender Inclusion in their organizations, evidencing the human focus.

"….building a culture of **respect** for individuals is essential to achieving gender equality because **people, not programs**, are what make a company inclusive and diverse." Bob Easton, Accenture Australia and New Zealand Chairman

Gender inclusion or growing the female talent pipeline is no more a question of 'should we?' for organizations. It is a business necessity, more so in India, given the demands of a growing economy and the war for talent. Add to that the growing evidence that leveling the gender balance in organizations adds to its bottom line, and it becomes evident why this has become a key focus area for HR professionals and organizations.

Yet the conversation on gender inclusion in businesses is not and cannot be limited to the business case or compliance, as is evident in Bob Easton's statement above. It treads the broader issue of social justice, gender equality and economic growth. It is a human rights issue.

The UN has clearly articulated this as one of the Sustainable Development Goals. A slew of studies have calculated the potential impact of increasing women's participation in the workforce on the GDP of nations. And governments across the world are passing laws to speed up the social and economic change.

Organizations too have the ability to play a key role in leading this change, given their access to large populaces. Besides, they also have a responsibility to serve the contexts they operate in. The Maternity Bill, the Prevention of Sexual Harassment Act, and the Companies Act, 2013 on woman Director on Boards, have placed significant responsibilities on organizations in contributing to this change.

In our consulting experience in building gender inclusive workplaces and growing the female talent pipeline, we have been witness to many large organizations across India that have embraced this journey with great commitment and rigor. The journey of gender inclusion in organizations is a difficult one. One, it requires a significant leap of faith considering that it is hard to measure the change, besides being a very slow process; two, the socio-cultural influences are deeply internalized and are many times beyond the ambit of influence for organizations; three, the path of change itself is strewn with resistance and sometimes downright hostility, since it pulls against centuries of entrenched structural status quo. It is clearly the CEO's agenda; but HR, as custodians of the people function have to set and drive this humane agenda, beyond business case or risk mitigation, and leverage their roles to embed gender inclusion into their organizational DNA. The HR professionals and organizations who have committed to and implementing this agenda, are showing us the way towards reconciling the 'human' focus with the business focus.

Consider the Sexual Harassment of Women in Workplaces (Prevention, Prohibition, Redressal) Act, 2013. On Nasscom's commissioning, we conducted a study in association with Trilegal, to evaluate and understand the implementation of the law. The law itself protects women, but most organizations have gone beyond to protect both men and women; and some have included same sex harassment too in their policies. In places where the law is grey, organizations have chosen to abide by the spirit and intent of the law by building in specific details in their policies. I have been on cases where HR heads (and their CEOs) have taken a firm stand on zero tolerance against senior, influential employees who were found to be harassers. A key challenge in implementing the act is getting women to report on sexual harassment cases, due to fear and character abuse. It requires a lot of education and a trusted, rigorous investigation process conveyed to employees through continued messaging to provide a climate of trust where people feel able to report. The HR function drives and achieves this climate of trust in organizations where we have seen the law being implemented in spirit and intent.

Maternity is a challenging phase in a woman's career path. Often referred to as the Maternal Wall, this phase is witness to women dropping off careers, slow pedaling their careers, systemic biases and prejudices impacting their career growth. The 'leaking pipeline' is a reality across the world, and specifically in India, reports are showing declining female participation and growth in careers. The Maternity Benefit Amendment Act, 2017, has increased the duration of maternity leave that organizations are mandated to allow, providing women the much needed support in a society with little infrastructural support. But the challenge is much more nuanced. In a snap survey we conducted amongst women, we found some of the women raising concerns on how this could potentially reiterate the stereotypes and biases about working mothers. So while providing maternity leave as mandated by law, going beyond compliance to provide flexi work policies, which are perceived by most business heads and managers as 'expense' it falls to HRM to also plan strategies to combat the biases and

stereotypes that are socialized constructs and potentially a fallout of perceptions of 'benefits'. I remember one HR head (we christened him 'The Crusader'!) who would challenge any manager / employee with statistics and data whenever they raised concerns of reverse discrimination. Wherever we have seen gender inclusion efforts bearing fruit, it has almost always been an outcome of a dynamic HR team.

Maternity mentoring & coaching programs for women and their managers have been launched and are successfully addressing these challenges. Programs to attract mothers who have taken a break and investing in them to build their competencies & skills, besides confidence (which is often a casualty during the maternity phase) have also been initiated by many HR teams in organizations. Trainings and workshops on minimizing biases are run for managers and teams to enable seamless reintegration of returning mothers into the system. Appraisals for returning mothers are also closely monitored, with some organizations mandating stable appraisal ratings across the pre and post maternity phases.

In fact, we are currently partnering with two large business houses with interests across industries that are investing on young women in their organization, even before they reach maternity, to build a robust career orientation and re align their internalized socialization on aspirations, careers and career resilience. Other organizations are focusing on women during the 'vulnerable phase' of ages 28 years to 36 years to reignite their aspirations and ambitions that might have taken a backseat due to complexity entering their lives, through intensive training and coaching. One organization bravely took up our recommendation of engaging with the women's spouses by roping them into the program! Most organizations have women leadership programs in some form or other, to enable women engage with their careers in a more focused and intentional manner. Fast track programs for hi potential women employees to prepare them for leadership roles combine competency building, gender nuances, and opportunities to participate in high visibility projects. In most cases, it is about taking a punt on a woman leader who

might not have the right competencies for the role, but providing her with the opportunity (and support) to grow. Talent Management teams, articulate the case for developing female talent, own them and ensure there is a ready talent pool of women executives & leaders to fill senior management positions. The head of Talent Management of a large multi national company, who was also a good friend, reached out to us, concerned about the lack of ready women talent within the organization, to step into senior leadership roles. We worked together to build a leadership development intervention for women in their middle management cadre, through a structured program of development, mentorship and sponsorship, and successfully ran three batches.

Combined with supportive polices, all the above initiatives are beginning to show some needle movement. Policies on hiring to bring in more women into the organization include a range of rewards and recognitions for vendor partners and business leaders alike. Most organizations now insist on a 50:50 slate at entry levels and offer special incentives for female lateral hires at senior leadership level. Processes to check systemic biases for promotional slates, besides policies on accountability for managers on number of women in their teams are having a positive impact on the depleting numbers in the talent pipeline.

Engaging with and enabling leaders manifest inclusive leadership behaviors is a key factor in redressing the gender balance. Training, coaching and reward systems for leaders have been developed by HR of leading organizations to prepare this facet of gender inclusion. A year ago, a large IT major reached out to us for coaching two senior women leaders, who did not 'fit' into the system. A qualitative diagnostic revealed the predominantly 'masculinized' culture of the top leadership team, with significant gaps in their ability to engage with senior women leadership. A sensitization session combined with coaching for the women leaders as well as the senior leadership team, to build inclusive leadership competencies was recommended.

Lastly, building a culture of respect for the differential strengths that women bring to the table creates a climate of inclusion, where women leaders can thrive and grow. Embedding gender inclusion into the system requires removing biases and developing positive feelings towards differences. We have seen this work beautifully in one organization where HR and the Communications team developed campaigns on busting stereotypes, celebrating differences and rewarding managers who were engaging with women in their teams inclusively.

The journey of Gender Inclusion in organizations, especially in India, is admittedly at a nascent stage. It is a humane agenda with business impact, which has to be driven by the HR function with a keen human focus.

The HR teams and Organizations that are keeping that focus are showing the way towards reconciling the human focus with the business focus.

Growth
At What Cost?

Kaushik practices as a psychologist-psychoanalyst and has worked with individuals, groups and top teams, across a wide variety of market sectors. Kaushik is a trained coach supervisor, who is responsible for the quality and delivery of coaching services across diverse cultures. His professional background includes research in understanding the inner workings of the mind. Also, he has helped manufacturing groups approach quality from a psychological perspective and has worked as a researcher and counselor with under-privileged children. In his spare time Kaushik is an amateur birder and explorer of history.

Kaushik is currently managing consultant at YSC, a premier Leadership Consultancy. Prior to this he was head of coaching for APAC at the Center for Creative Leadership and was based in Singapore.

Nikita is a Research Consultant at YSC Consulting, a global leadership strategy firm and currently heads the leadership analytics team in India. She specializes in quantitative and qualitative data analysis and research. Her work includes insight into leadership assessment, talent development, identifying potential, diversity & inclusion, succession planning, coaching and team effectiveness.

Nikita graduated with a Masters in Industrial/ Organizational Psychology and has an advanced PGD in Counselling Psychology. In the past, she has developed behavioural and soft skill training programs for organizations the areas of performance management, leadership development, team building & conflict resolution, organizational development, occupational health & safety, prevention of sexual harassment at the workplace, work stress management, etc. She also has experience practicing as an EAP Counsellor and has worked as a Senior Research Assistant with a non-profit academic institution.

Kaushik Gopal

Nikita D'Souza

Gender Inclusion and HRM: Leading with Human Focus

In a nutshell

Can growth continue to happen without development? What is the value of growth without development?

The pursuit of one without the other can be detrimental to both individuals and organizations, while balancing both can lead to larger sustainable outcomes.

Specifically, what are some of the larger questions organisations need to ask themselves if they need to find that fine balance.

The Thrill of Growth

A financial services company posted growth of over 30%. It was getting used to big achievement year on year. The celebrations were intense though short lived. Steep targets quickly brought the adrenaline back and the intensity began. There would be monthly reviews. The language of the reviews would show the 'game face' of the boys' locker room, though they all had gradually developed thick skins to easily absorb the acidic attacks of a dissatisfied boss, driven by achieving numbers and hell bent on getting to one hundred and twenty percent.

As a preparation for the year, HR requested feedback skills training to help learning from experience and lead on to better performance with minimum damage. On inquiry, what became evident was that there was very little feedback that was taking place. Attacks of various kinds replaced feedback: blatant use of four letter words at one end to dealing with issues through escalation was part of the culture. There was more negativity in the system and next to no appreciation. Huge growth was happening and there were intense celebrations, so what? HR was clearly concerned but tentative. Their focus on the 'soft stuff' made them an easy meal for the wolves, self-assured in the success of their hunt.

A look into the culture of the organization showed an underlying disaffection. Attrition was high but the compensation made it a dilemma for many. They had to suck up the toxicity in the environment: the big boys played hard, making a virtue of the context and driving a clear message to others: if you can't take it here, leave. They had managed to create a space where the individual was rewarded for what he achieved and people were driven to be heroic. While the organization was very happy with the way its numbers were being achieved, unfortunately there was an impact on the cultural ecosystem that had become nasty and toxic.

An example from a senior manager

One executive in his late thirties, highly aspirational and with immense potential, had risen through the ranks rapidly. He had achieved what few others could have in the time frame he had. Unfortunately, he was almost always on a treadmill of achievement and looking for the next thing to do. He had stopped reading systematically. Stopped just 'being there' for his family. He candidly spoke about the fact that if he spent more than thirty minutes with his family on a weekend, he would be plagued with what he was not doing. Family relationships were slowly but surely sliding and all because the pressure driving individual achievement had not factored in runaway person growth with the infrastructure that would sustain him for a longer time.

Taking a Step Back

Growth at the cost of development could be a larger issue than recognized. Amartya Sen once said, "Economic growth without investment in human development is unsustainable and unethical" (interviewed by Madeleine Bunting of the Guardian in 2016). While he was talking about the overall growth of India, the problem is much larger than what the financial services company (referred to above) was experiencing. In fact, it is perhaps a part of the ecosystem we live in: growth happens, development, if you are lucky, will follow a few years behind.

So what differentiates growth and development? In biological systems, growth indicates a quantifiable change in size, whereas development indicates a transformation of structure. The two are intertwined with each other. If growth happens without development you have cancer, since the wild mushrooming of cells is without any structure to use the additional mass. If we feed ourselves too much we have growth without the ability to make full use of and burn the extra calories and as a result our bodies grow out of shape and in the end, utility. Growth is an increase that is measurable whereas development is the progressive change in the underlying quality. Development cannot be measured by growth alone as they might not always be dependent on each other. In essence, development supports growth, potentially leading to a virtuous cycle, if they are linked with each other.

A Framework

One can represent the relationship between growth and development through the following illustration:
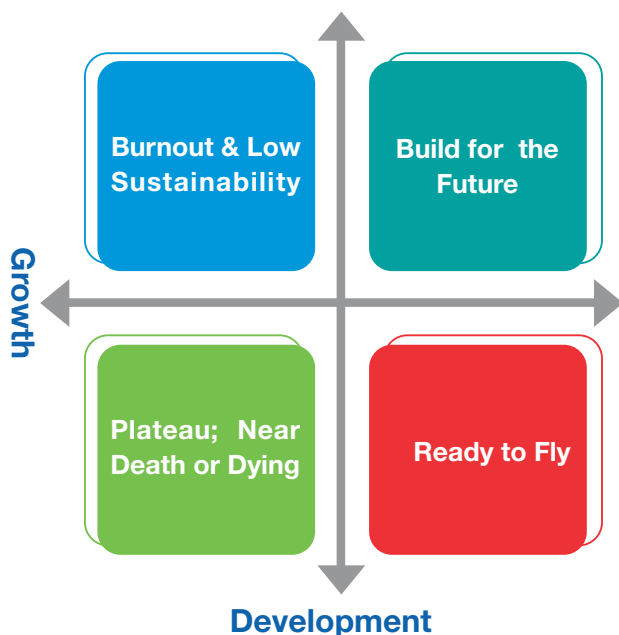
When there is no development and growth, the system plateaus. It is a death like experience. When this happens to couples, relationships or organizations, they end up existing without any real interest in the relationship. The focus is on day to day survival with the meeting of basic needs. Over time, such a system will become a vestige, somewhat like an appendix in the human body, with no real use.

When development is strong without growth, there is a readiness and therefore a need for exposure, experience and opportunity. If these are not provided, there is a strong likelihood that the person or organization will wind up. The difficulty of starting a new business in India aptly shows how readiness meets with obstacles that prevent the opportunity for growth, resulting in a quick demise.

When growth happens without the support of underlying development, it is like a big tree with a very small root system and can potentially crash with strong headwinds associated with competition or a flagging economy. Therefore, it is not sustainable in the long run.

Balancing the Forces

Finally, when you have development and growth happening together and in a way that is mutual, we have the recipe for adaptability and sustainability of the institution. Long standing organizations that have weathered the storms of time have showed this kind of combination. They encompass the physical growth or increased size with a change in innovation, management and continuous learning. It is the leadership that drives the culture of such organizations. They not only embody drive and focus but build in time to self-assess their approach, their impact on the system, on people, on the environment, linking it finally with purpose.

Jim Collins, in his book Good to Great brings out the relationship between passion and meaning beautifully: "When [what you are deeply passionate about, what you can be best in the world at and what drives your economic engine] come together, not only does your work move toward greatness, but so does your life. For, in the end, it is impossible to have a great life unless it is a meaningful life. And it is very difficult to have a meaningful life without meaningful work. Perhaps, then, you might gain that rare tranquility that comes from knowing that you've had a hand in creating something of intrinsic excellence that makes a contribution. Indeed, you might even gain that deepest of all satisfactions: knowing that your short time here on this earth has been well spent, and that it mattered."

While growth can come naturally to any person in an organization in terms of increasing sales, revenue, market share and so on, the underlying support system needs to be uniquely defined else it leads to decreased effectiveness, productivity or creativity. At the individual level you have people who are almost perpetually running on a treadmill focusing on how they will increase the numbers they are responsible for. It is not unusual for people to lose sight of their health and their families, only to pay the price at an early age. With organizations, the rush to grow stops them from both looking at the consequences as well as examining, with interest and curiosity, what are the underlying supports that need to be thought through, whether in the collective consciousness or in the infrastructure created by the organization. Some introspection is called for.

The questions organizations need to ask themselves to foster a focus on development include:

- What are our guiding principles and values?
- Our purpose?
- Are we living these?
- Do we have a clear vision of our future company?
- How do our strategic goals fit into this direction?
- Does our environment help create a sense of safety for people?
- Do they have an opportunity to express themselves without fear of being picked on?
- Do we balance the focus on achievement with encouraging our people to build their understanding, thinking and capability?
- Do we foster review mechanisms that place equal importance on qualitative factors as much as the quantitative?
- How did we go about what we achieved, what worked what could have been different?
- Do we encourage an individualistic focus instead of an organizational one?

Correspondingly, individuals would need to ask themselves:

- To what extent am I paying attention to how I think, the values that I embody, the impact I have on others?
- Am I mindful of my physical and mental infrastructure?
- Do I take care of my health needs?
- Am I nurturing and strengthening my family and social circle?

For individuals and organizations to flourish, they need to look closely at how they operate, in particular at the way they prioritize growth over development and intentionally move the needle to balance the two. An absence of this can only create short-term gain, with consequences that all of us have unhappily seen.

People Focus
Research
Insights

- ▶ The CFI – NHRDN People Focus & Leader Development Survey
- ▶ 'Human'-Centric Human Resources - A Call to HR to Awaken to its Potential
- ▶ Are we losing our Focus on People? The Future of HRM

The CFI – NHRDN People Focus & Leader Development Survey

A Report

The CFI – NHRDN People Focus & Leader Development Survey

A Report

Context

An issue that attempts to answer a question as fateful as, "Are we losing our focus on people? The future of HRM", is certainly not complete unless we ask and listen to as wide a cross section of stakeholders as possible.

For this very purpose, Coaching Foundation India and NHRDN partnered to survey coaches, business leaders and the HR community on various facets of 'people focus' such as investments by organizations to develop leaders, the increasing focus on the softer 'people' aspects of leadership behaviours and the organizational cultural elements that emphasize people focus.

The survey was rolled out in May 2018, with 14 questions across the following three dimensions

- People Focus in organizations
- HR and business leadership style
- Investment in Leader development

Basic Demographic Data
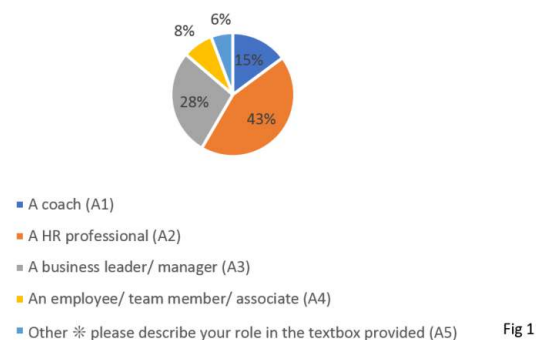
Fig 1

In a period of 3 weeks (8th – 26th May), the survey garnered 262 completed responses. There were of course many incomplete responses which have been removed.

The respondents (Fig 1) were quite evenly split between HR professionals (43%) and non-HR professionals (57%) which included coaches, business leaders, mid-level employees from other functions and the minor (6%) 'Other' category which consisted of retired professionals and consultants from other fields.
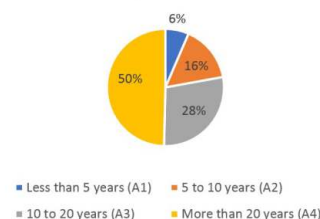
Fig 2

In terms of experience, (Fig 2) our respondent base is largely of professionals with over 10 years of experience (78%). 50% of the respondents have over 20 years of experience.

The findings at a glance

We present in this report excerpts from the survey, focussing on certain select questions that throw some light on stakeholder perceptions about people focus. Where appropriate, we present responses separately for HR and non-HR professionals.

1. **How do respondents perceive organizations have fared on the dimension of humanness in the last three years?**

- The emphasis of humanness in the relationship with employees is described as - personal warmth and knowing people vs impersonal and process based; care for people's interests vs business focus; time for people vs time for task.

The results

- As can be seen in Fig 3, while 49% respondents report an increase on this parameter, it is disturbing to note that 30% report a decline.

Fig 3.1
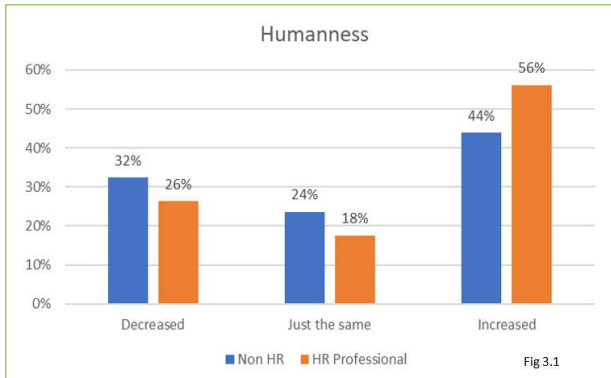
Clearly, HR respondents see the situation more positively than non-HR respondents

2. **How do respondents perceive organsiations have fared on the dimension of treatment of employees in the last three years?**

• The manner in which employees are treated in the course of their employment is described as - physical and psychological treatment including facilities, benefits, respect, safety, style

Fig 3
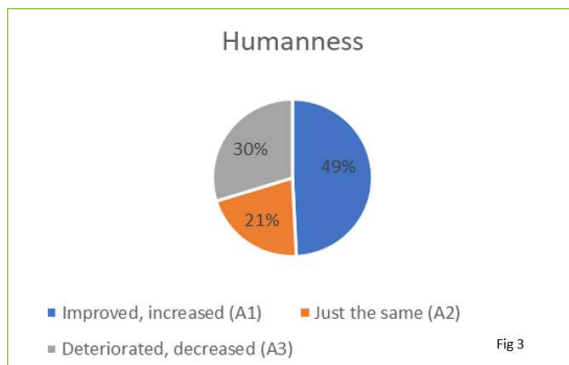
The results

As can be seen in Fig 4, 56 % of respondents perceive an improvement in the manner in which employees are treated at their workplace.

Fig 4

Fig 4.1
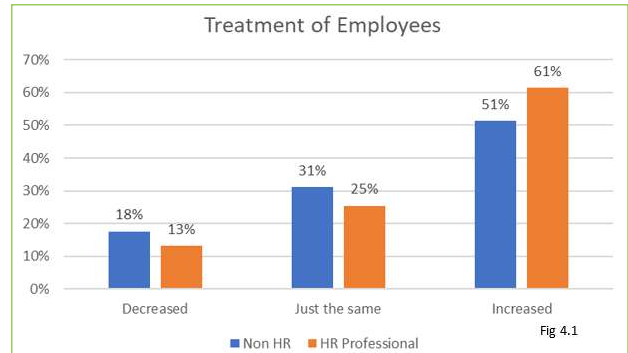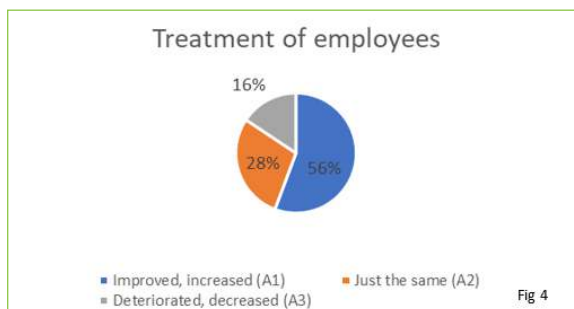
3. **How do respondents perceive organsiations have fared on the dimension of investment in Employee Development?**

• The extent to which investments are made for employee development is described as – investments in training, coaching, career growth projects and so on.

The results

As can be seen in Fig 5, 57% of respondents report an increase in investments made for employee development.

Fig 5

Fig 5.1

4. **What do respondents consider as the most typical attributes of 'people-focussed' organizations?**

From the below list of eight attributes, we asked respondents to pick their top three.

- Ensuring that business exigencies don't hurt people, as far as possible
- Having policies and practices that are considered people-friendly
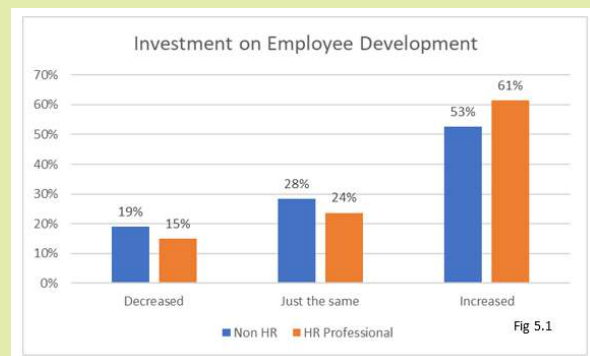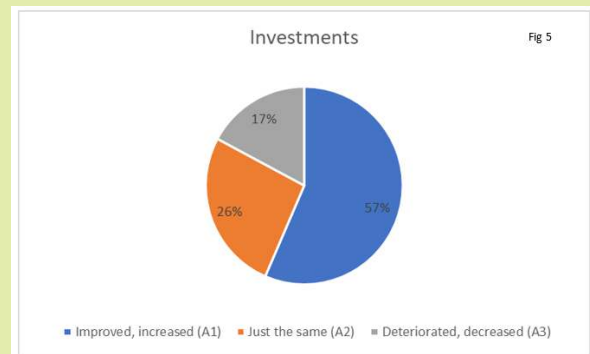- Paying well
- Treating people well
- Offering development and growth
- Standing by employees in times of difficulties
- Having a personal connect with employees and knowing them as individuals
- Creating a workplace that is safe, attractive and evoking pride

The results

- Having polices and facilities that are considered people friendly came right on top as the number one attribute.
- Treating people well came as the second most popular attribute.
- Offering development and growth and creating a workplace that is safe, attractive and evoking pride came as the third and fourth most popular attributes.
- What is surprising is the fact that - Having a personal connect with employees and know them as individuals ranked below all of these. 15% of the respondents ranked it third and none ranked it first.

5 **What in the perception of the respondents do HR professionals pay more attention to - organizational / task needs, or to people needs, or equally to both?**

The results

As is evident from Fig 9, 61% of all respondents believe that HR professionals pay more attention to organisational requirements.

Current Style of HR Professionals

- They pay balanced attention to BOTH organisational requirements AND employee requirements (A1)
- They pay more attention to organisational requirements (A2)
- They pay more attention to employee requirements (A3)

Fig 9

Interestingly though, 49% of the HR respondents believe that they pay equal attention to organisation and employee needs where as 71% of non-HR respondents believe that HR pays more attention to organisation needs, as is evident in Fig 9.1.

View of HR

■ HR   ■ Non HR

Fig 9.1
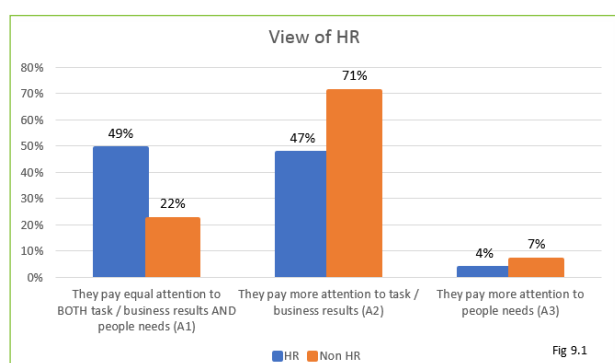
6. **What in the perception of the respondents do business leaders pay more attention to – task or business results or to people needs, or equally to both?**

The Results

The results as seen across all respondents on leadership styles as can be seen in Fig 10, points to an overwhelmingly strong focus on task, with people focus being miniscule

Current Style of Leaders

- They pay equal attention to BOTH task / business results AND people needs (A1)
- They pay more attention to task / business results (A2)
- They pay more attention to people needs (A3)

Fig 10
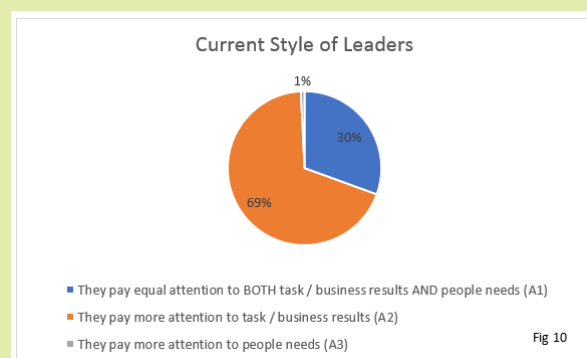
7. **What in the perception of respondents do organisations do when a manager delivers results BUT treats people badly?**

The three choices we offered respondents were:

- Offer him or her training and or coaching
- Give the person a strong message that this could become a big problem if not fixed soon
- Take no serious action

What would org do when a manager delivers results but treats people badly?
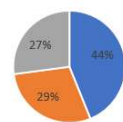
- Offer him or her training and or coaching (A1)
- Give the person a strong message that this could become a big problem if not fixed soon (A2)
- Take no serious action (A3)

Fig 11

The majority of respondents as can be seen in Fig 11, chose option 1 – coaching / training.

While 29% believe that a strong message will be given, 27% believe that no serious action will be taken.

Clearly, managers who treat people badly may not be viewed seriously enough, if results are good.

Surprisingly though, 34% of non-HR respondents perceive that the organization will not take any action at all.

Org response to a manager who delivers results but treats people poorly
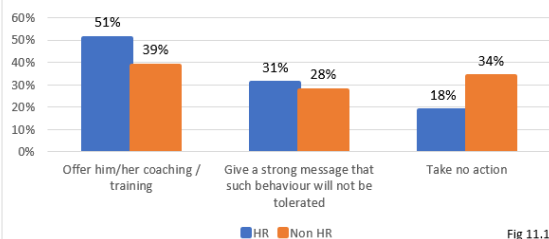
Fig 11.1

8. **What according to respondents are dysfunctional leadership behaviours that are most commonly addressed through coaching?**

The last part of the survey focussed on the developmental needs of leaders and organizational attention to the same. This was surveyed by asking about most common coaching needs, to what extent coaching has focussed on people skills and organizational investment in leader development

We asked respondents to rank the following seven behaviours, starting with the most frequently encountered item on top and least prevalent at the bottom.

- Handling failures poorly
- Making unreasonable demands
- Lack of emotional regulation with team members in public
- Not delegating or empowering
- Unethical, biased and/or unfair in their dealings with others
- Unable to listen to, and/or engage with other's point of view
- Not guiding, coaching, encouraging, supporting

The highest ranks for common coaching needs were awarded to the following four behaviours. (presented in descending order or rank)

- Unable to listen to, and / or engage with others' points of view
- Not delegating or empowering
- Not guiding, coaching, encouraging, supporting
- Lack of emotional regulation with team members in public

Conclusion

Clearly, organisations seem to be doing well on the hard aspects.

HR leaders and business leaders seem to focus more on task and business needs.

Bad behaviour toward people may be tolerated if results are good.

Most surprisingly, Having a personal connect with employees and knowing them as individuals does not even seem to matter that mush.

So, you decide if we seem to have lost people focus!

Report compiled for Coaching Foundation India Ltd. and NHRDN by Anand Kasturi (Senior CFI Coach and Management Consultant) and Aparna Vasanth (from CFI Research Desk)

'Human'-Centric Human Resources
A Call To HR to Awaken to its Potential

Kartik is a Leadership Development (LD) & Organization Development (OD) consultant, Executive Coach, and Group Facilitator operating from India. With twenty years of corporate experience in top management roles in Human Resources (HR) prior to his OD and LD consulting, Kartik brings to the table a significant appreciation of the challenges of the real world of executive teams working often in volatile / dynamic contexts and complex contemporary global structures. In addition, with his intimate engagement for over two decades with the evolving behavioral sciences movement in India, he brings to his work an additional and distinctive flavor of humanistic and phenomenological technologies of understanding behavior and the psychodynamics of teams and organizations. He has worked with and facilitated several teams from diverse business sectors.

Kartik is also a qualified musician, and has performed in several concerts in India. TAM (refer article for details) was born out of Kartik's dream of finding a space of correspondence between South Indian (Karnatik) Music and the fields of behavioral sciences and OD.

Rachna is a consultant in the areas of Strategic Human Resources, Organization Development, Capability Building and Talent Management. A Human Resource and Learning professional with 12 plus years of experience, her primary areas of work have been in organization effectiveness, leadership development, change management, talent management and group facilitation. She believes very strongly in the spirit and potential of people and systems and works towards unleashing this energy and potential for increased organizational health where people are more productive, successful and fulfilled. She is certified in and administers several psychometric instruments including the MBTI and FIRO B.

Kartikeyan V

Rachna Nandakumar

'Human'-Centric Human Resources
A Call To HR to Awaken to its Potential

Ravi Kyran joined Bajaj Auto in February-2017 as President (Human Resource). Prior to joining Bajaj Auto, he was with Texas Instruments (TI) in Dallas as Vice President of HR. He holds a post graduate diploma in HR from XLRI, Jamshedpur and has worked in strategic HR leadership roles in his career of over twenty years. In his free time, Ravi enjoys travelling and reading books.

Vishwanath (Vishy) specializes in the areas of Executive Coaching, Facilitation, Leadership development and Family Business Advisory. He is a business professional with over 20 years of organizational and consulting experience across a diverse set of industries. Vishy holds a MBA in Human Resources from XLRI Jamshedpur, India and during his career has held a wide range of HR and business portfolios at both the India and Asia Pacific Level. He is a credentialed Professional Certified Coach (PCC) with ICF (International Coach Federation) and also a Certified Professional Coach of the International Coach Academy (ICA). He is certified with The Leadership Circle (TLC) and is also a part of the Coaching Hub, an experienced group of coaches and facilitators based out of Singapore.

Now located in Austin, TX, Vishy enjoys music, trekking, traveling and writing and has co-authored a case study for the Indian School of Business, Hyderabad, India and has been published in journals in India.

Ravi Kyran

Vishwanath P.

'Human'-Centric Human Resources– A Call to HR to Awaken to its Potential

In a nutshell

We suggest that we should not be chasing the 'people-focus' question as much as we must be going after the 'human-centricity' question. We present a model for 'what is human' by sharing four psychological worlds (from the TAM framework - refer details in the article) and painting the human underpinnings of these. Using data from our ongoing research of the HR function, we outline how HR is currently being experienced – as a stability-preferring, 'containing masculine' function. The survey also gives us pointers to the desired future, and we explore how HR can move forward to additionally being more dynamic, provocative and vitalizing – thus helping create a new face of 'being human' for the organization. All of this may be all the more important given today's nature of complexity, dispersed workspaces, distributed workforce, global economic interdependencies, digital disruptions and the like.

The ideas presented in this article including all the details related to Transformative Alignment, the four worlds, the sixteen identities are more elaborately outlined in the forthcoming book "Discover the Alchemist Within: Taking the First Step towards Personal Growth" by Kartikeyan, Rachna and Vishwanath.

> "
>
> Human resources are like natural resources; they're often buried deep. You have to go looking for them, they're not just lying around on the surface. You have to create the circumstances where they show themselves.
>
> **— Ken Robinson**
>
> "

Abhinav was in a thoughtful mood, sipping his Americano laced with soy milk, in the windswept sidewalk adjacent to the Starbucks on Marine Drive. His friend Akanksha prodded him to speak. "You wanted to bounce off a few things with me – what's on your mind?'. Thankfully today Abhinav did not need much prodding. "You know, Akanksha, I have been wanting to move from my No.2 role in HR in my company to the CHRO role in a good company. I wanted to do this because I felt that my current company was losing its human focus and getting all-too operational". Akanksha raised an eyebrow in a 'go on' kind of gesture. Absent-mindedly stirring his coffee, Abhinav went on, "Strange yaar, in the past two months I have interviewed with six other companies. And it is depressing – in no company did I experience a pull towards what I think is quintessentially human. EVERY one of them wants the same thing – HR is about supporting business, HR should be operationally perfect, HR should be conscience-keeper, HR should make sure that the talent assembly-line (and here Abhinav grimaced) should not stop. I ask about culture, and one of them says – yeah, that too, thanks for reminding me. I ask about healthy interpersonal relationships, and they say Yes, yes, make sure we create a climate where people can network better and leverage each other. I ask about emotional climate and ambience, and one of the guys gives me a

catatonic, vacant stare. I ask about HR's role in overall system health and well-being and this guy tells me that we already have a medical center. I enquire about care, compassion and concern and I am patronizingly told yes, you should build that too, as long as HR doesn't become an ambulance service. I wanted to ask about HR's role as a provocateur, but I bit my tongue and held that one down! Am I being anachronistic or too futuristic, Akanksha?", wondered Abhinav as he carefully tucked away his copy of "The Human HR" in his backpack.

Let us take off from this point, dear Reader, and ask ourselves some of the questions that Abhinav may be going through. Except, we will make careful inquiries using some data that is available for us to base our explorations on, from an ongoing survey (*) that is being conducted by us, using the Transformative Alignment Map (TAM, for short). The contours of this framework are unfolded further in a following section.

Introduction

As a reader of this journal, and like Abhinav, there is no doubt that you are a serious inquirer into the nature, history, dynamics and future of the HR function as it is evolving in India. Like you, we too began our inquiry but with a set of burning questions –

• What is 'people-focus' and how is it different from 'human focus'?

• What is the picture of HR as it exists today?

• What can HR do to bring in a wholesome human focus

What is 'people-focus' and what is 'human-centricity'?

We are going to muddy the waters a bit first. We hold a position that the word 'people-focus' is a decoy, a red-herring; One that essentially limits what HR is about and what it ought to do. 'People' is about a collection of human beings, it implies reference to a number of human beings that are part of a system, be that an organization, a clan, a nation, a community or such. So, when we linger on the 'people-focus' of HR, we are likely to get caught up with what HR does or ought to do for a collection of human beings in the organization. There is a larger agenda for HR, and ergo, permit us to introduce the 'human focus'. 'Human' as a phenomenon, goes deeper than people-focus. The table (Artifact 1) below may help explicate the difference.

	People Focused Org	**Human Centric Org**
Basic Stance	Do things for people, value making people happy	Be authentic, All emotional states of people are meaningful and valuable
Leadership	Range from benevolent-paternalistic to participative	Focus on well-being AND Growth
Approach with people	Generosity	Contextually appropriate action
Expectations from leadership	Care and compassion	Create and maintain a system that allows for all aspects of the human system to emerge and be held with grace and alignment with the organization
Blind Spots	'Motivation' and 'making people comfortable' is misunderstood as 'Engagement'	Too caught up in its own convictions, all else seems hollow

Artifact 1

The TAM framework, from Transformatrix LLP (*), aims to study the forces that inform, make up and impact integration and wholesomeness of human systems, with a view to lead thought and action to promote greater alignment, well-being and growth in such. Critical to appreciating this article is the awareness of the four psychological worlds that TAM posits, along with their corresponding pulls, as is described in Artifact 2 below -

The Four 'Psychological Worlds' that make us human

- WCN - The World of Connectedness & Nurturance
- WFU - The World of Flow & Unfolding
- WAI - The World of Autonomy & Initiative
- WSO - The World of Structure & Order

Artifact 2

- WSO exerts a pull towards systems, processes, discipline, predictability, tradition, roles, etc

- WCN exerts a pull towards relatedness, touch, care, intimacy, etc.

- WAI exerts a pull towards individualism, assertion, growth, and expansion

- WFU exerts a pull towards inspirationality, curiosity, creativity, and change

These psychological worlds are in turn 'inhabited' by sixteen 'symbolic identities', but for the purpose of this paper, we will mostly stay with the four worlds.

Taking from the intent of the TAM framework, we advocate a view – that each of the four psychological worlds that we have offered above presents us a view of 'being human' – respectively – (1) WSO points to the human need to feel secure and be part of a system, (2) WCN is all about the need to relate, connect and touch, (3) WAI shows us the human need to aspire and grow, to be acquainted with power, and express strength, and (4) WFU unfolds the human need to create, play, to wonder and question, and experience flow.

We believe that all human beings have a need to feel integrated and whole – that is what makes them psychologically human; and conscious or unconscious muting of any part of oneself dehumanizes us and others. This applies to organizations as well, they being collectivities of human beings. But in reality, we (and therefore our organizations) are not always in a state of integration or alignment. A truly 'human-centric' organization is one that values each of these psychological worlds individually and all of them collectively. Truly human-centric HR is that which strives to create and foster the conditions in the organization and the context, to enliven such organizations.

The As-Is picture of HR

The dipstick survey that we commissioned initially polled 38 respondents with a near-equal mix of HR Heads, Business Leaders, Coaches / Consultants, and New Entrants to HR (as we write this, the survey continues as we have decided to maintain this as an ongoing survey of and for HR). Besides getting an overall and rounded view, our attempt was also to see what the differential voices were saying about the focus of HR as it exists today and what they felt it ought to be going forward. Here are some glimpses into the function that we could glean -

- An aggregate view (Artifact3 right below) suggests that the HR function as it is, is focused primarily on structures, systems, processes, role-clarity, SOPs, execution and delivery (highest WSO). The secondary pull of the HR function would seem to be towards relatedness, connections, and nurturing relationships (WCN, the next high world). HR seems to be currently most distant from being a fosterer of creativity, disruption, and change (low WFU).

All constituencies - view of HR as-is
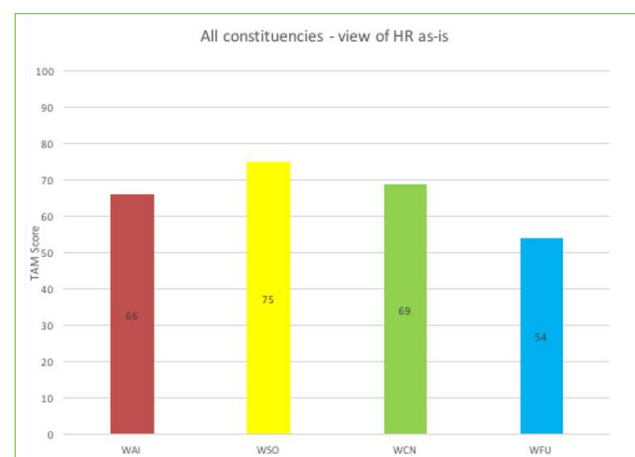
Artifact 3

- In the TAM framework, WSO and WCN are worlds that relatively prefer 'stability' and tend to have a static orientation. WAI and WFU are the worlds that relatively prefer 'change' and tend to have a dynamic orientation. The data thus further reveals to us that HR is relatively seen more as a 'stability preferring and static' function than a 'change-preferring and dynamic function'.

- The TAM framework also studies the relative 'masculinity' contrasted with the 'femininity' of any entity. Understanding these constructs in the context of the framework would require a deep-dive, so for now we would invite you to stay with our broad outline - Masculine' contains symbolic identities that are either penetrative in nature or containing/grounding. 'Feminine', on the other hand, contains identities that are either 'receiving' (contrasts with the masculine penetrative) in nature or 'expressive' (contrasts with the masculine 'containing'). Here is what the dipstick currently reveals –

  - Relatively, HR seems more masculine than feminine in orientation (perhaps a surprise to those that insist and/or have introjected a view that HR is feminine!)

  - Within the masculine aspect, HR seems to be considerably more of the containing/grounding nature

  This suggests that HR is perhaps seen like a benevolent 'father-figure', supportive, advice-giving, boundary-providing on the one hand, and on the shadow-side being restrictive, paternalistic, and patronizing.

- The survey data further reveals that the symbolic identities most associated with HR currently by all constituencies put together are the 'Custodian' and the 'Administrator'. Without going into the deeper dynamics of these identities, the very names suggest that HR is seen as a maintainer of the status-quo, as a holder of continuity, history and traditions, and as an upholder of tasks. Thus, we can safely say that HR today plays a great role in helping people feel part of a system, understand the broader context and history that they are part of, and help them feel productive.

- On the other side, the playful and creative part of being human, and the power-seeking and ambitious part of being human seem to be least fostered by HR. (The symbolic identities least associated with HR in the TAM survey-assessment are the 'Trickster' and the 'Warlord', and more about these in a following section).

The survey goes on to reveal a few other interesting snapshots. The beliefs revealed by the four constituencies polled is given below against specific triggers in the first column (Artifact 4)

	HR Heads	Business Leaders	Coaches/Consultants	New Entrants To HR
The HR function is primarily	Strategic	Administrative	Administrative	Problem-solving
The HR function is not	Change-catalyzing, challenging, expansion and growth-seeking	Change-catalyzing, challenging	Expansion and Growth-seeking	(No clear pattern discerned)

Artifact 4

And, when we consolidate the individual qualitative comments received through the dipstick survey, the voice of the business leaders (put together) seems to be saying that while HR is facilitative and enabling, they are still not partners to business. The voice of the HR Heads in the survey suggests that they feel that the function is indeed business aligned, empathetic and emotionally intelligent.

What can we conclude from all of the foregoing? HR has gone ahead from its initial 'welfare' oriented employee-champion persona to now also being highly execution-focused and delivery-excellence-oriented. HR is now being seen as productive, efficient, quick, and result-oriented. This brings new plaudits, no doubt. However, this may be a new cage. Even with all of this, HR has ended up being 'human in a static way' or 'human in a way that preserves and maintains the organization'.

What can HR do to bring in a wholesome human focus?

The qualitative consolidated data from the survey suggests that HR needs to drive deeper engagement, play a bigger role in decision-making, embrace creative technology all the more, and be more humane.

When we analyse the dipstick data, and ask ourselves the above question, the poser that confronts us is – 'how can HR be human in a dynamic way?'. As we have said earlier, the symbolic identities least associated with HR, as it emerged from the data, are those of the Trickster and the Warlord. Let us ask ourselves how can HR mindfully 'become' these identities, embrace and express their positive energies.

"Why so serious" OR "On Becoming the Trickster"

Perhaps HR needs to ask itself if people in the organization come to work to 'play' or to 'work'. While it is not our intent to dilute the seriousness of work, we must also share our dismay that workplaces have diluted the playfulness of work. From Charlie Chaplin's classic 'Modern Times' to the more recent 'Officespace', we see how workplaces have become machine-like. And, no, we are not talking of more play-spaces (foosball, tabletennis, squash courts etc) which are a result perhaps of being 'people focused'. We are talking instead of a spirit of play, fun, enjoyment, flow and equalization at work. This cannot be ushered in by 'doing' activities.

HR needs to work closely with business to consciously bring in a culture of questioning the 'givens'. Maybe HR can start by considering the organization as a 'set of conversations'? The Trickster in HR must realise that language and conversations can be used to construct social realities. Bringing in the practice of story-telling by leaders can be deeply impactful, stories being the primary conveyors of organization culture. A recent trend has been the use of storytelling as a recruitment strategy, providing an emotive context for the potential hire to relate with, and also making the company's culture, values and traditions accessible to them.

Third, HR can also benefit much from changing leadership development from the staid prisons of age-old practices to embracing the emergent world. Train leaders to master the unexpected and the unwanted, befriend ambiguity and embrace complexity – and don't try fancy stuff like sending them deep-sea diving or cooking a pop-up meal, in fact don't try anything, but ply them with challenges, things that stretch their minds.

Last for now, provide safe-spaces for retreat, reflection and renewal, all the more important in the turbulent organizations of today. As Bergquist puts it, "At the heart of survival in a turbulent, post-modern world is the capacity for synthesis, love and sanctuary". HR needs to get out of the mindset of running the organization as 'just an organization' and learn to run the organization as an 'institution'. This calls for providing many reflection spaces – some examples – dialog gatherings of new joinees interacting with the 'about-to-retire', or getting hi-potential employees to design and conduct focus-group discussions on 'offbeat' and 'problematized' themes like 'dealing with unintended consequences of leadership' or 'designing organizations for enjoyment rather than fun" etc, and use the learnings to keep multiple dialogs and perspectives going. Several years ago, and certainly ahead of the times then, Mafoi Consulting (now Randstad) used to conduct what were called annual institutional meets, where people across the organization participated in large group dialogs on aspects like the emotional ambience in the organization, the nature of engagement, quality of leadership and membership etc.

"On becoming the Warlord"

The human energy of the Warlord identity is to do with growth, expansion, ambition, aspirations and achievement. To activate the Warlord energy both for itself and for the larger organization, HR may need to be willing to take more chances, to drop

preoccupation with the 'safety net' and explore its own sense of adventure and competitiveness. The Warlord energy ensures that skills and capabilities are acquired or built not just for the 'established' organization of today or even the 'emergent' organization of tomorrow – they invest in acquiring or building the capabilities of the organization that is yet to perhaps even be conceived of. And when HR is truly able to do that, they would then be able and willing to foster such desires in the organization with a sense of intimate knowing and not just something they have to 'enable'. To take chances and risks would mean taking action without a known response. Steve Jobs is known to have invested his way out of the downturn during the dotcom bubble around the turn of the last century. Apple did not do layoffs, the R&D budget was actually increased and Apple emerged ahead of its competitors with the pioneering iPod in 2001, and the world has not been the same since. Now, Steve Jobs is known to have done that. What is HR's appetite for embracing risk and how can they do more of such?

A great example is available in the recent book by Ganesh, Devarajan and Rao, where they present the case of the VC organization Accel which has a benchmark 'venture development practice' to build critical organization capabilities in the start-up enterprises they choose to invest in, even in advance of such start-ups stepping into the market.

The aspect of HR's vision for itself is relevant here. HR must know what it wants to accomplish—and why. There is no need to compulsively wait for the organization to define what HR should be. HR must make it it's business to know what's possible and also what will pitchfork the organization forward, even if the organization may not be asking for such a vision from HR. For far too long, a number of even seasoned HR professionals have been content implementing the organization's stated agenda. And very often, organizations have also not demanded too much from HR. "Get hiring right and don't drop the ball there, make policies and implement them, do basic training, hire a good compensation consultant to advise us on how much to pay, manage the bell curve and talent review process, and while you are at all these,

please also do D&I, CSR, Ethics, Expat Assignments" – give or take a bit to/from this, most organizations seem to want this as standard, normal HR agenda. One hypothesis, maybe extreme, is that this may be organizations' own defensive ploy to seduce HR to create a culture of 'business-as-usual" for otherwise, business may actually have to come to terms with their own limitations and inadequacies! So, for instance, when HR tries to step out of this 'standard normal template' and do true Organization Development (OD), it is like pulling teeth without anaesthesia, a painful process that finds no takers mostly. Or in the garb of OD, some plain vanilla 'soft skills' (a phrase that we abhor and urge you to challenge when you come across it) programs are done.

Before we leave

Let us take stock and ask ourselves the 'so, what' question. Hopefully we made a useful point in suggesting that we should not be chasing the 'people-focus' question as we must be going after the 'human-centricity' question. We presented a model for 'what is human' by sharing four psychological worlds (from the TAM framework) and painting the human underpinnings of these. Using data from our ongoing assessment of the HR function, we outlined how HR is currently being experienced – as a stability-preferring, 'containing masculine' function. The survey also gives us pointers to the desired future, and we explored how HR can move forward to additionally being more dynamic, provocative and vitalizing – thus helping create a new face of 'being human' for the organization.

So, what? Well, all of this may be all the more important given today's nature of complexity, dispersed workspaces, distributed workforce, global economic interdependencies, digital disruptions and the like. So, let us offer ourselves a plea, an exhortation – let HR awaken to its potential – let HR go beyond the lulling chant of 'people-focus', and move towards creating transformative, aligned, integrated human entities.

And maybe, just maybe, we will be able to help Abhinav find a role that meets his need for a wholesome human organization, after all!

Acknowledgement

References

1. Bergquist, William; 2010; 'The Postmodern Organization: Mastering the Art of Irreversible Change'; Josey-Bass Publishers

2. Chella, Devarajan, Rao; 2018; 'HR Here and Now'; Sage Publications India

3. CareerBuilder, UK; 2016; The Changing Face of HR: Storytelling in Recruitment; https://hiring.careerbuilder.co.uk/blog/storytelling-in-recruitment

4. The Transformative Alignment Map at www.taminsights.com

From Human Resources to Human Relationship Management

Y. Shekar is a friendly and entertaining business leader who likes to blend Sports, Hindi film songs and business management together to create new meanings and vistas.   His over three decades of customer facing work experience in the Information Technology vertical makes him passionate about emerging technologies and futuristic business processes, which he incorporates in his Management Consulting services.

Shekar has just completed writing his thesis for Ph.D. in the area of technological impact on middle management roles and organisation structures. The research also covers skilling required in future for managerial roles.

He is a certified Executive Coach – coaching senior and middle management level executives. He enjoys teaching and is a visiting faculty at Management institutes for Information Systems Management and Customer Relationship Management.

Y. Shekar

From Human Resources to Human Relationship Management

<div style="background:#1f5fa6; color:white; padding:1em;">

In a nutshell

Indeed, the focus of business has shifted from people to processes and from performance to profits. The mechanised metric based management, the clinical approach to compliance and the penchant for profits have snuffed out 'human beings' and subjected human bodies to toe-the-line of achieving financial results. The emerging trends of lean organisation structures, automated processes and transactions, implementation of thinking and acting technologies, etc. are leading to an environment that will embrace efficiency of systems and eschew engagement with people; allow cost parameters to supersede career options; position profit objectives ahead of perseverance …

Emergence of technology has enhanced speed, efficiency and scale to a level that cannot be humanly managed. The dependence on automation to operate, manage and sustain business activities and on technology to discover new opportunities and charter into unknown territories has brought mechanisation under focus and has taken it (focus) away from human beings.

People management skills have got democratised - every manager is expected to have people management skills.

While technology is HRD's disruptor, technology is also the oracle of HR's resurgence in the emerging world of business that will have man+machine working together.

</div>

Are We Losing Our Focus on People? The Future of HRM

The research base

"In the last 12 months it (Artificial Intelligence) has helped us eliminate the efforts of about 11000 full-time employees", Vishal Sikka, CEO Infosys (S, 2017)[i]; "If I have 50 people doing a job and see in an automation possibility a more efficient way of doing that, I must do that, even though it means that I am cannibalising my revenues" – TCS[ii] COO, N Subramaniam, Ganapathy. Tata Motors[iii] announced the doing away with positions like general manager, senior general manager, and deputy general manager to turn itself into a flatter organisation and collapse the organisation level to five from 14 currently. These are not isolated cases but are regular features in large and medium sized organisations in India. Investing in technology to increase efficiency and scale of operations occupies the strategic bandwidth of thought and time of the CEO.

This article is based on a comprehensive research on the impact of technology on organisation structures, by sampling close to 300 respondents – over a third of them comprising CXO level while the rest consisting of middle management level, working for medium to large sized organisations in India, in Technology, Services and Retail verticals. This research based article examines the impact of technology on HR and the possibilities of its re-emergence, through the changes in business environment which include the following factors:

i. The diversity in workforce

ii. Desire for 'experiencing' than 'owning'

iii. Skilling

iv. Role of 'Impact' in a Man+Machine environment

v. Death of Career

vi. Flatter and circular organisation structures

vii. Trust in Machines

Context

Across the two decades on either side of the millennium, global trends and also practices in India have changed from being Production centric (manufacturing oriented) to Product oriented (market facing), and then to Process focused (quality led) and finally now to Profits (cost of operations). In the same time frame, Industrial Relations transformed into Human Resources Management and then to Human Capital Management and now is Human Cost Management! Human cost is the cost of having the right skills at the right time in the right place, which can be converted into a revenue generating activity quickly. Does this feel like inventory management?

Figure-1: Top Management's perspectives on Technology. N=115
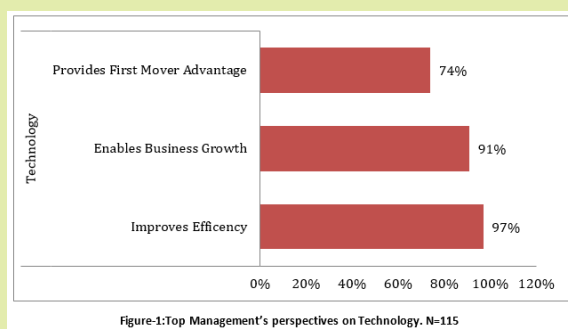
In future, as technology becomes intrinsic to business activities, Man+Machine (Cummings, 2013)[iv] will become a reality – human beings and machines will be working together as colleagues. Emerging technologies like Artificial Intelligence (AI), Robotics, Virtual Reality (VR), Internet of Things (IoT), etc. are capable of learning, implementing and making operations more efficient to such an extent that it will be impossible for human beings to manage those processes. Top Management believes in investing in machines (**see Figure 1**) because they (machines) work tirelessly to scale up the business activities, improve operational efficiency and even open up new business opportunities.

It makes financial sense too - once the initial capital cost is incurred, the operating cost only keeps reducing with time while the machine's capability keeps increasing, giving a very favourable capability-to-cost yield. Human

skills on the other hand start on a lower cost but become more expensive and inefficient with time. Therefore, for repetitive and routine tasks, top management will prefer technology to human beings. Human beings will be assigned tasks that machines cannot perform – tasks that are perspective oriented or subjective in nature; very complex and need multi-disciplinary skills; very unusual or unexpected situations requiring an out-of-the-box thinking; when the outcome of a process is very unpredictable – like relationship management, negotiation, mentoring, etc.

In effect, human beings will be performing tasks that cannot be managed only by applying logic, controlling process or through a well-defined structure.
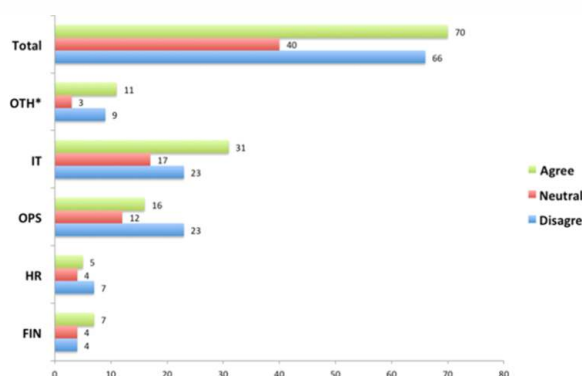
Figure 2: Middle Management Functions are Driven More by Technology than by Human Beings. N=176

What's Happening Around?

A very interesting phenomenon that writer Jonathan (Trevor, 2016)[v] observes is - "Uber, the world's largest taxi company, owns no vehicles. Facebook, the world's most popular media owner, creates no content. Alibaba, the most valuable retailer, has no inventory. And Airbnb, the world's largest accommodation provider, owns no real estate". Following this trend may lead to identifying the best organisation to work for being the one that owns no manpower! While this may appear unreal, the phenomenon of growing an organisation without assets (or asset light strategies) is becoming a global trend. Platform players like Uber and Air BnB, rather than the producers of goods and services are expected to lead the economic growth in the future. Such organisations employ few people, rely extensively on technology and have the flexibility to

scale up and down their business activities based on external demands. They are very agile and responsive too!

Such trends demand leanness in structure, deploy complex combinations of methods, products and markets that can only be managed by technologies. In such organisations, intelligent machines will do the predictable, process oriented and repetitive jobs like planning, scheduling, monitoring, co-ordination, following-up, budgeting and controlling. Systems and technologies are self regulated and they require minimal supervision.

Human beings will perform creative and complex (multi-domain) tasks involving unpredictability in outcome like negotiations, mentoring, research; solving unusual problems, managing unprecedented situations that emanate from rapidly changing external factors, as well as spot trends and patterns in the environment. Human roles will have variety, contextuality and ambiguity, requiring them to be creative and innovative in their thinking.

Hiring, developing and retaining talent in future will be a complex task riddled with kinds of uncertainties that technology will not be able to manage, although the processes may be fully automated. Human being's intuitive thinking and gut-based decision-making will be much in use to select the right individual from a globally distributed pool of resources.

The Longitudinal Impact of Technology on HR

HR will experience a longitudinal impact (Shekar, 2018)[vi] on account of speed and scale of operations influenced by technologies. The longitudinal impact relates to HR functions either getting automated or subsumed under other functions and hence not requiring a full-fledged department as a specialist team. As indicated in **figure 3**.

HR tasks that are process oriented, structured and repetitive like, hiring process, compensation and benefits, appraisal, manpower planning, compliance management, etc. will be done by intelligent machines and therefore will get mechanised.

Figure 3: Longitudinal Impact of Technology 'AI' can impact HR and Finance functions
The red line indicates the roles that will get impacted on account of Technology

Activities like career and succession planning, leadership & mentoring, counselling, relationship management, etc. that require humane skills like emotions, feelings and sensing, will become part of the responsibilities of the operations manager. As roles get too technical in future, Operations team will take charge of selection and also other activities leading to mentoring and grooming the team.

HR's activities relating to protecting culture, values, integrity and ethics of an organisation besides supporting people to deal with emotional situations will be the joint responsibility of the top and operations management.

Learning and development will become completely redundant – organisations will hire people with relevant skills when required, and will drop them when not required. Employees will invest in their skill development.

Top management will prefer to use technology to do those activities that human beings may do with reskilling (**see Figure 4**). In all the verticals surveyed, the opinion of the top management has been in favour of investing in technology.

The top management's urge to implement various kinds of technologies – driven by business needs of course, will only separate operations further from HR, which is already being viewed as a cost and will get eliminated as organisations strive for high cost efficiency.
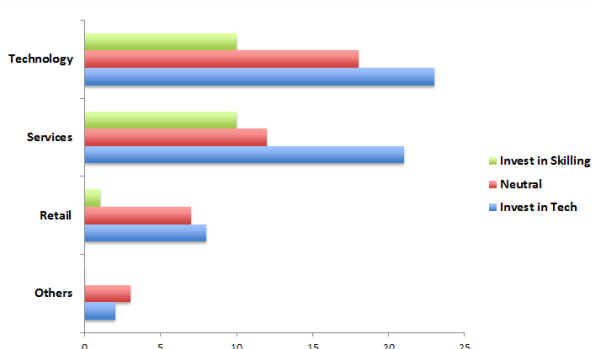
Figure 4 Top Management's Perspective on Investment in Technology versus Investing in Internal Skilling N=115

A study in UK by the International Bar Association (Wisskirchen, 2017)[vii] on accountant's work getting replaced by intelligent software is a good reference to consider. It mentions that there's 98 per cent probability that the work of an accountant can be done by intelligent software.

This is where HR needs to rediscover itself than get longitudinally impacted by technology. Technology impacts other functions too – sourcing, procurement, vendor management, which emerged as Supply Chain Management (SCM). Finance is rediscovering itself as 'Fintech'. Sales & Marketing has got reformed under Customer Relationship Management (CRM), which embraces the digital technology too within it.

From Human Resources to Human Relationship Management

If HR chooses to work as Human Resources, then like material resources got subsumed under SCM, HR will also get embedded within operations management function. If HR rediscovers itself as Human Relationship Management, then like CRM it too shall play a critical role in future.

Relationship Management is in fact going to be a core business function in future. Flat structures, chained entities coming together for a specific fulfillment that technology would enable and manage will demand the ability to develop strong people oriented relationships, which will require specialised skills.
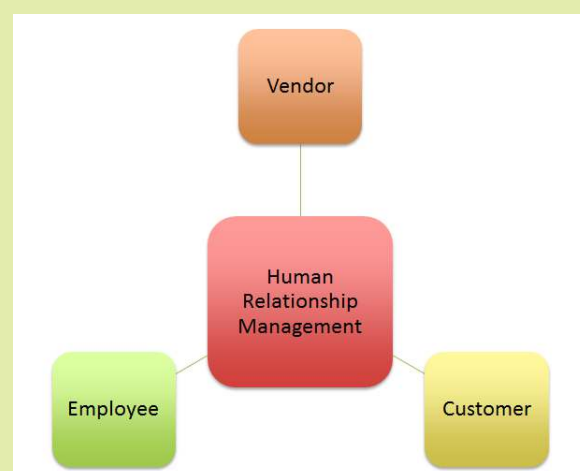
Figure 5 : Human Relationship Management

The findings of the survey indicate that the following trends and factors will aid the strong need for human relationship management orientation from HR.

i.   Diversity in workforce

ii. 'Experiencing' than 'Owning' and the death of careers

iii. Skilling – Hiring in lieu of training

iv. Flatter and Circular Organisation Structures

v.   The impact factor

vi. Trust in Machines

Diversity in Workforce Culture

HR professionals are already seized of the implications of diversity in the workforce. Diversity includes gender, culture, skill and competence, language, religion, beliefs and practices, awareness and outlook, needs, aspirations and philosophies, and generations.

All this leads to interpersonal challenges of tolerance, communication and intent and can only be managed through a strong relationship orientation.

Desire to Experience and Not-to-Own

'Not-to-own' but to 'experience' something is emerging as a trend with the new generations that are entering the workforce.

The attitude towards experiencing new things – at the work place and outside, will drive employees to take breaks in their careers, seek

new meanings in life and venture out much more than before. Experiencing also implies venturing at work place to do more than specified or exploring multiple tasks at one time or even demanding more challenging assignments from their managers.

Figure 6 : Responses of Middle Level Managers on Experiencing versus Compensation. N=120

'Generation Z May Not Want To Own Cars. Can Automakers Woo Them In Other Ways?' (Bettendorf, 2017)[viii], examines the economic impact of this behaviour, but more importantly it requires recalibration of Maslow's theory of hierarchy of needs.
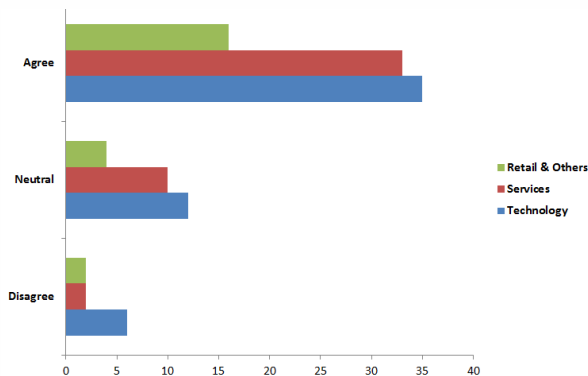
'Experiencing' neither has a defined scope nor can it be bound by policies. 'Experiencing' is a subjective matter and therefore needs to be personalised and contextualised. Therefore, excellent understanding of people alongwith contextualization of it will be very important.

The attributes of 'experiencing' include variety in roles, break and re-start options in jobs, working from home & flexibility of time, working on multiple assignments with different people at the same time, working on social and not-for-profit kind of tasks, etc.

Organisations will have to do much more than generate mere profits that enrich the society and/or environment around.

Professional and personal needs and desires will overlap and organisations need to take cognisance of this fact.

Skilling - Hiring in Lieu of Training

Spotting skill-sets a little ahead of them being needed or just in time when business needs them is going to be a key factor for an organisation's success in the future. There are a few reasons for spotting skills externally:

Complex and Ambiguous Roles:

Roles human beings will be performing will be complex and ambiguous. It will be ambiguous on account of speed of change and shifting context. Despite a lot of data being available easily, decision-making will be a 'judgement call' riding on top of these data.

Global Resource Pool:

Speed of operations influenced by AI and Robotics will ensure faster turn-around-time, leading to innovations happening more frequently. The speed of change will make existing skills redundant more rapidly. Hence sourcing people globally will become a full-time activity. As mentioned earlier, the diversity factor will make selection a complex task.

Rapidly Changing Skills:

Human beings' endeavour to respond to changes will make them acquire new skills periodically. In future, organisations will be looking for demonstrable skills – a context in which skills were put to use and there's an experience gained out of it. Organisations will prefer to invest in technologies and therefore human beings will have to invest in themselves for skill development.

The future skill-sets are largely unknown but WEF (World Economic Forum - The future of Jobs, 2016)[xi] has put upto 10 skills (**see Figure 7**) that will be required by human beings. Single skill will not be relevant, and how many of the multi-skills will form the basic work is yet not known!

Figure 7 : Future Skills – WEF Report – Future of Jobs

'Subject matter experts' will have to become 'Subjects matter experts' and this is applicable to all levels in the organisation.

CEOs believe that in future, Investing in technology and hiring the right skills at the right time will be more business appropriate as compared to developing skills in-house through training programmes and other forms. **Figure 8** indicates top management's preference for technology.
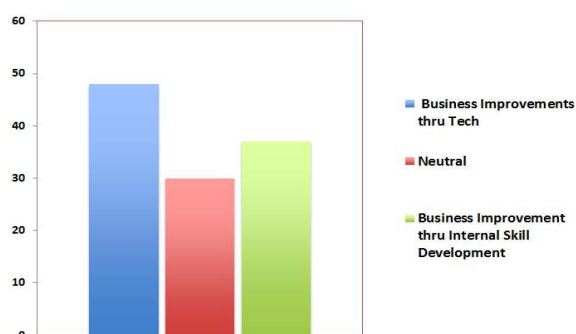

Figure 8 : Top Management's Response to Using Technology for Business Development in Preference to Developing Business by Reskilling Employees

Flatter and Circular Organisation Structures

The emerging technologies will not only displace people on account of creating more efficient processes but also because they will be doing tasks that human beings either will not be able to perform (to the same level of efficiency) or may not have the capability at all (complex and hazardous). The latter means increase in scope of work but not for employment.

It will be fallacious to imagine that automation will impact only entry-level jobs. Middle and senior level positions will also get impacted to a point where an organisation structure can be made up of just the 'thinkers' at the top level, and the 'doers' at the entry-level. Entry-level jobs will be relationship oriented and top-level jobs will deal with managing environment level changes. Internal processes and controls will be automated and managed by intelligent machines, which will perform repetitive and predictable tasks.

A digital stock exchange's organisation structure is a good example to cite. A digital stock exchange uses automation extensively and thrives on technological development for its business activities, including building strategies for growth - tapping into newer markets, launching newer products and services and expanding its overall presence. Its turnover to headcount ratio is highly skewed in favour of the former. Even entry-level jobs for human beings are highly skilled, and human beings at all levels are working on situations that are rapidly changing. The top management focuses on regulatory, compliance and emerging trends in stock trading; the middle management focuses on improving traders' experiences and managing exigencies that arise on account of changes, and the entry-level people are developing the markets and products for their new and existing customers.

NSE – National Stock Exchange, started in 1994 with less than 100 employees. When it touched 100 crores in revenue, it had 100 employees. At 2500 crores (March 2018 pre-audit figure), NSE employs 800 people. For a 25X growth that NSE experienced, its headcount only grew by 8X.

In order to be responsive to the changing environment – VUCA, organisations will get flatter and leaner. This is already visible in large Indian establishments that are reducing headcount and investing in automation. The emerging trend is that of formation of fulfillment chains enabled by technologies and operated by lean organisations.

Fulfillment Chains

Multiple organisations that are very efficient in their operations, having lean and flat structures, will come together to form a chain, in the context of a fulfillment. The combination of specialisations will make for a fulfillment, and technology will enable their collaboration of efforts. Once fulfilled, these organisations will revert to their regular positions and the chain will get dissolved only to re-emerge later on for another case.

Skills across the chain will have to be relevant for the fulfillment. It is likely that one of members of the chain takes the lead position and uses additional skills to enable a smooth fulfillment experience.

The Circular Structure

In order to be highly responsive, organisation structure may also support a circular format called, Holacracy.

Holacracy is gaining traction in the US, which fundamentally believes that an organisation's structure should enable people to interact internally and externally, for business reasons, in the most efficient manner. Therefore, Holacracy (**see Figure 9**) professes that the organisation takes the shape that is required for the given moment and thus presents a circular structure. While Holacracy respects the thinkers' and doers' roles, it prescribes flip, turn, twist characteristics in the structure so that the organisation responds quickly to external and internal variations.
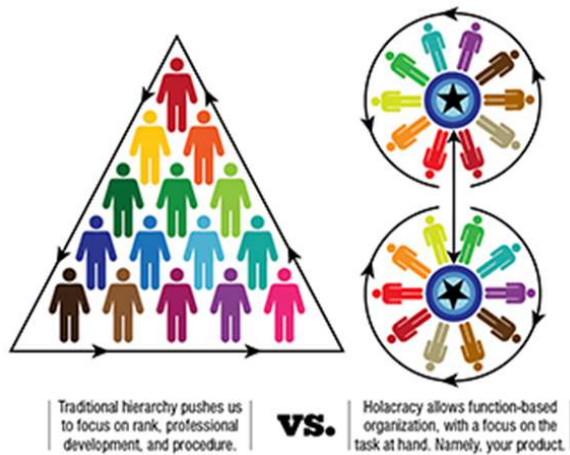
Source: www.ridiculouslyefficient.com

Figure 9 : Holacracy – A Diagrammatic Representation

In the game of hockey, which has a structure of captain, forwards, mid-fields, defenders and goal-keeper, the person in possession of the ball is 'the most important fellow' for that moment of the game. His or her past experience, expertise, qualification, etc. bears no consequence at the point of action. His/Her action – pass, tackle, dribble or hit, is the best option to have been exercised for that moment, and everyone else in the team respects that. There are no approvals sought, nor does the player pause the game to seek the captain's opinion or wait to take inputs from a more experienced colleague. The entire skill, knowledge, expertise drawn from various practice sessions and coaching gets converted into an action that works on instinct more than on thought. That's speed in action (operations)!

The organisation structure – whether flat or circular, will operate at very high levels of efficiency and speed and will be focusing on outcome just like a competitive team-sport is played. Their structure will be **lean on headcount and scaled-up on business activities and revenues**.

The Impact Factor

Impact is the new efficiency! While technology speeds up operational processes, increases output and improves the overall efficiency, in future the focus of the organisation will be directed towards creating an 'impact'. Impact is subjective and doesn't have a measure like efficiency does. In the separation of roles between machines and human beings, machines will get an efficiency factor and human beings will have an 'impact' factor.

HR will need to anticipate and visualise 'Impact' factor in employees – impact is not only about tapping into latent talent but also about nurturing the person to being aware of the talent and knowing when to effectively use it – timing of usage of talent! Be it in a creative design studio, a problem solving scenario in the factory or tackling an unfavourable situation with a customer, the ability to create a 'wow feeling' is 'impact'.

Impact works at the emotional level and thrives in ambiguous, unfamiliar, unexpected and unusual circumstances to provide a memorable experience. It is nebulous. That is where, once again relationships become important.

Trust in Machines – A Race to Perfidy?

Technology thrives on data and modern technologies have the ability to create and propagate data - machines and human beings will tend to behave in a similar manner when it comes to decision-making based on facts. Therefore, the reliance and trust on machines will be higher as they faithfully follow the processes.

Scientists are working on enabling technologies with discretionary skills like human beings have, which are based on the less understood facts of faith, belief, feelings, occult, etc. The objective is to make machines understand human emotions and feelings and convert them into a form of data that machines can apply logic onto.

To err will continue to be a human factor, whereas, when a technology makes a gross mistake, we (human beings) will still show greater tolerance and work towards correcting the machine's context or logic. Right use of technology will become very important and this can be managed only when human relationships are intact.

Human beings will be competing with machines not only at the competence level but also at the 'trust' level. It will take a humane effort to preserve trust in the organisation at all levels, which cannot happen by the mere use of analytics and dashboard management!

In an emerging world of high automation and extensive use of technologies, wherein human beings fear job losses and extinction of careers, Human Relations will be the one that can bring in humane features in a mechanised world. Putting faith on discretionary decisions, preserving trust so that people can experiment and fail in their ideas before they (ideas) become block-buster successes, creating an environment where vendors, customers and employees are encouraged to take a leap of faith decision, human becomes core to interactions.

It is the human relationship that can transform a rookie into an expert, strengthen the frailties in human beings and make them courageous and confident, put the heart in the business for visionaries to emerge.

That's the big canvas for HR to work on.

"In the past 20 years we made people like machines. In the next 20 years, machines will look like people. Future is not manufacturing or knowledge driven, it is wisdom, experience and creativity driven. Machines will never be able to win the Man, because machines have chips and human has heart" – Jack (Ma, 2018)[x] .

Conclusion:

HR is at a cusp – a choice it needs to make! Follow the 'resource' path and treat human beings like 'inventory with emotions' or metamorphose into becoming Human Relationship Managers and change the perspectives around to adapt to these new trends.

Should that happen, the same technologies that disrupted its functioning would become its enabler. Relationship management is going to play a very significant role in future where human+machine will work together to achieve business objectives. Human beings' complex nature, desire, aspiration etc. requires a treatment distinct from a maintenance task given to a robust machine.

Works Cited

i   Ravi Kumar, (2017), *Towards a Future with Purposeful AI, Infosys Insights*

ii Subramaniam, 2017, *TCS rejigs delivery model to use automation to hold on to clientele*, Business Standard

iii Reeba, 2017, *Tata Motors Aims to Cut Costs Via VRS for Senior Executives*, Times of India

iv Cummings, 2013, *Man Versus Machine or Man+Machine,* IEEE Intelligent Systems

v   Trevor, J. 2016, *Future Work: Changes, Choices & Consequences*, The European Business Review, http://www.europeanbusinessreview.com/future-work-changes-choices-consequences/

vi Shekar, 2018, *Impact of Advancement in Information Technology on Role of Middle Management*, University of Mysore, India

vii Wisskirchen, 2017, *Artificial Intelligence and Robotics and Their Impact on the Workplace*, IBA Global Employment Institute, UK,

viii Bettendorf, 2017, *Generation Z May Not Want To Own Cars. Can Automakers Woo Them In Other Ways?*, Radio, National Public, USA

ix World Economic Forum, 2016, *The future of Jobs*, Davos

x   Ma, 2018, *Education Biggest Challenge*, Southern China Morning Post, HK

People Focus
A Polyphonic Presentation

▶ The Great Problems are in the Street

The Great Problems are in the Street

The first part of Vivek Patwardhan's career saw him as a successfull HR leader, retiring as the Global HR Head of Asian Paints after a 33 year stint. During this period he was appointed by the Tata Institute of Social Sciences as the TISCO Chair Professor, he edited a book on Industrial Relations and was felicitated by the Maharashtra Institute of Labour Studies and the Rotary Club of Thane for his professional contributions.

In the second part of his career, Vivek has been an avid blogger in Employee Relations issues and won the Indian Blogger Award in 2013 and 2017. He translated the book 'The Angel Inside' into Marathi. He served as an independent Director on the Board of MSL Driveline Systems Ltd. [Formerly Mahindra Sona Ltd.] and as a trustee of 'Aroehan', an NGO and served as the President, Rotary Club of Thane Metro 2017-18.

Vivek Patwardhan

The Great Problems are in the Street

In a nutshell

I retired nine years ago and am not in touch with specific initiatives taken by various organizations in the area of people focus. But I hear diverse voices every time I meet working men and women - this is the reason I have adopted a 'polyphonic' style of writing. (**Polyphony** is a way of narrative, that implies a diversity of points of view and voices. The concept was introduced by M. Bakhtin, using a metaphor based on the musical term **polyphony**. The Noble prize for literature was awarded to Belarusian writer and journalist Svetlana Alexievich in 2015 for her polyphonic writings.

The issue is simple: is the corporate world losing its people focus. We may be tempted to say 'yes' quickly, but that would not be right. We have not found out the facts. But I have heard voices of people. They ring in my ears. I have heard people hold diametrically opposite views. It is natural because each person experiences the organisation in a different way.

Here are those voices. I can hear people say passionately, proudly and sometimes with a sense of anger. I present those voices. Some will strike a chord with you, some will not. But these are actually voices of people who have spoken to me. They are true. All voices are a commentary on people focus as they see it in their organisations.

What people have to say

Let there be no doubt that business organisations' prime objective is Profit (and growth). Profit is a function of revenue minus costs. Employees or People impact both significantly so in other words People are the 'means' to an end and not the end itself. This 'means' is a living animal with its emotions and expectations. Understanding those and 'taking care of them' to the extent necessary to achieve the organisations' primary goal is what I would say is called 'people focus.' The context is different if we are talking of people focus in the Govt. Policies or programs. There the wellbeing of people is the end and not means.

....
....

"Congratulations on your promotion as Head HR" the Accountant friend said. "Do you know what HRD means?" I sense that he is going to tell me something silly or derogatory about HRD. I nod my head to suggest 'no.'

"HRD means Harassment till Retirement or Death" he says and laughs heartily at his own joke. I do not respond. I have heard several HR jokes. They are never kind to the HR function. It does not feel good.

....
....

"You are talking of the 'people focus.' Has it gone stronger or weaker, that's the question. You will hear a lot of negatives. That is because you will be speaking to a lot of professionals of your age group. Those who are fifty plus.

These people turn nostalgic easily. They will tell you how good it was in their days and how bad it is now. Is that really the case?

Look at what IT companies are doing – they are focusing on their employees. Can we really conclude that things are going from bad to worse? Deteriorating in general? That would be a mistake.

The approach has changed. It is no longer paternalistic. At least not in the new age industries. They make facilities available. The best facilities. Use them as you like. In our days employers decided everything. It was a favour earlier. Now it is entitlement. That's the difference."

....
....

There should be no doubt that 'people focus' is lost. What are you talking about? *Jara factories me jake dekho kya ho raha ha*i. Ten percent of the employees are permanent. Others are contract labour. And trainees. And NEEM trainees. That's ninety percent! What people focus you are talking about? It is exploitation!

I spoke to one of them. He said he is working in an MNC, and he is hired by a contractor. I asked why he does not want to form a union. He said he will

get sacked immediately and the permanent workers' union will not take up his case. The contractor is completely under their control. Union does not take up our case.

He said 'What to do, sir? How to survive here? How to educate our children? How to give them a future? I am forty now. My life is wasted. I will earn only minimum wages. I now think only of the future of my son and daughter.' I had no answer. I also did not want to answer the question. I felt I can't do anything about the problem.

....
....

We approached the local MLA to solve our problem. We told him that our pay was a pittance. There was harassment at work. We said you should do something about it. Our hopes were high.

He promised to do something to address our hardship.

We now know that the contract of supply of uniforms and safety shoes is given to his son.

Our problems remain unsolved.

....
....

Six months of maternity leave! Phew!! These are populist ideas. Who will engage women now? I came back after three months of leave when my child was born. We have a hospital here. We have four hundred nurses on the rolls. Take a look anytime and you will find that twenty are on maternity leave. We can't bear this cost. We can take pride in saying we are taking measures which other countries, not even the US has taken. All this is only adding to cost. You can't ignore the cost.

The employment of women will go down. This Government has done a grave injustice to women.

....
....

I was happy that the Government extended maternity leave to six months. Let us be practical. Which young mother returns after three months of maternity leave? Only those who have support at home! This is rare.

These girls are talented. They come from IIMs and reputed business schools. We must retain such talent. In some cases we have given more than six months of leave – may be unpaid. I don't want to lose such an exceptional talent. They can work from home, that's okay, I am not bothered.

....
....

They told me you are a retainer, not an employee, so no maternity leave for you. I was surprised. I spoke to my boss. He asked the HR Head to make an exception in my case, he complied. He told me not to mention it to anyone. On one hand I am happy to get this benefit, on the other hand I feel bad about this company policy. Why do they decide benefits on a 'person to person' basis?

....
....

The number of toilets for women in almost any organisation is less than requirement. We never get a toilet free when we enter the washroom area. And mind you, ours is a new and very beautiful, well designed office; but they have missed this simple requirement.

....
....

'People focus?' Hmmm….. let me think…. Let me tell you what I teach in my economics class…. Organisations are meant to work for the fulfilment of some human desire on a social scale. In that process they develop and deploy machines and yield an output. It could be a service or goods.

Over time there's a strong possibility that the machines and the yield get the centre stage. That might be the beginning of losing people focus. To get back to the original plan behind the birth of an organization might be the process of regaining people focus.

....
....

I am very clear about it. We do not want any union here. It is a cancer. Why should they have a union? I take care of my employees. I give them personal loans. I give them a good office, excellent working conditions. Good pay. What more do they want? The day they form a union, I will either sack the HR guy or just close down. No union. Period. I don't have the energy to engage in endless discussions with them. The same business can be continued in another name. I know how to do it.

....
....

I like the Toyota statement on Employee Relations. It is crisp and well drafted. 'If the management of the company does have a union, both should recognise that the prosperity of the company is the common objective and both must use communication in order to resolve any differences of opinions and build a healthy relationship of mutual trust.'

We have held regular training programs for our union. My take is that the more you share, more is the trust. We have differences, but nothing that is vicious.

....
....

We accept that there will be a union some day in this factory. We have formed an 'employees representatives' committee. They are like a pseudo-union committee. But they do not have the legalistic approach of the unions. I am trying to influence their mind at this stage – we must create the right work culture. One thing for sure – no outsider as a leader under any circumstances.

....
....

You can teach and talk of democracy at work place, but let me tell you, it does not work. People come with their agenda. [External] Union leaders are corrupt. They want to give contracts to their cronies. Workers who are members of the union committee do not work. Democracy is a good thought but you require maturity of workforce. Kidhar hai? Show me a single example.

....
....

I told my managers that you can't prevent formation of a union at the workplace. That is okay, we can deal with it. The real issue is do you have influence over the employees in spite of the union? That is my test of your effective people focus.

....
....

I was consulting for them - the investor family was what you call 'people focused.' Oh, they extended the service of retiring employees by two years regularly. In the last five years twenty two employees got such extension. And then ten of them were engaged as 'retainers.' Now that they have made losses, the young ones in the family are asking to summarily get rid of the retainers, and not to offer any extensions. I have been telling them that they need young and tech savvy managers and employees if they have to succeed.

Now they will probably sack those oldies. Their people policies would have turned 180 degrees. I wonder what they will think about the Company when they are asked to go.

....
....

We have clearly defined values. A candidate has to meet eight different managers who evaluate him or her against our corporate values.

....
....

I know he breaks rules. I know he is arrogant and shouts at people. I know he has held out threats of sacking to some. But, boss, he has produced stunning results. He has changed the look of this workplace and brought in many new initiatives. And our people had become too complacent, somebody had to push them, extract more work, and keep them on their toes. High achievers are also usually arrogant. Let it be for a while, then we will see.

....
....

We train people to conduct performance appraisals. In the room three are present. We have mandated it. The appraisee, appraiser and the appraiser's boss. The function of the appraiser's boss is to avoid biases coming in to play. Fair play is of utmost importance to us.

....
....

This bell curve in rewards has created tremendous discontentment. Same people get rewarded every year. And bottom ten percent are to be weeded out! This is okay in the US but it won't work here.

....
....

On the day of my promotion my boss called me and told me that if I do not develop myself as a business manager there would be no more promotion. He said you excelled so far because of your 'functional expertise.' But that will no longer take you ahead. I hated that experience.

Looking back I think he was right. I admire his ability to hold some tough talk. A lot of people

cannot move forward unless they take a step jump in their competencies. But nobody says so to them. Tough talk does not come easily in our culture, it is almost always avoided. Nobody tells you that this is your last station in this company, you can't go further. HR also talks as if all employees can be endlessly developed. There can't be a premise more imaginary than that.

....
....

Our office has a room where you can take a quick nap if you feel like. Believe it or not, they have just made it. With dim lights. You can relax there or switch on soft meditation music.

And there is flexi time. It helps us Mumbaikars tremendously. People come from Kalyan and Dombivali. All can reach office without having to rush madly to swipe access card. Small things these are, but they help employees in a big way.

....

Our canteen offers three types of menu. Subsidised. And we have coffee machines on every floor. It is free. People have no complaints. But I have. Nothing comes free. I kept a box near the coffee machines with a small note that 'nothing comes free, please put some amount in the box which will be donated to a charitable organisation.' On several days there is not a single note in the box. When it comes to facilities, it is a one way street!

....

We have no limit on casual and sick leave. Employees are supposed to take only when required. A very small number of employees misuse it, I know. But a significant number of employees use this discreetly. You have to trust them.

....

We work in Fort area. Nobody here works on Saturdays and Sundays. It's a five day week. That's fine. But why do you demand leave on ALL bank holidays? Some fourteen or fifteen additionally? That's 104 days plus say 14 bank holidays, makes it 118. Additionally you have earned leave, casual and sick leave. Boss, do you come here to work or to see Mumbai?

....

The organisation structure in our company looks like a bowl of spaghetti, with direct and dotted lines everywhere! For one decision you have to consult everybody in the 'family.' The 'family directors' are generous when it comes to employees, but everything here is person centric, it delays simple decisions and creates confusion. I get tired of spending hours together to build consensus.

....

'People Focus' is put to test only in a conflict. How you handle it is the litmus test of your people conflict. There are organisations which have made surplus workers sit in a room for eight hours with no work. And there are organisations which have told workers 'let bygones be bygones' when they resumed work after a strike on management's terms.

See what textile tycoons have done. It is daylight robbery. Greed eats away people focus.

....

Our jewellery business was hit hard in the recession of 2008, and several houses downsized their organisations. Some did not declare VRS, they just asked people to leave. I decided that I will not do it. I have seen bad days in my life, I do not wish to give those to others. I retained all the thousand employees. On many days we had no work on hand. But I did not ask anybody to leave. When the business situation improved, these employees paid me back by their loyalty and work.

....

We had to close down the Mumbai Factory. We declared a VRS, but only after talking to the employees. Not just to the union. A large number of employees accepted. Then a small number who said they wanted more benefits. It was a tricky situation. Their earning would vanish quickly so they wanted more compensation. But we had already given VRS to many, and they would have felt cheated if we were to increase the compensation for others. We sat down together and finally concluded a deal honourable to all. We had a dinner together on the eve of closure of the factory, everybody cried.

....

Well, the image that comes to my mind when I think of 'people focus' is a person holding a magnifying glass on people to look closely on what's happening on the ground. It relates to paying attention to the behaviour and requirements of and from people keeping in mind the purpose of the organization.

On the contrary, a magnifying glass would also burn the paper when sun rays pass through it, burn out of people because of 'watching' too closely would be detrimental, one would need to strike a balance between creating an environment that enables people and performance to flourish while at the same time keeping our eyes and ears open and grounded.

....
....

That's the point. We need to balance between concern for people with concern for business or work. These are two wheels of a cart. They have to run together so that the path is well travelled. And one can't be smaller than other, if so it will only run in circles. Managers must manage polarities when they operate, they must learn to manage it. Like they have to capture market share and also increase profitability. They have to focus on the long term and the short term issues. They have to ensure that it is a place where everybody would enjoy working and yet it is a commercially successful organisation. We must focus on sociability and solidarity, both. If we focus on people alone, we will produce a culture of 'networking' as Rob Goffee tells us. To create a missionary culture we must focus on both.

Each person experiences the organisation differently. So some will praise and others will criticise people policies. It all depends on the leadership to be sensitive to how an employee is experiencing the organisation. There are very few organisations which deep dive in such [possibly troubled] waters with the resolve to change things for the better. But it needs to be done. The only key is to go back to employees and find out how they are experiencing the organisation. That requires empathetic listening, a skill terribly in short supply in the corporate world, and an ability to communicate the organisation's stance and policies on various matters.

People spend a very large portion of their time [and life] working in the organisations which invest good time and effort in developing people for the jobs they offer. The focus is however on being effective on the job. Development is an unobtrusive process, and people keep learning from others, they 'absorb' a lot of things from others. This is magical. It requires a culture where people experience nurturing, mentoring. And this is precisely where the leaders come in.

There are two aspects on which the leader sets the tone – how he handles conflicts and how he handles dissent. A dissenting viewpoint is not necessarily [rather usually] a revolt or mutiny. Adopting a liberal viewpoint is not considered macho in many cases. A good leader has to close many issues, no doubt, by taking a final call but he must 'close the door' on an issue but take the precaution of 'leaving it unbolted' – meaning he should be willing to take a relook if fresh perspective is put forth. This in my opinion, is at the centre of workplace democracy. When there develops a huge gulf between those in power and the employees, when the leader forgets that 'The great problems are in the street' [as Nietzsche says], it is a clear sign that people focus is getting lost.

We have to ask why should organisations focus on people, and the answer lies not in the commercial success but also in creating an organisation where people 'grow'.

The central issue around people focus is 'does the organisation promote workplace democracy?' As long as the answer is in the affirmative, there is hope for people focus to survive and thrive.

Workplaces are a reflection of the developments in the world around us. That is the reason an organisation [read the leader] will require greater force of conviction to stand out in the world today.
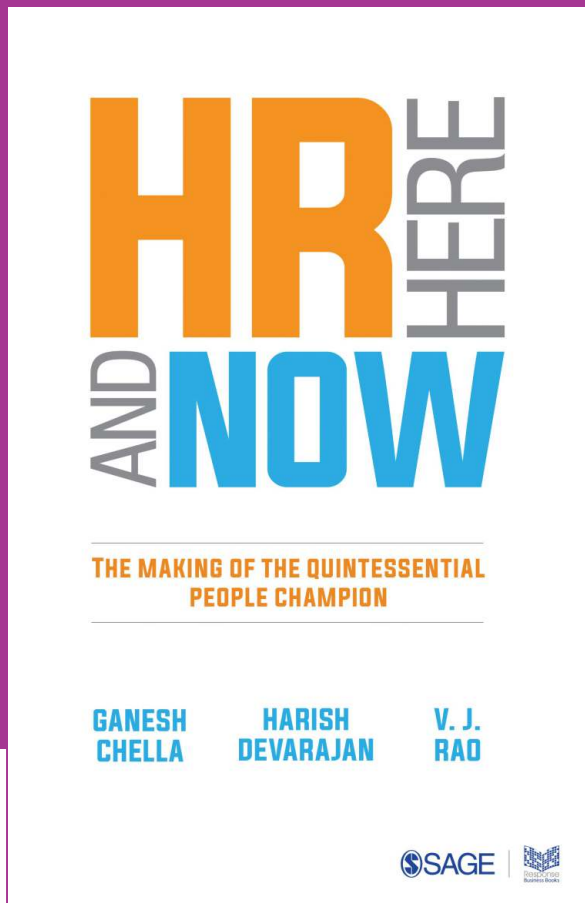
People Focus
From the Book Shelf

- ▶ HR – Here an Now – Book Review
- ▶ Hit Refresh – A Book Appreciation

HR – HERE AND NOW
A Book Review

THE MAKING OF THE QUINTESSENTIAL
PEOPLE CHAMPION

GANESH   HARISH   V. J.
CHELLA   DEVARAJAN   RAO

Prabhakar Lingareddy is Vice President - Human Resources at ITC Limited's Agri-business.

Prabhakar has held several important positions at ITC from 1992 to 2000 and thereafter from 2003 onwards. He has also worked with the TVS group and the Murugappa Group.

In addition to his corporate responsibilities, Prabhakar has always found the time to contribute to national professional bodies like the NHRD Network, the CII, the Employers Federation of South India and the Hyderabad Management Association. He was on the Naitional Board of NHRD from 2007 to 2014.

Prabhakar is an engineer from NIT and an alumnus of XLRI, Jamshedpur.

Prabhakar Lingareddy

HR – HERE AND NOW – A Book Review

> " "
>
> Yesterday I was, tomorrow I will be, but only here and now I am
>
> – Human Angels
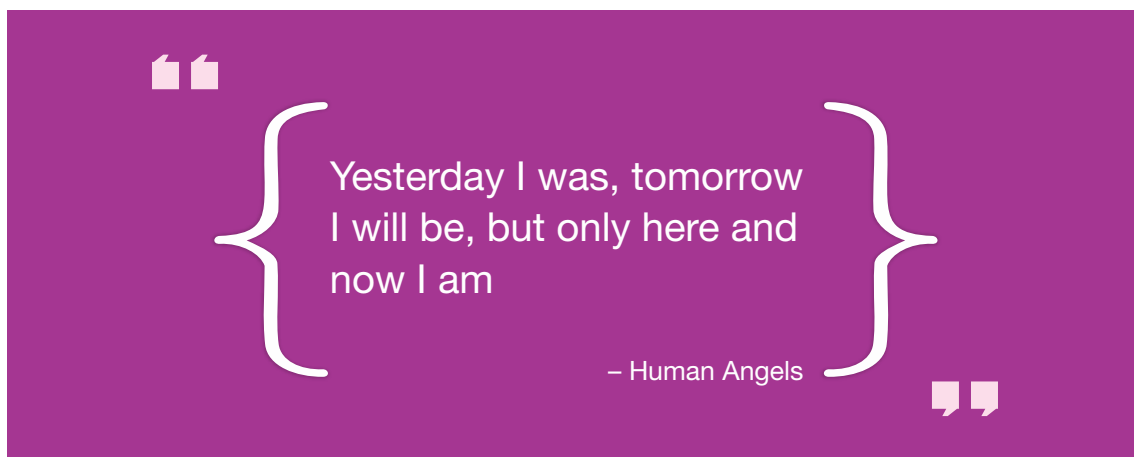
A few years back I had the privilege of being invited for a workshop to reflect on emerging trends in HR. It was a very different experience because of the format, the blend of formal and informal moderation and more importantly the pre-workshop preparation done to get all participants on the same page. One had a similar experience earlier with another such workshop on Employee Relations. Why am I mentioning these workshops 'here and now'? They were facilitated by Ganesh and Harish, who along with VJ Rao have authored the book **"HR – Here and Now"**. The book is a rich distillation of many such interventions that the three authors have anchored and experienced.

Few months back, I first got to hear about this book when they were collating organizational experiences. Having known all three of them, I am not at all surprised at the narrative style adopted by them - a style that reminded me of Rahul Dravid known for his understated elegance, sharp cricketing brain, effectiveness not only on field, but also off field, nurturing some of the finest young cricketers.

There is something refreshing, something 'hatke' in the book, different from many others that I have read in the recent past. And I was wondering why I was getting that feeling – was it a bias of having known the authors, or was it the fact that I could manage reading the book within 24 hrs? I realized later that I felt so because of my alignment with the thoughts expressed, a sense of relatedness with the different contexts and aspects covered, a sense of honesty in upfronting all issues however sensitive they may be, but most importantly, deep down it felt 'this is all about India and Indian HR'.

Why did I feel so? The answer literally lies in and between the cover pages. Let us look at the cover pages itself to start with. At a time when the trend is to talk of the future, they have opted to look at the 'here and now'. When the trend is to showcase a macho business oriented HR function, they have chosen to highlight the 'people champion'. I mentioned about Rahul Dravid earlier – a quintessential people champion. The back page in a way brings out the reason why the content of the book is both reflective and at the same time a practitioner's guide. To me the book not only aptly answers all the questions listed, but more importantly also answers the question, "Why does HR as a function evoke such strong and varied emotions amongst people?". All that one needs to do is to visualize being in a coaching conversation with the authors as you move from page to page, chapter to chapter.

The seven chapters reminded me of '7 habits of highly effective people'. Each of the 7 chapters captures the core of an effective HR function. They are written in a manner that any HR

professional or people leader can relate to. Books tend to be very heavy for young professionals or too simplistic for experienced professionals. The authors have navigated this challenge very deftly and retained a universal appeal.

So what makes me connect with the book?

- I felt involved as both positive and negative moments of my 30 years of professional journey started flashing by. The reading therefore became a two way process and I experienced a 'flow', similar to what Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi defines.

- Most of us have been brought up on 2x2 grids. The authors do not disappoint and two such grids, one based on centrality and helpfulness, and the other based on task demands and business preferences, serve as anchors for all subsequent chapters.

- The thematic approach to deal with all facets of HR gives a 'story-telling' feel, taking us on a smooth journey, rather than a gush of a T20 - more as cricket commentators say 'play session by session'. The theme 'Doing, Thinking, Feeling' reminded me of Myer Briggs Type Indicator that was very common sometime back. How CEOs' perceptions of HR get shaped by their own early experiences of 'Moments of Truth' with HR and their 'Frames of Reference' was an eye opener and made me wonder how the choice we make in responding to a query can have a life lasting impact for the profession at large. No wonder Stephen Covey said 'Moment of choice is a moment of truth'. Another interesting theme covered is 'Spectrum of Relationships', which could have been elaborated further. The Brakes India case was a very fresh perspective and an example of thinking out of the box.

- A challenge that one sees in today's context is the ability to link theory to practice. The authors have deftly weaved the same in their narration, be it the timeless Maslow's hierarchy or Herzberg's two factor theory or the late 50s work of Michael Young or the more recent studies like WorldatWork Rewards Model or Eliott Jaques Stratified Systems Theory.

- The cinematic start with the serial 'The Eye of the Beholder' remains a continued underlying part of the narrative, and the authors go on to suggest that the HR response had and will have to turn to other allied fields as well as its own scientific origins for insights and wisdom. This is also highlighted to a certain extent under 'professional origins and influences'. The authors end also with a cinematic reference to Auguste Gusteau in the movie Ratotouille.

- As you move from one chapter to another, from theme to theme, not knowing what lays in store, came a wow moment for me. It came because I felt that a topic not discussed so intensely would surely have not been covered even here, and then it just pops up on your face in the next theme. That wow moment was when I finished reading the theme 'Money and Beyond'. Lo and behold the next theme of 'Moment of Truth' discussed the whole topic of service orientation.

- It was heartening to see that focus on Employee Relations was not lost and figured amongst the seven specializations in HR. The tenets of ER got discussed as one of the themes, but the context was really laid out in the theme on 'Boundaries Redefined'. Coming towards the end of the book, to me it was like a delicious dessert at the end of a seven course meal. I would have however preferred it to be part of the main course, but maybe then the flow would have got impacted.

370 pages may not do justice to a combined experience of almost a century. In their quest to strengthen the HR profession, this book is just one more glorious test match that the authors have played leading their profession to victory. Just like we keep referring to epic innings of cricketers, this book will serve as a good reference for HR professionals of all vintages.

> *Mindfulness is not a mechanical process. It is developing a very gentle, kind and creative awareness to the present moment" said Amit Ray. The authors have similarly traversed the path to create the here and now for a promising future. As Soulla Christodoulou said "You have to focus on the here and now. The future will work out itself.*

Hit Refresh
A Book Appreciation
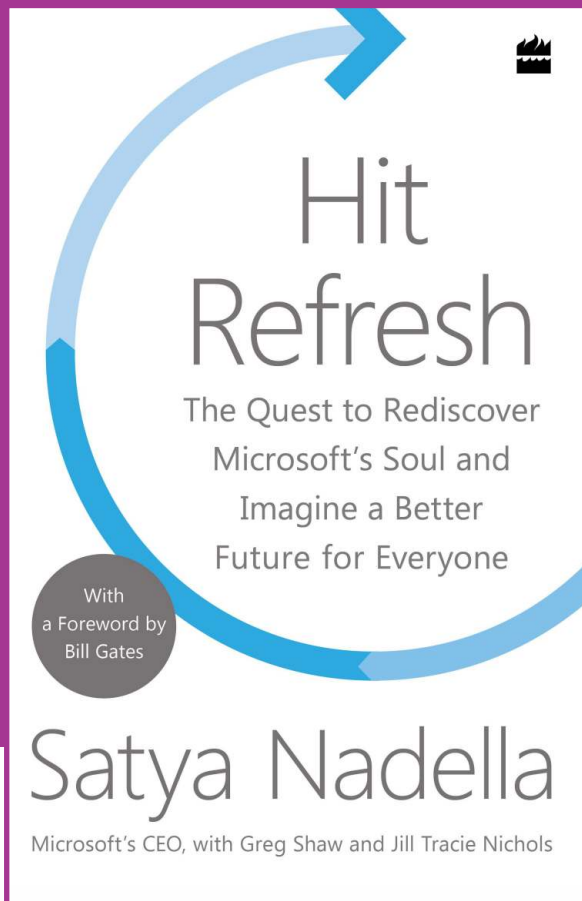
Vaishnavi Chella is a Human Resources professional with 3+ years of experience in the IT/ITes and professional services industries. She is an MBA graduate from TAPMI, Manipal where she majored in HR. She is also a passionate Bharatanatyam dancer with 17 years of practice and is a keen blogger.

Hit Refresh is a book that's hard to categorize under a specific genre. It could be viewed as an autobiography by Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella, a management book with rich anecdotes shaped by personal experience, a manifesto of sorts by a CEO for the future growth trajectory of his organization or an informative journal on how the fourth industrial revolution will shape the future of humans. For me, it was all of the above rolled into 300 engaging pages.

Vaishnavi Chella

Hit Refresh — A Book Appreciation

> " "
>
> This is a book about transformation-one that is taking place inside me and inside the organization driven by a sense of empathy and a desire to empower others. But most important, it's about the change coming in every life as we witness the most transformative wave of technology yet.
>
> — Satya Nadella

Summary

Nadella begins the book by describing his journey from Hyderabad to Redmond. Being the son of an Indian government official from India meant he had to transfer schools frequently before finally settling in Hyderabad Public school, which he believes shaped his life in many ways. He sheds light on the individuals and life lessons that deeply impacted him including raising a child with cerebral palsy and how they helped him develop empathy, a quality that he stresses upon multiple times through the course of this book. In parallel, he describes his journey within Microsoft where he began as an evangelist for the Windows NT operating system.

The second part of the book constitutes Satya Nadella's path as he hits refresh as the CEO of Microsoft. He achieves this by focusing on the core philosophy and rediscovering the soul of Microsoft (democratizing computing), reviving the culture of the organization, establishing a growth mindset, invigorating existing partnerships and creating new ones. He describes how Microsoft shifted gears from chasing the taillights of competitors towards a mobile and cloud-first approach.

The third and final part of the book focuses on Satya Nadella's forecasts regarding future breakthrough technologies, critical values in a digital age, the future of humans and machines and how technology can help drive equitable and inclusive growth. He provides his perspective on whether the growth of Artificial Intelligence (AI) will ultimately be helpful or destructive to humankind. He foresees a world where machines will work alongside humans, rather than against them. He states that an ethical and empathetic framework would be required while designing such technologies, such that AI maximizes efficiencies without destroying the dignity of people. Nadella says that these values should not be dictated solely by the tech industry; it should instead be built in collaboration with people from every culture. For equitable economic growth and participation, the author prescribes a dextrous mix of breakthrough technologies, plus a workforce trained to use them productively, multiplied by the intensity of their use. He urges policy makers to demonstrate empathy towards all their constituents to build a knowledge-based economy and also foster next gen skill development.

Reflections and learnings

While Hit Refresh is a personal account by Satya Nadella as he looks to reinvent one of the behemoths in technology, there are also many lessons for professionals. As a young professional in a dynamic world, I find myself constantly trying to identify the trends that will shape the future of work and subsequently my career. The following are the key takeaways that I have had from this book and why I feel it is relevant for today's professional and the specific theme of this journal.

Empathy- An indispensable trait for digital natives to develop

Empathy is the very core around which the narrative of the book has been woven. Nadella stresses multiple times on the importance of empathy - a trait that he believes is hard for machines to replicate. This is the trait which will help humans differentiate themselves in a human-AI world. He states that it is a "must have" quality which will become even more valuable in a world where technology will disrupt the status quo like never before. Learning to collaborate with others, building relationships and developing a deeper understanding and respect for one another's values, culture, emotions and drives is what will set humans apart from machines and make them thrive. He illustrates how empathy helped him better understand the unarticulated needs of customers and thereby put Microsoft back on track. In his own words "My passion is to put empathy at the centre of everything that I pursue, from the products we launch, to the new markets we enter, to the employees, customers and partners we work with."

Transformative technologies that will shape the fourth industrial revolution

One of my key discoveries from this book was about three transformative technologies - Mixed Reality, Artificial Intelligence and Quantum Computing. This book helped me gather a sense of how profoundly technology will revolutionize the future. Together these three technologies which are also a very big part of Microsoft's agenda for the future, will help create immersive blends of the real and the virtual, create breakthroughs in the field of medicine, help forecast crises situations and possibly even merge consciousness with computing by breaking the barrier between our brains and computing.

Important values in a digital age

In an increasingly digital age, the Microsoft CEO believes that values such as Privacy, cybersecurity and free speech will become more pertinent than ever before. He also elucidates with examples the case for maintaining a balance (as elusive as it may seem) between protecting individual liberties and maintaining public safety. The answer he feels is ultimately driven by trust among tech majors, public officials and end users to do right by each other, which can only arise from a shared sense of empathy.

Growth mindset

Satya Nadella brings out the difference between a "Fixed Mindset"- one that reinforces the tendency to stick to the beaten path because it works and a "Growth Mindset"- one that helps embrace change in the midst of uncertainty. A "Growth Mindset" according to Nadella would help better anticipate and react to uncertainties, to innovate and to take risks without fear of failure. This is a value that I feel most organizations and individuals need to imbibe in order to remain relevant in the future.

Essential skills for future generations

Apart from empathy, the author also describes three essential "Musts" for future generations viz.- Education to attain higher level thinking and to implement new age technologies, Creativity and Judgement and accountability for the outcomes of final decisions.

I would recommend this book for anyone looking to *Hit Refresh* on their perspectives, careers or organizations which I believe in a disruptive world such as ours Is a constant.

Since your journal has become online from January, 2016, you need to make sure that your email id is updated with NHRDN national secretariat. Without your correct email ID we will be not in a position to send you the Issues at regular interval. In case you or your fellow professionals and members have any problem in receiving the journal online do write to Pranay Ranjan (pranay.ranjan@nationalhrd.org) at national secretariat.

As you also have noticed that all our Issues are theme based and therefore we do not publish any article in a particular Issue that is not related to the theme. So our request to future contributors will be to plan your contributions based on the future themes only and send me your contribution only at me@nationalhrd.org. Please also note that final decision to include your article will be based on the decision of the guest editor for that particular Issue and the editorial team. We would also like to know about the themes/contemporary Issues that you want to focus us in our future Issues. Please send your suggestions and feedback to me@nationalhrd.org after reading this Issue.

Network HRD Network

The National HRD Network, established in 1986, is an association of professionals committed to promoting the HRD movement in India and enhancing the capability of human resource professionals, enabling them to make an impact ful contribution in enhancing competitiveness and creating value for society. Towards this end, the National HRD Network is committed to the development of human resources through education, training, research and experience sharing. The network is managed by HR professionals in an honorary capacity, stemming from their interest in contributing to the HR profession. The underlying philosophy of the NHRDN is that every human being has the potential for remarkable achievement. HRD is a process by which employees in organizations are enabled to:

• acquire capabilities to perform various tasks associated with their present and future roles;

• develop their inner potential for self and organizational growth;

• develop an organizational culture where networking relationships, teamwork and collaboration among different units is strong, contributing to organizational growth and individual well-being.

NHRD
N E T W O R K

www.nationalhrd.org