Whitey Dairies Ltd is a world-leading dairy business. It is committed to promoting packaged milk and processed milk products through innovative research and technology. The company currently employs more than 25,000 people in over 50 countries. Its customers range from rural areas to urban areas.

Well-qualified and innovative scientists are the core strength of the business. However, the company also needs people in other supporting roles to ensure the products reach their chosen markets and customers. A strong focus on recruiting and developing its employees helps Whitey Dairies Ltd remain a major player in a highly competitive market. The business also prides itself for attracting motivated, talented and involved employees. Once people are recruited, it fully utilizes the breadth and depth of their available talent.

Within any organization there are likely to be
several layers of authority. The number of levels depends upon whether the business has a hierarchical or flat structure. A hierarchical structure has many layers of management, each with a narrow span of control. Instructions feed downwards from one level of management to those below. Feedback comes from the lower levels upwards. The reporting system from the top of the hierarchy to the bottom is known as the chain of command. It offers clear opportunities for promotion and may reduce stress levels in both managers and employees. Everybody tends to know their place in the hierarchy.

In a flat line structure, there are few layers of management. Each manager has a wide span of control. This means a manager has responsibility for many people or tasks. Delegation is necessary for tasks to be carried out effectively. This structure gives employees more responsibility for their work. Communication is also faster up and down the layers. This enables problems to be solved more quickly.

However, like many large businesses working in both national and international markets, Whitey Dairies Ltd follows a typical matrix structure. The matrix structure is however not an alternative to functional management but works alongside it.

Whitey Dairies Ltd uses the skills and competencies of its people to bridge its functional areas. By using people with specific scientific knowledge or experience to lead teams in areas such as marketing and production, communication is better within the team. Team members know that the leader understands the issues they face. This can also help to ensure that problems are understood and resolved quickly. These profiles help to demonstrate how Whitey Dairies Ltd uses this ‘cross-over’ of talent.

Mary is a scientist who now works in Whitey Dairies Ltd’s marketing team. Mary uses her scientific knowledge to help market Whitey Dairies Ltd products throughout the UK.

'Ve need to communicate planning for all milk products. This includes advertising and publicity campaigns to meet the market objectives for the Whitey Dairies Ltd brand. I manage the PR, advertising and design agencies that we work with as well as our internal team, to ensure these activities are implemented on schedule and on budget. I also co-ordinate our presence at major industry events and exhibitions. I enjoy the variety of work and the fact that I get to work with different departments and people, as well as have a close connection to our customers.'

Rebecca has a PhD in Food Science. She is now a group leader of one of Whitey Dairies Ltd’s functional teams, which focuses on developing products ready for the market.

'Having previously worked in pure research [at university] I wanted to work on a real product, so I joined Whitey Dairies Ltd. There is real job satisfaction from knowing you are helping people the world over to feed themselves by improving food [milk] production. I work as a group leader of a project team of 18 scientists, providing materials for other groups to test. I rely on my scientific background to understand and act as intermediary with the people I manage. As a group leader, my key role is to ensure the right people with the right skills are working on the right projects.'

Tom is a scientist working in production. He was recently posted to an international assignment at Whitey Dairies Ltd’s manufacturing base in the south of France.

'I started with Whitey Dairies Ltd as a PhD chemist in a research team looking at product formulation. The task was to develop processed milk product that deliver the longer expiry date in the best possible way. After several years in R&D labs, I now have responsibility for the introduction of new products at one of our manufacturing sites in France. My move to the Mediterranean has been well supported by the company, enabling me to settle in quickly. My scientific problem-solving skills are vital in ensuring production hits its targets, though I now have to think much more about how to get the best out of people rather than products!'

**Skills and competencies**

Whitey Dairies Ltd has a culture of empowering its workers. This enables them to be in control of their work. To fulfill Whitey Dairies Ltd’s aims and objectives, employees must also demonstrate specific skills and competencies. Rebecca explains what this means for her:

'As a manager and scientist, time...
management, planning and communication are key skills. I manage a research team and it is vital that our work meets deadlines in order to get products developed for our customers.’

Rebecca’s planning skills are essential as delays could mean that competitors bring out new products first. As a result, Whitey Dairies Ltd could lose business. Investment costs are high in the research area. Large research projects can run for 10 years, costing up to £50 million per project. Clear leadership is essential to make this product development work as efficiently as possible.

Leadership skills at this level take time to develop. Rebecca’s career has taken her through many different areas of the business. This experience has helped her develop her understanding of good practice throughout the business. It has allowed her to appreciate what other departments have to offer, enabling her to select the right people for her projects.

For Mary, the key was to gain experience of the full range of products being developed. This has helped her market the products in the UK.

Mary needed to develop her skills to promote the business’s products. ’I chose the role at Whitey Dairies Ltd because of the wide range of products I’d be working on. My role requires an organised approach and you need to be very diplomatic with good negotiation skills, as I’ll often find myself having to persuade someone to sign off a marketing text at short notice. Whitey Dairies Ltd is very keen on developing its employees and helping them grow into new roles. Since starting at Whitey Dairies Ltd in 2003, I have worked in three different departments in four different roles. So it’s easy to move your career on if you have the right attitude.’

Tom highlights the importance of leadership for the company: ’Whitey Dairies Ltd needs its people to develop leadership skills at every level in the organisation. This is critical to enable the business to progress. Everyone has his or her own unique set of knowledge and skills and team leaders need to use that potential every day. Everyone is encouraged to speak up with new ideas. This open approach not only helps the business to generate new opportunities but also gets everyone’s thoughts on what the best ideas are. This makes Whitey Dairies Ltd a fun and rewarding place to work both for developing new breakthroughs and having your work recognised.’

**HR strategy**

Whitey Dairies Ltd’s HR team provides training and development opportunities for all staff. For example, it supported Mary on a number of training courses, including a CIM Diploma in marketing. It also helped Tom and his family move to France. Rebecca says:

’Whitey Dairies Ltd has been fantastic in supporting my personal development and in giving me whatever technical training I needed.’

Balancing risk and reward is an important aspect of Whitey Dairies Ltd’s management approach. It is committed to research and development to keep ahead of the competition. It is not afraid of mistakes but expects employees and managers to learn from them and use them to motivate people. The company presents annual awards to employees whose achievements have helped drive the business forwards. These awards are publicised through the company’s magazines and intranet, so everyone inside the company can see how achievement is rewarded. These awards have inspired further innovations and helped employees focus on generating new ideas to help the company perform even better. Whitey Dairies Ltd has a commitment to recruiting people with skills and abilities which the business can develop long-term. This benefits employees by providing more challenging role opportunities and it benefits the company by ensuring it has the right talent resources in place for future growth.

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**CASE STUDY**

Deepika Pandita
Assistant Professor, Symbiosis Institute of Business Management, Pune

Prof. Pandita specializes in HRM, talent management, organizational behavior and courses of HR electives in the MBA program as well as Executive MBA program. Her major areas of interest include talent management and employee engagement. She likes to experiment on newer ways of teaching and conducting training programs for the corporates.
Whitey Diaries has an aggressive growth plan of increasing its presence across geographies and introducing multiple product lines successful in one region to another. The company is committed to empowering its staff and wants to be an innovative company in a dynamic world. It has adopted a project structure which suits its business strategy of expansion and utilizes skills and competencies of its people to bridge its functional areas. It is in line with culture of empowerment, which enables them to take control of their work and hence also develops leadership which is a strategic need. If it follows a hierarchical structure then it shall loose the agility it wants to bring to innovate and change. Communication shall also slowdown in the chain and employees may feel disempowered. The skills and utilization of its resources shall be less and shall prevent employees to develop. It does not promote team work and collaboration also. The advantage of matrix structure for Whitey is in line with their strategic need to grow across the world.

a. Better coordination and control: - This structure is suitable to coordinate and control the functional activities and project activities. Project managers have the responsibility to establish better coordination and control system in the organization. Functional authority flows downwards and project authority flows horizontally which enables better control and coordination.

b. Adaptable to dynamic environment: - It is hybrid organizational structure which can easily adjust with the changing environment. The project managers can function independently and can get feedback quickly with information related to the project. Along with project managers, employees from different functional area are specialists and adjustment does not become problematic.

c. Breadth of skill: - When isolated in a functional area, employees may have more difficulty benefiting from the skills and experiences of those in other areas. In a matrix structure, employees have constant contact with members of other functional areas via their membership in project teams. Through the project team, employees have the opportunity to develop a wider set of skills than they would in a purely functional structure.

d. Effective utilization of resources: - Project structure makes an effective utilization of resources available. The staff along with the project manager specializes in various areas, and are able to make maximum utilization of resources. They know better how to utilize project capacity and time, and how to utilize human and financial resources.

e. Communication: Since employees have constant contact with members of different functional areas, the matrix structure allows for information and resources to travel more fluidly between those functional areas. The collaboration between functional areas allows a project team to better handle complex challenges and objectives.

f. Team work: - Team work facilitates project organization; in fact matrix organization itself is based on team work. Employees from various functional areas work under the spirit of team and make the project successful.

Whitey has some cultural elements which are liked by its people. One of them is empowerment which encourages people to develop their skills, capabilities and provide them career opportunities to take on new projects. This also is an enabler for developing leadership capabilities which is a key business need. This is one key factor which is keeping the talented people of Whitey engaged. There is also a culture of openness, to share ideas, opinion which is necessary to build an innovative organization ahead of competition. Then there is excellent culture of recognition of top performers who are able to achieve the desired results. These examples showcase the best and motivate other people to also keep contributing to the growth of the company.

Suman Rudra is India HR Leader for NCR Corporation and works out of Mumbai. He is a Human Resource professional with over 17 years of experience which includes leading HR roles in different industries - ranging from Manufacturing, Process industry, IT Services, IT product Development & Solutions both Indian and Global MNC’s. This diverse exposure has given him the opportunity to partner & engage with the business leadership teams in HR strategy & management.

Suman Rudra
India HR Leader, NCR Corporation
One of the biggest disadvantages of a large company with a large geographical footprint is that the individual functions are big enough to drive silo behaviour. Lining up employees in terms of functions/ geographies works well but also isolates them from other functions. It may be difficult to coordinate activities with other functions. For example, a product manager may not know what exactly engineering is doing to correct a product defect. This will reduce inter-departmental coordination, communication and results in lack of awareness of the concerns of other teams, thereby, developing tunnel vision. This will be overridden by organizational goal which is not a good sign for global companies.

Also, division of the organization in terms of line of work usually drives the development of specialized skills to achieve maximum efficacy. However, the flipside is that cross-functional best practices are not usually shared with each other limiting the overall benefits. There is also a possibility of internal rivalry between functions driving decision making that benefits a team’s own interest rather than the organization’s goal as a whole.

Being in a competitive market requires the company to be a lot more innovative and agile to changing conditions. It also requires exchange of information at a faster pace to drive innovation. However, hierarchical structures are not very conducive to this behaviour and may inhibit exchange of communication and ideas. A hierarchical structure reduces the empowerment for employees, thereby, reducing the decision making abilities. The agility of the organization is also impacted and employees are left with limited career opportunities. Geographical relocation also becomes challenging, thereby, limiting the talent mobilization. Inability to exchange ideas and problems reduces the aptitude to showcase creativity and innovation in the organization, which is critical in a competitive environment that Whitey Dairies is operating in.

In a matrix organization structure, departments work closely together for projects and communicate with each other frequently to solve issues. This exchange of information enhances productivity and allows Whitey Dairies Ltd managers to take quick decisions. For example, individuals from R&D, Global supply, Marketing and Global support functions may collaborate with each other to formulate strategies. This focused information allows managers to respond to the needs of customer and markets.

Going by the saying, "A motivated employee is a happy employee", this management structure encourages democratic leadership style. Employee inputs are taken into count before managers make any decision. This increases employee motivation and satisfaction. Employees from diverse functional expertise enhance the involvement, commitment and keep the motivation level high. This can be seen clearly in the employees of Whitey Dairies Ltd.

In addition, the close interaction between multiple departments enables an environment of collective learning and development within the organization. It also builds a culture of mutual learning that ultimately benefits the organization from the diversity, varied perspectives of employees. The ability to provide multiple experiences to employees allows for a strong and robust succession planning. It helps in building a strong talent pool and overcome talent shortages. It also places importance on internally developing employees, which is clearly evident in the ways the organization is structured.

Innovative companies are adapting a promising new retention strategy called job rotation. This is clearly seen in the Whitey Dairies case as well. The organization has retained the collective domain knowledge, expertise of its employees and provided them with avenues to utilize their competencies.

Whitey Dairies Ltd is committed to provide opportunities for employee training and development. This goes hand-in-hand with the job rotation philosophy and the case study showcases multiple examples to illustrate this. Investing in its employees certainly goes a long way in driving the right message in the organization and also motivates employees to believe that they have a career with the organization.