

Bringing Forth The Winning Ways

- BY S. AJAY KUMAR

“Be respectful, keep promises, make it easy and be inspiring”

As the Indian telecom industry surges ahead with increase in the number of mobile connections and tries to keep in sync with the demand of the customer base, particularly the Gen Y, the HR functions within the telecom organisations are pressed hard to keep a unique set of customers to engage with- the employees themselves. Human Capital interacted with Quazi Mohammad Shahed, CHRO, Telenor India, who discussed the various aspects that has affected HR in the Indian Telecom space and the ways and means adapted by Telenor to ensure the one thing that matters the most - employee motivation.



Quazi Mohammad Shahed
CHRO, Telenor

HC: Telenor as we know was a late entrant into the Telecom space in India as compared to Airtel or Vodafone and hence lost out on the early mover advantage. Is it still a preferred employer for the fresh talent as well as existing talent within Telenor? What initiatives have you taken for talent retention at Telenor?

QMS: Telenor is a challenger brand that offers affordable and value for money products for mass market. Its team of highly motivated people have captured the market share on 'Winning Everyday' mantra. The Telenor Values - be respectful, keep promises, make it easy and be inspiring is the DNA of our

operations. As an organisation we believe in an open work culture that promotes faster decision making. In addition, we have a strong development framework for our talent pool and the successors, which equip the talent with the very best of education, global exposure and industry experience. All this helps us keeping our employees engaged and retaining our talent.

Telenor India is definitely a preferred employer brand in the telecommunications space. We see lot of people interested in applying for our job openings. Our employee engagement score from global survey outcome has consistently been above the group average and global high performance norm.

For talent retention, the strongest employee value proposition is the culture that the company offers which we internally call 'Telenor way'; the work environment we have created here keeps our employees energised and agile. Telenor has special incentive programmes to retain talent. Once we have identified talent on the basis of skills, expertise and leadership qualities, then individuals are put through the Leadership Development Programme.

We combine traditional approach with experiential and unique learning to ensure that all individuals gain relevant quality. We have tied up with leading institutes to enrol these leaders in the leadership programmes. This is a fully paid programme and helps us in grooming the talent as well as retaining them. While top talent would go to foreign institutes, for the other potential talents, we work with global renowned leadership development organisations to prepare training and grooming modules.

HC: Owing to the hundred plus unique positions in the Telecom Industry, it is obvious that there is a definite crunch for talent in this vertical and Telenor is no exception. What do you offer to the fresh talent that you wish to hire in Telenor?

QMS: The telecom sector has its own complexities and requires specific skill sets to deliver a world class voice and

data experience. Operators need subject matter experts and those with telecom domain knowledge. We evaluate candidates on their leadership competencies, technological proficiency, creativity and innovative ideas. Telenor today is looking for aspiring young as well as experienced candidates who have the competence to deliver, carry the willingness to explore opportunities in business, passion to lead and grow our business and who perform on the highest degree of integrity. To get ready for the digital business environment, our campus-connect programme focuses on skill sets in business intelligence, analytics and customer life cycle management. While education and skill set are important, at Telenor we look for talent with the right attitude to integrate with the Telenor Way of work. We understand that not all talent will come with understanding of the telecom sector, so we have designed on job training and learning modules to support our employees.

HC: In your opinion what are the inherent qualities in an employee to be deemed fit for roles of responsibility? How do you groom the talent within so that they can be competent to seek roles of responsibility?

QMS: Telenor Competency Framework builds a strong foundation for employee's capability building and enables them to perform consistently. This also provides a strong foundation to assess the readiness of our talent to take senior roles and help them identify their development areas for future growth. It comprises of qualities, characteristics, skills and abilities a high potential employee must have to successfully perform in a given position. Therefore, our hiring goes through a stringent selection process of assessment tools and competency based interviewing technique which helps us to find the right competency and cultural fit for the role.

There are various best practices that have been adopted by Telenor. To meet changing business environment and diversified business



models, Telenor has cultivated a "Winning spirit" among the employees. The purpose of this winning spirit is to strengthen culture of winning every day, make people accountable to deliver business results and celebrate every success through reward and recognition. Specifically, Telenor has adopted a three-pronged approach to HR that lays emphasis on

- 1) Employee voice platforms
- 2) Career progression by providing lateral, vertical and international movements and
- 3) Expert role creations.

All these ensure that our employees have the opportunity to develop and grow along with the organisation. In this manner, Telenor hopes to create a winning team that is passionate and motivated to drive business to get a higher market share.

HC: What prompted Telenor to bestow extended maternity leave for women employees? Do you believe that such an employee engagement initiative will enhance the level of motivation among the employees?

QMS: The core of the HR policy is to ensure diversity at workplace. In line with our corporate philosophy, we encourage diversity and promoting female leaders in business and society because we believe this diversity will bring in a new perspective and help in the growth of our business. For instance, for a female employee, the post delivery period is one among the most critical time, and the extended maternity leave offers her the opportunity to ensure work life

balance, and allows female professionals to re-enter her job with a lot lesser anxiety for the new born. In fact, in Telenor India, female workforce has increased from 5% in Jan 2015 to 11% in Dec 2015. We have internal women referral programmes that have helped us to achieve the above mentioned numbers. We earnestly promote internal movement for women employees and more so for those representing business functions.

Across our business, we believe in empowering and strengthening women leadership as a part of this drive. Our policies and trainings are designed to eliminate challenges in their professional growth and build an environment of support to balance both the personal and the professional front effectively. We have recently adopted a six-month paid maternity leave policy. In addition, we have introduced supportive policies like work from home, child care allowance and increasing maternity benefits to 6 months. Our Open Mind programme is for hiring those with special abilities. We are very optimistic that these amendments will help us in enhancing the level of motivation among the women employees.

HC: Do you believe that women are sufficiently capable to handle roles of responsibility like men in an otherwise patriarchal domain like telecom? How is gender diversification carried out at Telenor?

QMS: Gender cannot define leadership qualities and skills. Both

have different strengths and needs, and we should effectively tailor their strengths for the benefit of the organization or the function which he or she leading. As an organization we look for a blend of their qualities in our workforce. We are running gender sensitization programmes such as theatre based workshops within our organization to fight the bias and getting over stereotypes at workplace. Besides that, there are rigorous and continuous trainings that the women employees undergo from time to time to make them ready for the leadership roles. We are also encouraging women entrepreneurs to become part of our retail channel as well as hiring them for regional sales position. We also run all women call centres in cities such as Patna, Ethakota and Solan.

HC: Having worked in different geographies in diverse Industries before coming to India and manning a role of leadership in the Telecom space, what do you see is the one big difference in the Indian corporate arena? What are your suggestions to plug the loop holes and make corporate India a world class employer?

QMS: India has been instrumental in supplying talent pool to some of the

premier institutes across the globe, and, more so in the IT domain. As we move into the digital era, Telenor wants to become the preferred partner in the digital journey of its customers. To fulfil this ambition, we need to train our employees for this new business environment. The Telecom sector will require more such professionals who are digitally savvy and understand the changing needs of our customers. Companies need to invest both the time and more pertinently the resource in capacity building and providing relevant training to build analytical, digital skill set, which is going to be a key differentiator in the coming years. At Telenor, we have already begun the process of training our employees to this effect, and hiring is being carried out keeping this very aspect in mind.

HC: With your abundant experience as a corporate leader, do you witness employability gap in the academic arena? Do you believe it is essential to incorporate skill development programmes in the academic curriculum to address the breach?

QMS: The Indian education system is sufficiently capable to render the basic skill sets that are required after which corporates can groom the candidates

depending on the basis of the nature of business and its requirements. The world is changing at a faster pace, and the content that is being provided in educational institutions today might not be relevant when the students come into the professional arena, so it is very important for the educational institutes to focus on developing the capability to learn. They also need to keep the students connected to the professional world while they are studying and provide them hands on experience by way of internship and Co-Opt programme. Inviting industry leaders and experts for classroom sessions, lectures and mentoring sessions are also some great tools to coach and nurture students effectively. Prime Minister's Skill India initiative to train over 40 Crore people in India in different skills by 2022 is a good move to provide the right talent to corporate India.

HC: One of the core issues affecting employee motivation is relocation. What steps have been taken at Telenor to address the emotional aspect of relocation to ensure a motivated talent pool?

QMS: Telenor Group strongly believes in leveraging the experience of its talent pool across its business units.

Vision, Mission and Values

Our industry plays an increasingly important role in people's everyday lives. Our vision, mission and values express where Telenor is headed and the role we will play both in transforming people's lives and empowering societies to grow and progress.

Our vision

Empower societies

We provide the power of digital communication, enabling everyone to improve their lives, build societies and secure a better future for all.

Our vision to empower societies is a clear call to action. We bring vital infrastructure, new services and products that stimulate progress, change and improvement.

Our mission

We're here to help our customers

We exist to help our customers get the full benefit of being connected. Our success is measure by how passionately they promote us.

Our values

Our values serve as a guide for our everyday work. They describe how we should serve our customers and work together as colleagues.

Be respectful

We acknowledge and respect local cultures and want to be a part of local communities wherever we operate.

Keep promises

We're about delivery, not overpromising. We're about actions, not words.

Make it easy

We don't complicate things. Everything we produce should be easy to understand and use.

Be inspiring

Everything we produce should look good, modern and fresh. We find new ways to improve and create value - for people and society alike.

We have a strong talent mobility programme to give our employees an exposure of both the international and the domestic markets. A lot of Indian employees have been elevated to new roles and are working across the globe. Both the Asia head and the Global CEO were once Indian CEOs. I was the CHRO of Grameenphone (A Telenor subsidiary in Bangladesh) and was appointed as the CHRO for Telenor India last year. We have 37% of our resources who have moved functions or locations within India and 7% of our managerial population have taken up international roles within the group.

During 2014, Telenor had launched Internal Mobility policy, to promote lateral movement of resources into various functions and locations. As a part of this programme, we extend mobility benefits to support them with house rent, schooling and relocation. During the settlement period, a buddy from the new location is assigned to support in settling down and also assists in the process of induction to the function and location. Further, there is an inbuilt review mechanism during the first quarter to understand the challenges of transferred function and location, addressing to make the movement a successful one.

HC: What are the various aspects of talent mentoring that are in vogue in Telenor? Do you believe that employees at all levels need to be mentored or counselled to perform better?

QMS: In Telenor we have a structured mentoring programme that provides an opportunity to our best talents to benefit from the experience of a senior leader who acts as the mentor. Our mentoring programme has been highly successful in creating a leadership pipeline. This year we propose to open this platform in a more robust way to a larger audience for them to get benefit from this. Telenor believes that every individual has a specific need and not one tool serves all. Telenor believes in an open work culture and encourages open and constructive feedback to its employees. We up-skill our managers for feedback processes and help them with relevant tools to be more effective in their roles. The usage of tools and methods are different, but the approach and the principle remain the same across all levels, as we have flat structures.

HC: What is the one thing that sets Telenor apart as a better employer as compared to the other corporate players not merely telecom? What is the one thing that you thump your chest about as the CHRO of Telenor?

QMS: The Telenor Way of work is what sets us apart. It defines the work culture across the 13 countries where Telenor has operations. Our values, strong code of conduct, leadership attitude and strong customer focus is what makes Telenor stand out in the corporate environment. Our business and people approaches are built around these and are part of our DNA. **HC**