THRIVING IN COVID-19 AND BEYOND

Dr. Marshall Goldsmith

BACK TO THE DRAWING BOARD

Abhijit Bhaduri

HR 4.0 AND THE FUTURE OF WORK

Ravin Jesuthasan

BUILDING A ZERO-COST LEARNING PROGRAMME

Nishath Usmani

A MAN OF MANY SHADES

Ashish Vidyarthi

SPECIAL FEATURE

Kalyani Rao
Abhishek Reddy M
Vikas Dua
Dakshdeep Singh
Farah Naqvi

23rd ANNIVERSARY

From The Publisher's Desk

Wuhan, the capital of Hubei Province in Central China, has now become synonymous with COVID-19. The city which has been developed as a major industrial hub since 2004 generated a GDP of around USD 22 Million in 2018. While the fate of Wuhan and China in the post-COVID period is worth contemplating with several major corporations deciding to relocate their operations elsewhere, the scenario for the Indian Industries and economy is equally grim. While the Indian Government is offering a huge respite in terms of an economic package through the "Aatma Nirbhar Bharat Abhiyan" initiative, companies in India, more so the MSMEs, have a long way to traverse before they can attain a level of normalcy.

Human Capital has come forth with a Special Edition on the plausible way forward for the Indian Industry post the COVID-19 pandemic with some very noted names coming forward with valued contributions. Amarpreet Bhamra writes that post the COVID-19 pandemic, HR function's role is set to assume a new dimension. In an exclusive conversation with Human Capital, Dr Marshall Goldsmith advises people to follow the principles of the Bhagavad Gita to deal with the crisis that has consumed us. In yet another exclusive conversation, Abhijit Bhaduri reveals the silver linings for organisations willing to boldly bets on reimagining themselves in such uncertain times. Human Capital also interacted with Ravin Jesuthasan, Managing Director, Willis Towers Watson, who spoke about automation, the imperatives of HR 4.0, and how COVID-19 is shaping the future of work.

Vikas Dua believes that to overcome COVID-19, HR leaders need to don a soldier's avatar and lead from the frontlines. Dr. Anuradha M. V. talks about psychological well-being at the individual, societal and organisational levels. Gautam Brahma shares intriguing insights on the post pandemic changes at work. Persona features Ashish Vidyarthi, national award-winning actor and Founder, Avid Miner, who finds new reasons to be passionate about every single day, and considers himself to be a professional learner.

The fact that experts have anticipated that the Indian economy will stage a recovery from the second quarter in FY 2020-21 is indeed heart-warming. And this can be achieved only through sustained impetus from the Government and minimal social distancing. Hence, only can only hope that there is no further damage to the already ravaged economy by COVID-19.

Carpe Diem!

Neha Jain

Contents

HC
Human Capital

Contents

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This issue of **HUMAN CAPITAL** contains 82 pages including cover

The Post COVID-19 HR

As organisations continue to grapple with the COVID-19 pandemic by either shutting down operations or remotely operating the processes, the role of the HR function and its practices will assume a new dimension.

BY **AMARPREET BHAMRA**

The fury of COVID-19 has undoubtedly delivered a lethal punch to most enterprises across the globe. Almost every other sector viz. insurance, banking, aviation, tourism, hospitality, manufacturing, automotive, e-commerce etc. is making a valiant effort to come to terms with the crisis unleashed by the virus by devising plans to ward off disruptions in the functioning of global processes. And the bitter truth is that the existing business models along with business continuity plans have gone topsy-turvy. Enterprises are thus scrambling to keep their workforce engaged during long spells of lockdown announced by multiple nations across the globe.

The Great Depression in the 1930s and the global recession post the Lehman Brothers saga in the late nineties, heaped financial misfortune across the globe. In the current scenario, economists have predicted a massive economic collapse, global recession, and job cuts during the course of the lockdown. For Human Resources, this lockdown has precipitated several unforeseen scenarios which signal a rewiring of the existing people practices to manage the workforce in organisations. An attempt has therefore been made to assess and highlight certain elements of HR which have largely existed on paper and will possibly amplify in the post COVID-19 world.

Contingent and Remote Workforce

With citizens confined to their homes, and governments promising to supply them with essential items till the lockdown ebbs, a huge surge has been reported in orders for firms in the e-commerce, logistics, retail, warehousing, food, and healthcare space. As per a recent CNBC Workforce Wire report, the likes of CVS Health and Instacart are hiring contingent workers to meet the swelling demand. Amazon, Papa Johns, Kroger, and Walmart are ramping up both the regular and contingent workforce for enabling last mile deliveries. HR could bake-in a formal contingent workforce model with structures, risk protocols and governance and contract service providers or staffing firms to meet business requirements in similar situations. They will also need to solve prevailing concerns of contingent workers related to denial of benefits which are available to a regular employee and low compensation.

This apart, the demand for gig workforce will accelerate in the coming times. Jeanne Meister, a Partner with Future Workplace, an HR Advisory and Research firm in Forbes, states that remote work is here to stay. She further adds that with the benefits of tapping into a geographically and ethnically diverse talent pool, managers will increasingly explore how to make remote working part of their culture. In terms of human capital talent acquisition or the recruitment teams within HR will be tasked to hire niche talent in quick time along with an assured back-up bench strength of talent. Jeanne mentions that transforming talent models and digitising talent value chains will be a big focus area for HR.

Work from Home (WFH)

Work From Home is going to be a significant reform in terms of commuting to work going forward. As WFH assimilates into the

mainstream, the frowns and suspicion cast upon employees for doing WFH by many corporates including the reporting managers in the pre-coronavirus times is going to reduce further. In the current situation of outbreak of COVID-19 and social distancing measures, WFH has become inevitable with the likes of Amazon, Facebook, Microsoft and Google implementing the same. *"We're being forced into the world's largest workfromhome experiment and, so far, it hasn't been easy for a lot of organisations to implement,"* says Saikat Chatterjee, Senior Director, Advisory at Gartner. HR functions around the globe will feel the need to reorient the workforce, including the managerial and leadership cadre, on the new realities of WFH, and accordingly, amend existing Human Resource policies. In order to firm this even further, HR professionals need to cultivate a better understanding of business critical and non-critical processes.

> **"HR functions around the globe will feel the need to reorient the workforce, including the managerial and leadership cadre, on the new realities of WFH, and accordingly, amend existing Human Resource policies."**

Wellness

Corporate Wellness Programmes would gain more traction as enterprises would be keen to sustain a healthy workforce in order to minimise the impact of bio-virus attacks. HR teams are likely to partner with business heads on establishing and monitoring cadence on health

indices and cascading communication on hygiene and sanitary practices to employees. It will be worthwhile to evaluate the creation of a Chief Health Officer and Epidemiologist role in enterprises with a focus on employee wellbeing programmes to prevent occurrence of diseases. Counselling sessions for affected employees by known and newer ailments, and Employee Assistance Programmes are going to have more bite and traffic going forward.

HR Tools and Systems

In the aftermath of COVID-19, the focus on overhauling rusty HR tools and systems is likely to intensify. Collaboration and workplace tools are the need of the hour in organisations to tide over the grim situation. As remote work emerges as a reality investment in digital tools, video calls and virtual workspaces would be welcome. HR and business leaders need to sensitise the management and workforce on new standard operating procedures for video meetings, conference calls, virtual workout sessions and dress codes. HR systems used for workforce time management, salary, pay, leaves, performance management, tele-health services, benefits programmes, order management etc. need to be configured to the new realities. This in itself will be a key transformation. Furthermore, the aspects of HR apps and data along with hardware and bandwidth required to support remote work and new tools need serious thinking.

Policies

The COVID-19 outbreak has exposed severe chunks in the existing HR policies across global enterprises. In this context, such policies must be examined and revisited to accommodate newer working conditions. E.g. existing policies woven around WFH, disability, compensation, health, shift allowances, working hours, contract staff, vendors, employee

perks and bonus have to be debated, and subsequently, amended in line with the prevailing laws of each country. Insurance policies in the future are likely to incorporate coverage in terms of medical and life for virus related pandemics, and HR teams need to be at the forefront of leading this change. Another huge consideration would be the travel policy with restrictions on local and international travel likely to be extended at the end of the lockdowns. For instance, existing questions on Sick Leave and whether it should be paid or unpaid needs to be resolved. Stephen Miller, in an article in the SHRM titled *Health, Wellness and Leave Benefits Help Employees with Coronavirus* has stated that President Donald Trump has signed the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) on 18 March, 2020. The following new regulations have been introduced:

- Emergency Family Medical Leave (FML) Expansion Act: Temporarily expands the provisions under the Federal Family and Medical Leave Act specifically to address COVID-19-related absences
- Payroll Credit for Required Paid Family Leave: This refundable tax credit is designed to reimburse 100 percent of wages paid by the employer under the new Emergency FML expansion for each calendar quarter
- Emergency Paid Sick Leave (PSL) Act: Employers are required to provide paid sick time, available for immediate use, to each employee requiring such time for specific reasons associated with the COVID-19 pandemic
- Payroll Credit for Required Paid Sick Leave: This refundable tax credit is designed to reimburse 100 percent of wages paid by the employer under the new Emergency PSL for each calendar quarter

Learning and Development

In terms of this crisis, new contours have emerged for Learning and Development. There has been a noticeable surge in employees enrolling for online courses, and HR teams could always encourage employees to upgrade themselves by undertaking some of these programmes. Another opportunity for HR could be to develop and deliver short business and leadership programmes through the online mode. HR could play a more strategic role by broad-basing the existing repertoire of learning programmes and include online courses on wellness, health, diet and lifestyle to sustain a healthy workforce. Organisations across the globe will evaluate and implement more programmes aimed at reskilling of the workforce on digital tools and the newer ways of working.

Risk

The current risk protocols are likely to be redesigned in order to combat a situation like the spread of COVID-19. HR partners have to update protocols and internal controls on workplace policies, business data, employee health data, IT assets, employee privacy, lay-offs, HR access management, remote working, business continuity plans including interim succession planning, alternative working arrangement like moving processes to a new site or location, client engagements, transportation etc. to see that businesses operate in a seamless manner. The existing protocols revolving around contractual obligations with vendors and other outsourced providers will call for a revision. In fact, preparing for a worst-case scenario could be handy to ward off any such eventuality in real-time.

Employee Communications and Leadership

HR needs to be proactive in dealing with employee communications in these challenging circumstances. Many organisations have activated dedicated webpages to COVID-19, thereby communicating all the relevant information to the workforce. However, HR needs to be more agile by conducting short podcasts with business leaders, live chat sessions, and virtual town halls so that employees experience the connect with the business in spite of operating remotely. In the future scenario, HR teams need to disseminate swift information on topics related to health and ailments to the employees. Social media is likely to occupy more mind space, and hence HR teams need to make the workforce aware about the norms and guidelines pertaining to the same. HR can also assist enterprises in setting up a website, app or hotline featuring curated content to provide guidance to employees in a lockdown. Some of the sources for content could include local governments, healthcare authorities and international organisations, such as the World Health Organisation (WHO). HR professionals need to be vigilant in negating any rumours or non-verified information which can rapidly spread through informal and social media networks.

In terms of leadership, HR teams need to sensitise the frontline managers and business leaders on how to empathise with employees in these dire situations. E.g. Chevron and Exxon have put safety as their topmost goal as people are critical to functioning of businesses. Leaders need to be transparent and inclusive and encourage employees to speak up on any concerns which they may be facing. Michael Beer (*Cahners-Rabb Professor of Business Administration, Emeritus, Co-Founder and Director of TruePoint Partners*) has stated in Harvard Working Knowledge that the COVID-19 challenge, like any crisis, provides the senior management with a huge opportunity to rapidly develop a trust-based culture. HR partners should acknowledge the efforts put in by employees to keep the wheels of business moving in crunch situations, and should also see that the workforce is operating with lower stress levels and anxiety.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

The destruction caused by COVID-19 would remain etched in history for a long time. There is an immense impact on mankind and nations, especially the poor and marginalised. Furthermore, HR and business leaders need to engage and collaborate with communities and self-help groups by designing and launching niche CSR programmes focused on health, finance, wellness and skill enhancement. The involvement of workforce in volunteering programmes should be accorded more weightage in performance management and could also be mandated in the respective organisations.

The unfolding of the COVID-19 Pandemic heralds a new learning curve which is unique and unparalleled for enterprises. As organisations continue to grapple with the pandemic by either shutting down operations or remotely operating the processes, the role of the HR function and practices will assume a new dimension. Being smarter, flexible, and prepared would be the newer attributes for Human Resources to sustain high levels of engagement and keep the wheels of the organisations moving. 🅗🅒

About the Author

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

Google Gives Every Employee Rs. 75,000 Work-From-Home Allowance

BY **ANUSHRUTI SINGH**

As working from home has become the new normal in the wake of COVID-19, Alphabet Inc's Google has announced to give an allowance of $1,000 (around Rs. 75,000) to each of its employees globally for expenses on necessary equipment and office furniture as they work from home.

The tech giant expects most of the employees to work from home for the remaining year. The company will restart opening more buildings in more cities from July 6.

As per Alphabet and Google CEO Sundar Pichai, there are a limited number of employees whose roles are needed back in the office this year, and they would return on a limited, rotating basis. "This will give Googlers who need to come back to the office or, capacity permitting, who want to come back the opportunity to return on a limited, rotating basis (think: one day every couple of weeks, so roughly 10 percent building occupancy)," Pichai said in a blog post. **HC**

OYO Announces ESOPs for Furloughed Employees Impacted by COVID-19

BY **ANUSHRUTI SINGH**

Oyo has granted employee stock ownership plans (ESOPs) worth Rs 130 crore to all its furloughed employees impacted by the COVID-19. The move is part of the company's efforts to minimise the disruption experienced by employees due to the pandemic.

OYO founder and Group CEO Ritesh Agarwal, in an internal email to employees revealed the Rs 130 crore plan. "I would like to recognise your contributions and this love and passion for OYO by making you a co-owner and shareholder of the company", he wrote. "I would like to inform you that all impacted OYOpreneurs would be eligible for ESOPs worth around Rs 130 crore (around USD 18 million)," Agarwal added. **HC**

Amazon Offers 125,000 Full-Time Jobs to Seasonal Employees

BY **ANUSHRUTI SINGH**

Amazon has planned to offer full-time jobs to 125,000 of 175,000 temporary workers hired to handle surging use of its online shopping service due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The company had expanded its workforce with 175,000 new positions in March to help provide for the communities and keep as many people as possible working during the crises.

"Like other companies, we hired these individuals for seasonal roles to meet a surge in demand and, for many, there was the hope of returning back to their previous companies once states began to re-open," Amazon wrote in a blog post. "As the long-term picture becomes more clear, we're providing the opportunity for 125,000 of those who came on with us seasonally to stay with Amazon and transition into a regular, full-time role beginning in June. Some may choose to return to their previous job, and others may choose to stay at Amazon in seasonal or part-time roles."

Amazon pays at least $15 per hour to its 600,000-strong workforce. Earlier, the e-commerce giant had announced to invest nearly $4 billion to keep its workers safe. **HC**

Standing The Test Of Adversity

Over the years, commitment to Diversity & Inclusion has increased across the globe, but the real test to the strength of these commitments is the ability to withstand this adversity.

BY **KALYANI RAO AND ABHISHEK M REDDY**

In August 1619, around 20 African slaves de-boarded a ship in Point Comfort in Virginia. And by the 18th Century, 7 million slaves had been dragged out of their homes and were chained, forced to toil, incarcerated, and even raped. Africa was thus robbed of its most able men and women. The justification for such atrocities was the heinous racial discrimination. Public assertions about people of colour being naturally inferior and negative stereotyping led to several people consciously believing such baseless claims. The prejudices and biases continue even today, but are only subtler. We encounter, and at times, even endorse - consciously or unconsciously - stereotypes and prejudices against women, people with disabilities, and other minority groups.

In an economic downturn, these stereotypes and prejudices only enhance the discrimination against certain groups. The journal article, *'Race and recession: Effects of economic scarcity on racial discrimination'* gives an insight into such a troubling trend. Through a series of studies, researchers found that economic scarcity produced racial bias at the time of distribution of resources. Prejudiced people allocated fewer resources to black recipients in a recession-like scenario.

> **Through a series of studies, researchers found that economic scarcity produced racial bias at the time of distribution of resources. Prejudiced people allocated fewer resources to black recipients in a recession-like scenario.**

The COVID-19 pandemic is throwing extraordinary stress on economies and businesses across the world. As the future looks bleak, one can increasingly begin to contemplate the safety of his/her own self/family, and people who are alike in terms of opinions, religion, class, gender, caste, etc. Such feelings will only enhance prejudices even further. The research report, *'Economic scarcity alters the perception of race'* states that during an economic downturn, people become subconsciously more prejudiced. Such heightened feelings will impact judgements about people and groups. Due to this, employers may be tempted to use poor economic conditions as a reason to discriminate against minority groups while making lay-off decisions. 'Recessionary discrimination' happened during the 2008 economic crisis, wherein women, people of colour, and those belonging to other minority groups were laidoff in large numbers. It also affected subsequent hiring practices for some time.

Today, we have a similar economic environment, and though subtle, prejudices and biases are still at play at workplaces. Decisions driven by biases today will undo the commitment and investments

made in diversity & inclusion over the past few years. They will not merely undo the efforts, but also destroy the credibility of organisations both externally and internally, by bringing forth the question of truthfulness in every effort, investment, and D&I values that organisations vouched for all these years. Internally, it affects employee perceptions of their leaders, receptivity to new ideas and initiatives, and engagement levels. All of this will translate into lower customer satisfaction and a decrease in profits. According to a survey conducted by Tony Simons and Judi McLean Parks in 76 US and Canadian holiday inns, profits were substantially higher in such hotels where employers strongly believed that their managers walked the talk and demonstrated values they preached. Even a one-eighth point increase in a hotel's score over this aspect of managerial behaviour on a scale of five, translated into a $250,000 increase in profit per year.

> **"Decisions driven by biases today will undo the commitment and investments made in diversity & inclusion over the past few years. They will not merely undo the efforts, but also destroy the credibility of organisations"**

Therefore, resorting to more evidence-based decision-making on the matters of diversity & inclusion will benefit the organisations. Some evidence we have come across suggests the following:

• **Inclusion helps withstand economic downturn:** A research conducted by Great Place to Work in 2000, companies with 1000 or more employees stated that when the S&P 500 experienced a 35.5%

drop in stock performance from 2007 to 2009, inclusive companies saw a 14.4% gain. Inclusive companies are more likely to innovate, drive sentiments of fairness and integrity and up investor confidence.

• **Diverse companies generate more revenue:** A study by BCG in 1700 companies across 8 countries found that diversity has a more direct effect on the revenue. Companies with diverse management teams had 19% more revenue because of enhanced innovation.

• **Inclusive leadership drives team performance:** According to a research by Deloitte, behaviours of leaders that lead to an increase in individuals' feelings of inclusion have resulted in 17% increase in

team performance, 20% increase in decision-making quality, and 20% increase in team collaboration.

Diversity & Inclusion has several benefits ranging from investor sentiments to employee morale. Over the years, commitment to Diversity & Inclusion has increased across the globe, but the real test to the strength of these commitments is the ability to withstand this adversity. Decisions based on biases might come at heavy costs to the investments done till date in D&I, credibility, risks of facing law-suits & settlements, and associated benefits of being inclusive. For achieving better outcomes for all, diversity & inclusion should stand this test of adversity. **HC**

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Thriving in COVID-19 and Beyond

In an exclusive interaction with Human Capital, **Dr. Marshall Goldsmith,** *a world-renowned executive educator and coach, Thinkers50 Management Hall of Fame Inductee, and celebrated author, shares his thoughts, techniques, and tips on thriving and leading through the current crisis.*

BY **ANKITA SHARMA**

Q The COVID-19 crisis has brought unique and varied challenges for everyone. What is your top guidance to navigate and adapt through this period of upheaval and rapid change?

A ADVICE FOR PEOPLE AS INDIVIDUALS

Lessons from the Bhagavad Gita

There's a great parable called the *Gita*, which I think is a great guidebook for helping people deal with today's crisis. In the *Gita*, Arjuna is faced with two very challenging choices: bad and worse. He shares his woes with Krishna. What is the message from Krishna?

- **Face and accept what is.** People want authenticity from leaders. They don't want them to paint a pretty picture of what is not a pretty picture. Face what is in a pragmatic way, yet be optimistic — practice pragmatic optimism.

- **Do not become attached to outcomes.** You do not control the outcomes. You didn't create this virus. You didn't create this disaster. When we become attached

to the outcomes, we invariably set ourselves up for failure. So it's very important to realise this and forgive yourself. Many people in the crisis are saying, "I should have saved more money. I should have done this or that." You can't change what you did. Also, forgive other people for being who they are. Getting angry at them for things that you can't control is a complete waste of your time and energy. Focus on where you want to make a difference.

• **Create a strategy that fits your deeper purpose and do your best.** Ask yourself, "What is my plan, and how does this plan tie into my deepest purpose?" The next important step is to do your best. Once you have made peace with what is, and you have accepted the hard reality that exists, all that's left is for you to do your best.

• **Make peace with the results.** When you get fixated in the outcomes, all of a sudden, everything is personal, and you think you're a terrible person. Not everyone is going to succeed. One of my good friends, David Chang, is among the most famous restaurant people in the world. Two of his top restaurants just went bankrupt. He's a brilliant guy. He's famous worldwide. He had great food. But sometimes, even the greatest leaders lose, and they have to make peace with that and say, "How can I start over?"

Learnings from Peter Drucker

I had the opportunity to learn from the great Peter Drucker, the founder of modern management and a great mentor of mine. I was on the Peter Drucker advisory board for ten years. Peter Drucker taught me a wonderful lesson that's very appropriate for this time of crisis: *Our mission in life is to make a positive difference. It's not to prove how smart we*

are or how right we are. We get so lost in proving how smart and how right we are that we forget that's not what we're here for.

There is a good guideline in my book, *Triggers*, which is very appropriate for today's crisis. Before you deal with any topic, ask yourself this good question that was inspired by Peter Drucker: *Am I willing, at this time, to make the investment required to make a positive difference on this topic?* If the answer is yes, go for it. If the answer is no, let it go. Do not waste your time, emotions, and energy on things you're not going to change and improve anyway.

> **"When we become attached to the outcomes, we invariably set ourselves up for failure."**

The Golfer Parable

There is an analogy that's going to be in my upcoming book, *The Earned Life*. I'm not a golfer, but my good friend and colleague Mark Reiter is. He helped me put this together.

Imagine this: You're a golfer. You are at the country club. It is a weekend, and you have a chance to win the monthly championship. You are very excited because you are on the final hole, and you have been playing very well. The group in front of you is noisy and drinking beer. You are very annoyed by these people. You go up to the tee. You block out distractions. You hit your drive, and it's perfect. It goes right to where you want it to go. However, it hits something and bounces over into the rough. You think, "How could that happen?" You walk to where your ball landed, and you see it hit a beer can. The beer can was left on the fairway by

these inconsiderate people. Now, you're angry. You hit a perfect shot. The stupid idiots left the can of beer. You walk to your ball. What do you do? Breathe. Let go of the past. Forget about the beer can. The results of the previous shot are over.

You cannot fixate on the glory that may or may not ever happen in the future. You can only develop the best possible strategy, walk up to the ball, and hit the shot in front of you. That is all that you can ever do. In the words of the *Gita,* you do your best, your duty, but do not get attached to the results. In today's crisis, you can't change the past. You have to let it go.

ADVICE FOR LEADERS

During this period of change, people need more communication because there is more ambiguity and rapid change. I suggest that leaders have a regular dialogue with each person they work with through a simple **six-question process**.

1) Where are we going?

As a manager, you say, "Here's where I see the organisation going right now in terms of vision, goals, and priorities." Then, ask your direct report, "Where do you think we should be going?" This opens up a two-way dialogue.

2) Where are you going?

You say, "Here's where I see you and your part of the business going now." Then, start a dialogue by asking, "Where do you think you should be going?"

3) What is going well?

You begin by sharing, "Here's what I think you and your part of the business are doing well." Then, ask your direct report a seldom-asked question, "What do you think you're doing well?" Many times, we

forget to recognise people during a crisis, and they're often doing very good things. By asking this question, you can celebrate performance wins that you would otherwise miss.

4) What are your key suggestions and ideas for the future?

You provide feedforward by saying, "Here are some ideas I might have for you in the future moving forward," and then asking the question, "Assuming you were the coach or advisor, what ideas would you have for yourself?" People often give ideas you might have never thought of that may be more valuable than your own ideas.

5) How can I help?

Another good question is, "In this time of crisis, what can I do to help you?"

6) What ideas do you have for me?

Finally, you can say, "We're going through this together. What ideas and suggestions do you have for me moving forward?" You don't promise to do everything; you promise to listen to people and do what you can.

During this period of change, leaders need to go through this simple six-question process — not less, but more — because things are changing very rapidly. As an executive coach, I only get paid if my clients get better. I've taught this process to seven big CEOs. I got paid seven times out of seven. This is how effective this process is. There are two keys to making this work:

● One is establishing mutual responsibility. As a leader, you say to the person you're managing, "I'm going to have a regular dialogue with you on these six basic topics so that we are in good alignment. If you ever feel overcommitted, lacking in alignment, or confused, I want you to take the responsibility of talking

to me. Because if I do my job as your manager on a regular basis, and you do your job in following up with me, there's no reason we should have ambiguity, confusion, or any lack of alignment."

● During times of crisis, you also need to say, "I cannot promise that our strategy today is going to be our strategy five years from today. In fact, I can't even promise our strategy today is going to be our strategy next week. However, at any point in time, I want you to have total clarity in terms of what's most important and what the priorities are right now."

> **"As a leader, you're much more of a facilitator who learns from others. You're not a little god who has all the answers, and it's very important to make peace with that."**

Q Why could practising either pragmatism or optimism be problematic? Also, how can leaders become pragmatic optimists?

A If you focus only on the news and reality, it can be very depressing. It's tough out there. Yes, it's real and pragmatic, but if you focus all day on the thought "Isn't life terrible?" you're not making a positive difference and not helping anyone. You have to face the hard reality and then ask, "How can I make the best of it? How can I make the biggest positive difference right now?" That's the optimist part. But you can't be just an optimist either. Motivational speeches or happy thoughts are not going to make

everything fine. You can think positive until hell freezes over, but the virus is not going to get cured by positive thinking. If wishing this would go away was the cure, it would have been gone a long time ago. So, the first part is pragmatism: Don't hide from the reality that's there. Today, people prefer authenticity. They don't want some show or pretense. The second is asking, "How can I make the best of the reality that does exist?" That's the idea of pragmatic optimism.

Q Today, leaders have to be bold, decisive, and tough—while also being empathic, compassionate, and supportive of their workforce. This is one of the most challenging balancing acts they will encounter in their career. On this front, what would be your best piece of advice for leaders out there?

A Peter Drucker gave a piece of great advice: Every decision is made by the person who has the power to make that decision, so make peace with that. If I am the decision-maker, then you need to influence me. In this case, there's one word to describe you, and it's "salesperson." There's one word to describe me, and it's "customer." You don't have to buy; you have to sell. So first, when you're trying to influence people that have more power than you do, realise that it is not their responsibility to buy — it is your responsibility to sell. If you cannot sell it or change it, then you make peace and move on.

If you are the leader, you don't have to prove that other people are wrong or put them down. On the one hand, you can be very compassionate, and on the other hand, you can tell the truth and say, "Here's the decision I've made". Sometimes, it may be an unpopular decision. People may come back and say, "This is bad

for me". However, an effective leader can be positive and respond, "I understand that, and I'm going to do whatever I can to help you. I've still made the decision."

One of the great leaders in our 100 Coaches group is Harry Kraemer. He was the CEO of a large pharmaceutical company called Baxter. He's now a top-rated professor at the Kellogg School. Harry was asked the question, "As a leader, you've had to fire people, lay people off, make very difficult decisions, and do things that caused a lot of pain for people. How do you sleep at night?" He had a very simple yet profound answer: "I only ask myself two questions: One, Did I do what I thought was the right thing? Maybe I was wrong, but did I do what I at least thought was the right thing at that time? And, two, Did I do my best? If the answer is yes, I did what I thought was the right thing, and yes, I did my best, I can always sleep at night. That's all you can ever do."

Q **What mindset should leaders take on as they steer their organisation through unknowns?**

A I have written an article about a leader being a facilitator, which is what Peter Drucker taught me. He said, "Today, we manage knowledge workers. They know more about what they're doing than you do. And as a leader, you don't have the answers."

During this period of crisis, you have to ask, listen, and learn from everyone around you. As a leader, you're much more of a facilitator who learns from others. You're not a little god who has all the answers, and it's very important to make peace with that. The people I coach are CEOs of multimillion-dollar companies. If I'm a CEO who knows more about marketing than the marketing person, more about finance than the finance

person, and more about HR than the HR person, then I don't have a leadership problem — I have a selection problem. I have the wrong staff. You need people who know more than you do. You need to facilitate and learn from these people and help them work with you to develop the strategy. People don't need you to be a little god who tells them what to do and how to do it because you don't know enough to be that little god. There are no such leaders — at least, I haven't met any if there are.

Q **Leaders today find themselves choked by the sheer volume of business and people responsibilities and may not find time for introspective thinking. However, this pandemic will define their legacy, for good or ill, no matter how far they are from retirement. How could busy leaders consciously build their legacy?**

A I think it's very good for leaders to challenge themselves with questions as human beings. What's my mission in life? What are my priorities? What is most important for me? What am I doing well? What do I need to change? What help do I need?

Every day, I practice something called the daily question process. I have a person call me every day. I go through these questions regarding my whole life every day. Someone asked me, "Why do you have someone call you on the phone every day? Don't you know the theory about how to change behaviour?" Well, I wrote the theory about how to change behaviour. That's why I have someone call me every day. I know how hard it is. My name is Marshall. I have someone call me every day. They listen to me while I read the questions that I wrote and provide answers. Why? I'm too

undisciplined to do this by myself, and I need help. We all need help, and that's okay.

Q **What would you like our readers to know about your upcoming book,** *The Earned Life***?**

A The first part of my book is about creating your own life. We live in a world of choice. In India, years ago, you had no choice about where you lived. You lived where your parents did. You had no choice about your occupation. You did what your parents did. Your religion was set for you. Everything was prescribed. Today, you have thousands of choices. In many ways, this is very positive. Yet, depression is at an all-time high. People are anxious and confused. When you don't have a choice, you also don't have regrets. You cannot regret making a decision when you can't make decisions. However, when you can make decisions, you have regret, and it's sometimes hard to face. So, the first part is addressing who you want to become and making peace with who that is.

The second part is that, as we journey through life, we constantly need to earn respect from others and ourselves. As part of our work with 40 brilliant people, we found that they're all trying to get better. Each one of these people could say, "I am successful. I have money. I have status." However, they're all saying, "I need to get better and keep earning respect and value." It's an ongoing evolution of life. Thus, the book is about creating the life you love and earning the life you create, not once but over and over again. **HC**

Back to the Drawing Board
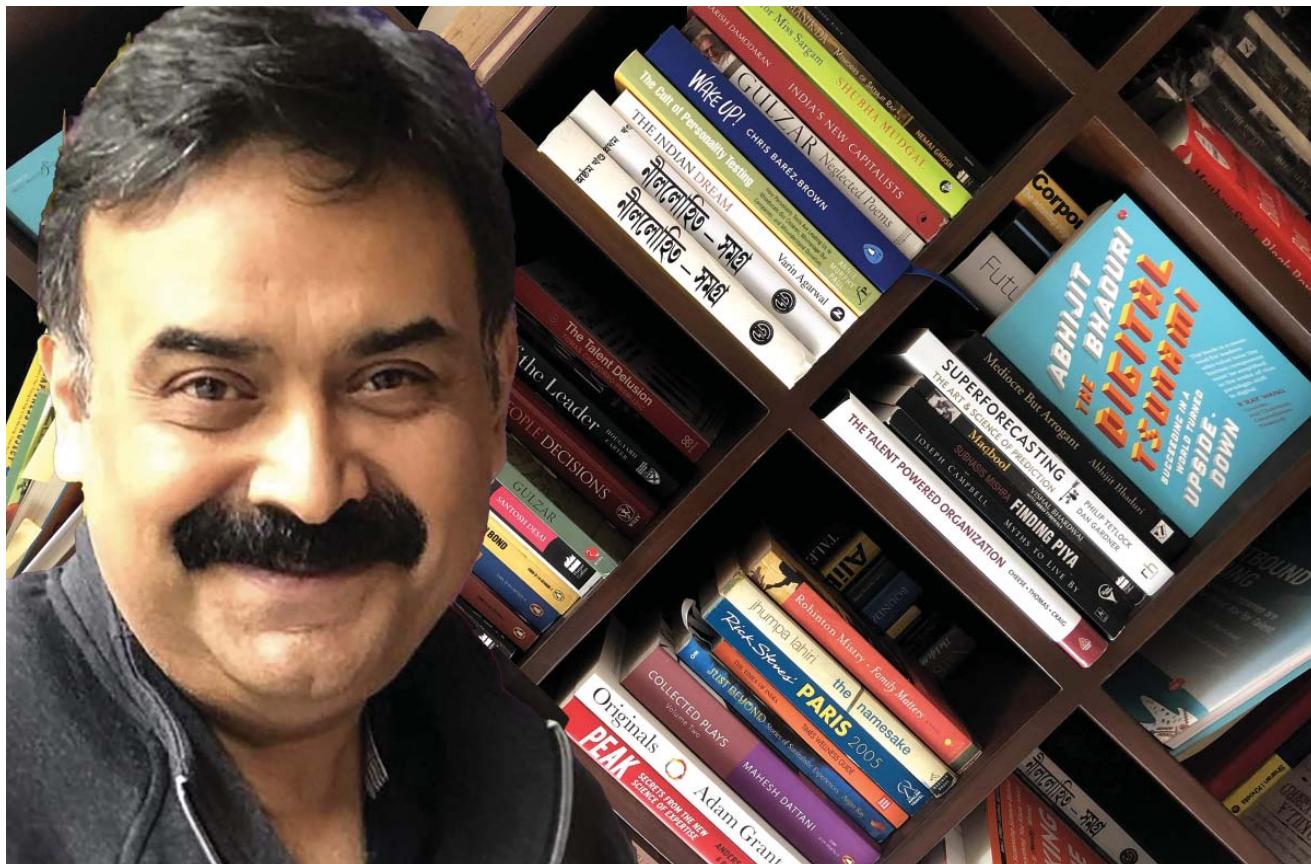
*In an exclusive interview with Human Capital, **Abhijit Bhaduri**, a leadership coach, talent management expert, author, advisor, and Founder of Abhijit Bhaduri & Associates, offers pragmatic advice for navigating the breakneck changes currently underway, shines a light on the changing talent equation, and reveals the silver linings for organisations willing to place bold bets on reimagining themselves in an uncertain present.*

BY **ANKITA SHARMA**

Q **You've built a very extensive career in HR. You are a talent management expert with global experience in top-tier organisations, an author, a speaker, a coach, and so much more. How do you look back at your career so far?**

A We all have a core professional area of focus and a portfolio of other interests. My core identity has always been human resources. But I also have many other interests – writing, drawing, theatre, music, etc. And I think, when you work on your own, it is possible to integrate many of these

interests even better. In a traditional job role, it is a little more challenging.

As a freelancer, it is easy for me to decide on how I will allocate time between writing, working on my keynotes, coaching or long-term projects. I can pick and choose. It becomes like a share portfolio. I can temporarily over-invest in one, under-invest in one and keep changing the mix. So that's how I look at it, which is the reason perhaps that I've been able to pursue many different things. I love that flexibility of being a little impulsive if I have to.

> **"Every function, whether internal-facing or external must be reimagined using technology to be location-agnostic."**

Q **The coronavirus outbreak has pushed almost every business to bolster its digital transformation efforts. What do you feel are the biggest pitfalls that organisations should avoid when executing their digital strategies?**

A When you look at a digital transformation strategy, the first design principle is that it's not about technology. A lot of people say, "We've created a website where people can buy and sell stuff, and so we are digital." Absolutely not. That's not digital transformation. Every function, whether internal-facing or external must be reimagined using technology to be location-agnostic.

Secondly, you need to ask yourself: When the lockdown was announced, how easy was it for you to continue every aspect of your business and employee experience? If it continued seamlessly and you thrived in this new environment, then that's

probably a good yardstick to look at. However, people don't really make enough investments in HR tools and technology. Without that, it's very hard for people to have their goals tracked and to have managers stay connected with the teams, or for individuals to stay connected with their managers and other colleagues and be able to collaborate online. The managers must be trained to rethink their role in the new scenario.

You should be able to manage every aspect of your business in a seamless, online/offline format. If your business was not O2O, which is online-to-offline, and back, then perhaps you have some distance to cover in your digital transformation journey. It's really like saying that when people buy something online, they also go to the store, try it out and check the size, and then order it online if it is cheaper. Or they can do comparison shopping, and if they need to return the stock, then they'll still go back and return it in the store where they tried it out. Good businesses blur the difference between the online and the offline realms. That's how I'd look at digital transformation for every function – especially HR. Is it O2O?

> **"The pandemic is going to make even large organisations start relying increasingly on freelancers and gig workers. Freelancers are going to experience a lot more opportunities as companies start to embrace a flexible workforce."**

Q **As the role of AI continues to expand rapidly in the HR realm, the potential drawbacks**

of AI-powered decisions are also quickly coming to the fore. How can HR professionals uncover and surmount the challenges of using AI, such as algorithmic bias?

A I wrote something recently where I said that if you want to fix the bias in algorithms, it's not the algorithmic bias that can be addressed, but the bias of the person or people who coded the algorithm. The coders must work in diverse teams to understand if any group is being excluded or treated unfairly.

Biases will always be there, in various shapes and forms, because every human being is unique. Algorithms have to be constantly evaluated for their ethical implications. In the post COVID world, if the employer uses face-recognition, the employee must specifically approve the usage of that data for some other purpose (e.g. creating a happiness index or engagement study).

If decisions are made without involving the people who are impacted, it is likely to be biased. This is not even about algorithms. Rather, it is about human bias. For instance, business meetings are usually dominated by extroverts – they take up a lot more of the airtime and introverts don't get much chance to speak. Extroverts and introverts in any population are nearly 50/50, so there seems to be no reason why this bias still exists. But it does. Try to map your own meetings to discover who does most of the talking.

Becoming aware of the biases is step one because it allows people to address them easily. Also, it is a continuous journey. As we go on, we will discover more nuances. We have biases against anyone who is not from the mainstream. It's the majority who must make efforts to include the minority in decisions. Biases in people decisions are everywhere. If the leaders are from certain colleges, then they tend to

With more than 850,000 followers on social media, Abhijit is the most followed writer in HR. Follow him on social media @Abhijit Bhaduri. Sign up for his sketchnotes on abhijitbhaduri.substack.com.

take more chances on students from a similar background. Prejudices come in all shapes and forms. So when I create an algorithm using the rule book that is in my head, it shows up as a biased algorithm.

Q **COVID-19 has cast the gig economy in a new light. What are your views on this front?**

A I look at the gig economy as just one of the many variants of talent. The key perspective to keep in mind is what I've talked about in my upcoming book, *Dreamers and Unicorns*, that when we thought of the word talent, even a couple of years back, we looked at it as a set of people who were on the rolls of an organisation. But it's no longer a binary group of people who are or are not on the rolls of a company. Freelancers are a set of people who are increasingly becoming prominent, and India is

definitely one of the places where a lot of freelancers exist.

When we think of the term gig economy, it covers a whole range of jobs. The way I look at it, there are three kinds of roles. One is a set of jobs that are allocated based on the platform on which you have signed up. Ride sharing, food delivery, home repairs are all examples of this. You sign up on any platform, and the platform allocates the jobs and ensures that you get paid. You don't have to worry about developing your own business or building your own brand, sales, or collections. It's all taken care of by the platform. That's one variant of the gig economy.

Then there are freelancers doing white collared jobs. They need to build their own brand to get discovered by the clients. They're creating their own products and services, and people know them for who they are. It's a very person-specific thing, and organisations invite that specific person or the team to offer services and support.

And then there are gig artistes: people in the arts and fine arts. 80% of Bollywood (film making in every language) is made up of gig artistes. Whether these people are in theatre, film, music, the broadcasting media in general, writing, or anything like that, they are gig artistes. They work on projects and get paid for their craft.

The pandemic is going to make even large organisations start relying increasingly on freelancers and gig workers. Freelancers are going to experience a lot more opportunities as companies start to embrace a flexible workforce. Such a workforce could include work-from-home mothers, people who've retired, people who have been the victims of acid attacks, or the cognitively challenged and physically disabled, among others. It will open new opportunities. B2B sales is now increasingly driven by SaaS productions (subscription-based)

or Cloud-based (pay-per-use). Connecting, collaborating and shaping solutions is driving value. And this requires soft skills like listening, empathising and offering to integrate conflicting views. Women have excelled at many of these. The customer success teams at Salesforce and Oracle are headed by women.

Q From your perspective, how can HR professionals build their personal brand to gain more influence and impact?

A I think your personal brand is not just about saying or doing a certain kind of thing but also about the nature of the work that you do. Being a subject matter expert who can simplify ideas in a manner that creates value for the users is a prerequisite for personal brand building. It's about building a pull. That involves knowing about the medium or platform.

When I work with leaders in helping them craft their personal brand, I help them discover their unique ability to create value and how to communicate it. Several senior leaders have used these principles to build a strong personal brand on various channels. Like any other brand, a personal brand is crafted and nurtured over time.

"Many HR processes were designed for a world where the overwhelming majority was co-located. Now when most roles are remote, the HR processes have to go back to the drawing board."

Q In times of crisis, it is difficult to make company culture a priority while continually putting out fires that threaten business sustainability. Moreover, with the COVID-19 pandemic, it has become challenging to build an engaging culture for a dispersed workforce. What would your advice be for maintaining and nurturing organisational culture during such difficult times?

A I think that the manner in which you deal with fires should reflect your company's stated values. this means that whatever your stated method, your values should reflect why you're doing what you are doing and also indicate how you're going to be doing it. Therefore, a company's culture shouldn't change drastically regardless of whether it's a short- or a long-term crisis.

Ultimately, the way you deal with people during times of stress – whether you trust employees and care about them and their families and what methods you adopt to tide you over difficult scenarios – are reflections of organisational values, regardless of what you put on the values posters.

Many HR processes were designed for a world where the overwhelming majority was co-located. Now when most roles are remote, the HR processes have to go back to the drawing board. What happens to hiring or onboarding when you take them online? Do they remain consistent with your company's culture? It's not the office that we have been used to. The rules of engagement were all designed for the pre-pandemic office world, and it's a different world now, so it's obviously going to need a lot of work. Now is the time for human resource people to take the lead and shape the workforce, work policies, and employee experience in line with stated values and culture. Ultimately, this is a great opportunity.

"This is a situation that nobody in the world has experienced before and, therefore, this is a time to make bold bets."

Q Turbulent times demand emotional resilience. In closing, could you give a few quick tips for leaders on how to stay resilient when all the odds seem stacked against them?

A This is a situation that nobody in the world has experienced before and, therefore, this is a time to make bold bets. It's a time to start questioning the basic assumptions and begin to design a different workplace that values everything that the previous workplace norms did not allow for.

Mental health has always been something that organisations have left people to worry about on their own. Perhaps this is a time to step up to the plate, prioritise employees' holistic well-being, and question the inclusivity of the whole process. These are things which endear people to you. You build deeper connections, and that's one of the big ways in which you build emotional resilience.

Maintaining a Gratitude Diary to record every day what one is grateful for is a wonderful way to build resilience. Meditation is a stress buster. We have overcome many challenges before – everyone has. This too shall pass. The poet Rumi said: *Light can only seep in when there is a crack. When a vessel is cracked, the light comes in.* While times of stress are very hard, they also strengthen and build us in a way that we see ourselves in a new light. If anything, I see this as a positive opportunity to bring groups together, to bring employees together, and to revitalise the workplace. **HC**

Building A Zero-Cost Learning Programme

L & D departments are undergoing a unique and difficult situation during the COVID-19 times. While Learning needs have not reduced, the budgets have frozen. The 'bells and whistles' have gone, yet the learning needs are real.

BY **NISHATH USMANI**

"No...no, Niharika! There's nothing good about this programme design!" No fancy facilitators, no modules from marquee universities. Only a series of virtual sessions. Every RBC in my 'training blood' was boiling over to say- *'this ain't gonna work'!*

The apprehensions felt by me are strikingly similar to what L & D departments in organisations are going through in the COVID-19 times. Learning needs have not reduced, but the budgets have frozen. The 'bells and whistles' have gone, yet the learning needs are real. In such extreme situations, how can we design great learning interventions with a zero budget? Coming back to Niharika....

She saw my internal angst, and then said, "*This is a good design.*" I walked away disbelievingly, telling myself, "*She is always polite.*" A few weeks later, much to my utter scepticism, we launched the programme.

As the programme was deployed, I witnessed something that had never been experienced previously. The magnitude of the feedback, the buzz, the perception of content relevance, the goodwill generated, the culture building etc. everything that participants came back to us with, was incredibly positive. I could not believe it. This was after all, the underdog programme. The zero budget one!

But I am fast forwarding too much and jumping to the end. Let me rewind a bit and start from the dinner table conversation that I had with my eldest daughter. *"Maa, like me, (she is preparing for her engineering exams) your participants were also preparing for something. So, their interest in the programme is natural."* She was right. In parts. The participants on this programme were indeed high potential leaders who were being prepared for the next

level of leadership. But this overwhelmingly positive feedback did not come when they reached the next level or when they got promoted. It came way before that. The participants did not connect their individual promotion as a criterion, for determining the programme's usefulness. They had made that decision long before.

Which is why I had liked to start by saying that beyond the high philosophies and grand themes, lie the unfaltering details of execution. And that is where the success story of this programme design begins. It is built on simple six principles.

Get the basics right

Old fashioned as it is, good learning design begins with learning objectives being correctly identified and narrowly defined. Once articulated, these need to fit into the programme's pedagogy and content. In this case, there were three key learning objectives.

- As future leaders of the firm, the participants needed to have a deep understanding of the firm's wide offerings.
- The firm's local leadership needed to engage with them and teach them how to build the business- here and now.
- They needed to build the softer aspects of leadership- like executive presence and communication.

These three objectives translated to three pillars, each of which had a specific learning intervention built around it.

For participants, seeing is believing

In his seminal research paper, *'Is career management related to employee development & performance'* (Journal of OB, 1996), Raymond A Noe studied 120 employees and their managers in a state agency to understand the relationship between career management and employee

development activities. In this paper, Noe argues, *'that the closer the employee's current position is to their career goal, the more interested and involved they will be in development activities.'* This is because employees recognise the need for 'readiness' to the next role. Secondly, the participant feels that his/her developmental behaviour may improve their chances for obtaining their desired position as it signals to the 'powers that be' that they are interested and motivated to receive new opportunities. Our learning programme was paced at 4 months away from the time of the actual process of the promotions. So, proximity to the learning goal (which in this case was the promotion process) greatly enhanced the engagement levels of the participants, keeping them around 95%. It is possible that would not have been the case if the programme was 8-10 months away from the learning goal.

> **"Old fashioned as it is, good learning design begins with the learning objectives being correctly identified and narrowly defined. Once articulated, these need to fit into the programme's pedagogy and content."**

Give them the context right, they will learn everything else

In our programme, we only used internal trainers, following the model of 'leaders teach leaders'. This worked brilliantly. This is exactly what Antonio Aragón-Sánchez et all (2003) had stated in their paper, '*Effect of training on business results'*. After their study

of 6000 managers in small and medium industries, they concluded that on-the-job training given by in-house trainers is the method that had the highest positive influence on profitability results of the organisations. 'This positive effect', the authors opined, was because this kind of training presents less transference problems: it does not interrupt the work; it develops the workers' precise skills, and promotes an environment of learning'. Similarly, in our programme too- the homegrown leaders, people who had gone through the promotion process and who knew the anxieties and lows, were called on to take all the sessions. At the same time, we had somebody from the senior leadership who truly cared about the programme. In our case, it was our CHRO, who was the programme's biggest evangelist. He nurtured the programme idea, carefully molding its shape.

Provide just in time content that 'comes together'

There is a reason why 'Pizza Hut' increases their advertising spends between 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. every night. It is simply because that is the time when people are hungry. Cereal manufacturers have smart analytics that can predict when the cereal box is due for a refill for a family. That is when their direct marketing kicks in. Our programme borrowed some of these principles. Programme content, such as the in-depth knowledge of the firm, the future strategy, the opportunities and challenges are the things that these 'to-be-leaders' already knew. It was about re-providing it to them at just the right time, when it mattered the most. We also stitched the virtual sessions, making them into an interesting TV series, where every session felt like the cliff hanger of a great novel. Also, we realised that the content does not have to be pretty and perfect. Imperfect, evolving

and practitioner-led content, is more precious to a learner than great looking slides! One look at any of the Khan Academy videos will tell you that you do not want the content to be 'perfect'!

> **"One of the main objectives of a learning programme then should be to make the learners believe that change is possible and that they can drive it post the programme."**

Bring in the FOMO, to bring in the engagement

Although, there is a lot of research that proves that a state of anxiety is not conducive to learning or concentrating, in today's world, some amount of 'fear of missing out' is a good thing to build in. Through the marketing and communication of each of the interventions, participants were made to feel that 'missing the

session, was like missing the bus and they had to have to take the train, which is not coming anytime soon.' To help participants stay connected, we played up the hype just a little bit by talking about what they would miss (instead of what they would learn), when we spoke about a specific learning intervention.

Ultimately, it's all got to do with motivation

One of the main objectives of a learning programme then should be to make the learners believe that change is possible and that they can drive it post the programme. This is what Bandura (1997) called selfefficacy or the belief *in one's capabilities to organise and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments.* Throughout our programme, participants were provided with the assurance that they are already the future leaders of the firm, regardless of whether they got promoted or not. Even at the end of the programme they were given consistent messages that they are 'ready' for the next level. This was reinforced by welldesigned

communications going from their managers and other influential members of the leadership. This created a sense of selfbelief that actions from here on will be dictated by the participants and that they have the onus of change!

Like I mentioned above, the COVID-19 environments are forcing us to think of highly quality, low cost offerings. While there is nothing so glorious about these simple six principles. When they come together, they provide the fundamentals of a highly effective learning programme built at a zero cost! **HC**

About the Author

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

António Guterres, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, has, albeit optimistically, stated that the recovery from the COVID-19 Crisis must lead to a different economy altogether. However, in light of the on-ground situation on the business front in India, the road to recovery seems distant. The Indian Economy, which was not impacted in the real terms by the global crises during 2001 and 2008, is now anticipated to contract owing to the COVID-19 pandemic. Experts, by way of analysing different scenarios, have indicated that India can be hopeful of a V-Shaped recovery, and hence, can anticipate a recovery from the second quarter in FY 2020-21, provided there is sustained impetus from the Government and minimal social distancing.

While sectors such as Aviation, Tourism, Hospitality, Construction and manufacturing have been the worst affected by the Pandemic, Education, Healthcare, Pharmaceuticals, IT, Telecom and Agriculture have been least affected. It is also unclear whether the exodus of the business orders and deals from China will reap benefits for India in terms of orders and investment. There is however a silver lining in the form of the US-China Trade war as also the former's angst against China for keeping mum on the outbreak of the COVID19 Pandemic in Wuhan. Japan has also been forthcoming by offering an USD 2.2 Billion economic support package to aid industries to move out of China in light of the COVID-19 Pandemic.

An anecdote to the Indian resolve of finding ways where there is a will has come in the form of the Indian healthcare sector. When the first COVID-19 case was traced in India in January 2020, there was only a solitary lab equipped to carry out tests for COVID-19. In less than four months, India managed to achieve the unachievable by carrying out 1,00,000 tests in a single day on 18th May, 2020.

While the prayer on every one's lips is that India remains "Aatma Nirbhar", Human Capital interacted with experts from various Industry sectors to seek their views on the crisis at hand and the possible outcomes that could emerge in the days ahead.

DR. MOORTHY K UPPALURI
Former CEO and MD - Randstad India, Angel investor and Advisor to early-stage Start-ups

Q **Owing to the lockdown, leading organisations like Uber have laid off its employees, and hence, the much talked out "Uber Business Model" is definitely being viewed with scepticism. What according to you are the positives that start ups can derive from such a disruption?**

A The "Uber business model" is a bold and disruptive business model that enabled a marketplace for the service providers and the service seekers to connect on a widely prevalent and reliable mobile phone platform, thus making the service available anytime, anywhere in a consistent and carefully governed environment. This also created employment for several thousands of young and skilled people across the world. It fostered a new ecosystem that was enjoyed by customers world-over. It is not appropriate to blame the "Uber business model" for the challenges imposed on the business due to the lockdown.

If one would take a closer look at the current business challenges, it is not too difficult to trace social distancing and the associated restrictions around ensuring personal hygiene to be the root-causes. These necessitate changes on multiple fronts like infrastructure, operations, transactions, and regulation, along with relevant training to the workforce to institutionalise those changes, and adapt to the market expectations rather quickly. This is evidently over and above the challenges imposed on the business, like variance in demand due to impacted customer sentiment and the bleak economic outlook. As mentioned previously, the "Uber business model" is a powerful tool that can be applied easily to create marketplaces across the globe to connect supply and demand in an effective and efficient way without the need for serious investment. Also, I passionately believe that every new disruption, like the ongoing lockdown, provides tremendous potential to challenge the status quo

and innovate to offer unprecedented solutions that the market will welcome. It is just that one must have the eye for such opportunities and the wherewithal to pursue the same in a timely manner.

Q **While the COVID-19 pandemic has been stressful for the Start-up Founders, it has been even more stressful for the HR Managers and the employees. Speaking from experience, what would be your advice for the HR Managers and employees to ensure that the spirits remain high?**

A True, it has been stressful to all the stakeholders as everyone is at the receiving end and were subjected to an extremely turbulent, vague, and difficult situation that was unprecedented in this century. It left millions of people worrying about lives, families, livelihood, and survival. The aftermath of COVID-19 is no less than that of any world war, with so many countries, people, economies, and businesses severely affected and left wondering where to begin, when and how to go about it! In tough situations like this, one has to conserve the resources available, be mindful of the ecosystem, environment, and the way forward, and seek the much-required courage and inspiration from within, so that s/he can be a dependable support for the people around. Unprecedented problems call for unprecedented and innovative solutions. Competencies like being enterprising, empathetic, and inclusive will be more in demand and constitute the core of leadership going forward. Employees will have to be dynamic change agents with an open mind and quick learners adapting to the disruption, leading the transformation, and accelerating the change for the revival and growth of the business. HR leaders, being the conscience of the company and culture, must take a proactive role in rebuilding the enterprise and employee policies to enable business transformation in a seamless and

painless manner. It is a proven fact that people converge and coalesce under distress. And the Leadership must capitalise this rare and historic moment to galvanise the organisation together and rally them towards the business mission.

Q **Do you believe that the financial package announced by the Prime Minister works as a life saver for start-ups? How do you believe that the start-ups can use the fillip provided for better talent management practices?**

A The stimulus package is certainly a step in the right direction. Several MSMEs will benefit from this package. While capital is a critical and core ingredient for the success of the business, there are other key elements like strategy, talent, and execution that are vital in determining the success of a Start-up, provided there is unmet demand for such products and/or services in the market. The stimulus package enables friction-free access to the capital and helps with the much-required liquidity in the business.

Start-ups will have to be mindful over the extent to which they can bear the burden of debt, and how such leverage can help the business accelerate the growth plans. With reference to the current situation due to COVID-19, Start-ups will need to weigh in the impact it has on their customers and the changes in demand. It is also prudent to revisit the business assumptions and re-validate their strategy and execution plans. Start-ups single-mindedly apply all their passion and available resources towards growing their business revenues and profits as planned. Talent in the Start-ups is usually paid incentives that are tied with business achievements/ performance, and in some cases, employees have equity that gets vested over a prolonged period of time to ensure retention of such performing talent. Most elements of the stimulus package are intended to

help the business in the immediate to short-term, hence it is unlikely that they will be applied towards the talent management per se, beyond hiring to meet the needs of the organisation in the immediate future.

Q **While people can shrug and claim that the millennial and Gen Z workforce knew the risks when they opted to work for a Start-up, do the lay-offs actually turn the tide in favour of the Gig Economy, a term that has been coined basis the work preference of the millennial workforce?**

A Gig economy alludes to the job market characterised by the prevalence of short-term contracts or freelance work as opposed to permanent jobs. Gig economy was made possible with the advent of uber-like business models, willingness of employers to convert jobs into manageable gigs, and a growing workforce that could not secure conventional jobs due to the prevailing skill gap or otherwise, more than just the preference of the millennial workforce. Surely, the layoffs and right-sizing decisions of the businesses result in a surplus of talent that will eventually settle for gigs and alternate staffing models, provided the future business demand supports such engagements. In my opinion, the post-COVID market will be ripe and fertile for some structured and well-designed experiments to figure out the right proportion of jobs/gigs, and accordingly, the talent mix basis the revised demand-supply. Gig economy will continue to evolve and will remain a key constituent of the job market and workforce, albeit gradually.

Q **With WHO claiming that COVID-19 is here to stay and that organisations will need to work around this very premise, what according to you is the road ahead for start-ups in**

> **"Every new disruption, like the ongoing lockdown, provides tremendous potential to challenge the status quo and innovate to offer unprecedented solutions that the market will welcome."**

terms of sustaining their business model as also ensuring that they hold on to their talent?

(A) Agility and the ability to Adapt quickly are critical factors for success of the business in such turbulent and traumatic times. Acquiring the right talent for the right jobs at the right time at the best cost and retaining them productively continues to be a business priority and critical for both the short-term and long-term success of the business. Identifying the talent that can navigate the business in turbulent and unchartered waters remains the top priority of the leadership. Equally important is the ability to engage with customers, build lasting relationships, have deep insights, and provide effective solutions to customer's problems and acquire sustainable business growth. Start-ups must make technology their ally, create solutions to customer's problems with a differentiated value proposition that is not only compelling but also competitive. Start ups must remain bold to challenge the status quo, innovate, try new things, take risk, fail fast, and emerge with differentiated offerings that are relevant, effective, scalable and sustainable. Success breeds success! Typically, high performance of the business fosters a healthy and winning culture that by itself inspires and retains employees. Inspirational and empathetic leadership will remain the critical need for organisations to execute tirelessly and stay on the course of success.

(Q) **While Venture Capital activity has declined in China following the COVID-19 pandemic, several Start-ups in Japan have opted to provide automated services and have thereby excelled. According to you, how will the start-up scenario in India look like once we emerge out of the lockdown?**

(A) I see excellent opportunities for synergistic consolidation of select potential start-ups that are conceptually great, but are either not yet very competent individually or are yet to build the stamina required to sustain on their own. Such consolidation of select businesses enhances the economies of scope and scale. Venture Capital firms can offer funding to support such consolidation and bold execution of such broad and deep solutions. This implies that the deals will be fewer, but of substantial size. I believe technology will continue to play a particularly important role in the disruption and rebuilding of the new economy post-COVID. I believe there will be an emphasis on personal hygiene and personal protection due to COVID-19 that will create new opportunities and market for creative solutions in this domain. There is clearly room for innovation that offers the much-required assurance in personal and public transportation, logistics, delivery, healthcare, and hospitality domains to cite a few. Technology assisted, low-touch solutions and service-offerings could be in increased demand. We are already experiencing a high demand for productivity tools and platforms that will enable remote engagement in scenarios like WFH. 🄷🄲

JAYDEEP DAS
International Head - People & Culture, Children Believe

Q **The COVID-19 pandemic has shifted the much-needed focus on critical illness and refurbishment of the healthcare sector. Coming from an organisation which is in the domain of holistic child development, what do you believe is the biggest HR opportunity that the pandemic has provided to the non-profit sector?**

A COVID-19 did not break the system, but has unmasked the realities. The VUCA (read C as COVID19) situation has further highlighted the inadequacies of our healthcare infrastructure in terms of quality, accessibility, affordability in addition to compromised hygiene practices and shortage of trained healthcare workers.

However, beyond healthcare, we are beginning to witness how this outbreak could indeed "leave" many vulnerable people behind in contrast to UN's tagline "leaving no one behind" by SDG 2030. The economic and social crisis triggered by the lockdown has further aggravated the iniquities and marginalisation. The underprivileged and vulnerable have been hit hard from aspects namely nutrition, livelihood, safety, mental health and education. The most vulnerable are children, including those with special needs.

I would say that this unprecedented crisis has provided a much-advocated platform and a brilliant opportunity for HR professionals to rise up as strategic business partners and build the organisational resilience. Non-Profit Organisation (NPO) leaders are looking at HR leaders for their counsel for ensuring business continuity as they empathetically handle the people resources that is at the core of what we do and how we do. HR professionals with strong business acumen, sense of urgency, and the influencing ability to build resilience within the organisation have remarkably buoyed the cause of business just like a CEO.

While tightrope walking on the dwindling budget lines, NPOs have always debated investment Vs cost, flexi Vs traditional approach. However, this pandemic has helped HR leaders to show and tell that things can amazingly work together without compromising the programme impact or business continuity if we have the hearts and minds of our people, regardless of their workplace positioning.

Q **Fundraisers, events, and human contact are the hallmarks of the NonProfit sector. With the COVID-19 Pandemic, all the above activities have come to a naught. In such a scenario, what are the possible ways in which an HR can enhance employee morale?**

A Although COVID-19 has ruled out face-to-face fund raising drives, other avenues remain open. Our teams have broken the distance and time-zone barriers and are scaling up efforts, as the need of the poor are huge and immediate. However, the recent amendment of Companies Act allowing corporates to donate their CSR funds is a big dampener. It will deprive the grass root NPOs who have been amazing in providing food and shelter to lakhs of migrant families, while all systems seem to be clueless and apathetic.

As People & Culture (HR) leaders, we were able to co-create a flexi-working environment much opposed to the traditional thinking that the social sector cannot thrive minus in-person dialoguing. The Last 60+ days have shown that flexi-working has brought in more resolved results, and has added more meaning to the staff. We have been able to do so as our front line workers and community leaders have demonstrated their leadership and have stood in the gap.

As our commitment to duty of care, there is increased focused on wellness including mental health as the staff continue to cater to the needs of the people we serve. We have been proactively consulting and communicating the needed shifts in our service conditions and processes with our staff as the work-arena has

moved beyond the confines of office. Increased frequency of town hall video meets, virtual shout outs for staff recognition and virtual lunch meets to remain social amidst the lockdown has been an effective anti-dote to lockdown stress.

Honest and inclusive communication, trust and empathy holds the key to keep the morale high. We are mindful about not adding to their anxiety by springing up surprises for the fact that we need a "motivated-them". Moreover, a "motivated workforce" is a by-product of the success stories that stems out of what we do in our communities, and we have plenty of them to keep our staff motivated and moving.

Q **With tech-enabled tools and telecommuting dominating the work arena today, do you believe that team interactions in the non-profit sector are bound to significantly change in the immediate future? Do you feel that this has come about as a huge advantage for instant decision making in the non-profit sector?**

A Many recognised INGOs and NGOs are not new to virtual platforms, very much reflective of their stewardship of resources. It may however be newer for the smaller NPOs. However, what has changed across in the NPO space is hooking on to technology as a lifeline for business continuity.

There is a significant shift in the way the team was interacting in the pre-COVID scenario versus the way it is currently. We do foresee that the pattern will further evolve in the coming days. Days are past when the staff could read a colleague's body language and facial expressions, and that calls for investment around virtual communication that is crisp, clear and correct. The crispier the communication, the lesser time it requires for consumption, analysis and decision-making. Yes, the

techenabled tools have aided faster decision-making.

To remain future ready, NPOs have to explore using virtual platforms beyond the current usage. Development sector needs to explore programme delivery until the beneficiary at the village level. Technology can help us to overcome time and cost barriers and can provide us space to do more. However, virtual trainings call for adequate caution in terms of appropriateness of our language and presentation in view of local cultural context. Therefore, figuring out what activities/resources that we could provide virtually, and how to be intentional when it comes to the safety of individuals who participate and/or volunteer with us are critical points to consider.

Q **The breadth, depth, and scale of the novel challenges being experienced by HR leaders are indeed astounding. According to you, what are the biggest pain points for the nonprofit sector? How must they be tackled by a HR Leader?**

A To explain how our interventions work, let me share of a statement by Rainata, 16, from Burkina Faso. On being asked why she is actively engaged in COVID-19 relief work, she says, *"I have learned that as a leader I should always inspire others by setting a good example."* There are many such children and youths across the globe who have stepped in for the greater community good. I appreciate our front liners for their long-term investment to make it happen.

So far, we have well-weathered the disruptions caused by COVID-19. However, it has nudged almost all the non-profits to think through on drastic revamp of programme design, newer/deferred ways of programme implementation and the allied wrenching decisions about staffing. There are big names who are restructuring their organisation

❝The COVID-19 pandemic has helped HR leaders to show and tell that things can amazingly work together without compromis-ing the programme impact or business continuity if we have the hearts and minds of our people.❞

"This unprecedented crisis has provided a much-advocated platform and a brilliant opportunity for HR professionals to rise up as strategic business partners and build the organisational resilience."

making it leaner and stronger. Even non-profits whose funds have not declined are nonetheless experiencing significant shifts in how they do business. For organisations that thrive on values of equity and justice, managing the people aspects of the business during such unprecedented times presents challenges and opportunities.

Human connections are at the core of any non-profit impact. However, in view of the dwindling funds due to mass layoffs impacting our donors, and a large chunk of donations landing in the government's coffers, the NPOs are left with a constrained scenario while pushing us to think of newer ways of cost optimisations for business continuity and sustainable impact on the lives of children, youth, families and communities.

When we say newer ways and cost optimisation, we already know what the pain points are. Now the practical challenge for HR is how to actualise the hard decisions while upholding the values we profess and neutralise any legal risk allied with those decisions. In my opinion, HR's maturity and preparedness while dealing with shortterm shifts in people policies to negotiate challenges in the current scenario and the ability to figure out long-term improvements based on experiential learnings in supporting staff will be key aspects for effective business positioning. While we face this pandemic, we constantly remind ourselves not to take any permanent decisions to negotiate any short-term problems.

Q **According to you, what has COVID-19 changed the most for HR professionals? What are the areas of concerns that employers might be called upon to address going forward?**

A In short, the biggest change is changed working. The new work arrangement is not the same as the work from home that used to be in the pre-COVID world. When thinking of deliverables, we need to be cognisant of the changed work atmosphere with household chores

and well-being while weaving in empathy into equation. The Shift in work setting has forced HR professionals to unbox their thinking as the very idea of employee experience suddenly has different measuring indices. The evolving context has opened up avenues for HRs to step up business partnering to a more strategic level to augment effective yield.

As we look forward all employers will have to address the following areas:

Tweaking of HR policies: It is almost certain that remote work will be a permanent feature. HR needs to unpack how the practicalities of employment terms including compensation & benefits, process flow, travel requirements, office protocols, and communication strategy would play out and they remain legally sound.

Talent acquisition and management: This pandemic might enable NPOs to afford hard to find hires and let go positions that are not business critical in the changed context.

Cultivating culture in dispersed workplaces: Culture is more vulnerable in times of crisis as each of our action and inaction sets the foundation for our next chapter. Culture has to be cultivated through authentic human connects infusing identity and purpose of our work.

Engaging a dispersed workforce: Research tells us that staff, who feel that their physical, social and emotional well-being is a genuine priority for the organisations they work for, are generally more engaged. How do we keep our staff engaged, inspired and industrious will reflect our professional capability.

This situation has again reinforced that engagement cannot be bought. It is our privilege to have people driven by passion and who are clear about their purpose in life. And that makes it somewhat easier to continue to do whatever it takes to ensure our communities flourish in spite of operating in a constraining environment. **H** **C**

SWARNA SUDHA SELVARAJ
Head of Talent Development,
TCS UK & Ireland

Q **In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, every organisation is experiencing its own set of unique challenges. How do you see the COVID-19 crisis and its impact on the IT/ITeS sector?**

A In the current situation, placing more focus on moving forward would be beneficial to people and businesses alike. I see this as an opportunity and would like to highlight four main silver lining areas:

- New Engagement Models
- New Business Opportunities
- Reimagination of Sustainability Initiatives
- Expansion of Community Initiatives to Global Communities

Q **What, according to you, are the biggest opportunities that the COVID-19 has brought forth for your sector?**

A COVID-19 has thrown several opportunities to the IT Sector. I have already highlighted them in four categories. I expand upon them a little bit here.

The TCS trademarked "Secure Borderless Work Space" (SBWS™) is a point of pride, in which we have been able to onboard more than 95% of about 450000 of our employees across the globe.

Even though customers in some of the sectors like travel, tourism, and education are right now struggling with the situation, there is a lot of scope for cross-pollination of industries, and coming together collaboratively to create newer business opportunities.

The ongoing crisis also turns out to be a great opportunity for sustainability initiatives with a lot of learning from current environmental changes.

There is a larger focus laid by organisations on community initiatives, mainly in the education sector, where organisations are providing learning opportunities for people not only within their communities but to global communities now in the digital mode.

Q **The breadth, depth, and scale of the novel challenges being experienced by HR Managers are indeed astounding. According to you, what are the biggest pain points for the IT industry? How do the same need to be tackled by an HR Manager?**

A The primary focus area has been the health and safety of employees and supporting business continuity of customers. The actual challenge was to get both done in parallel seamlessly. Currently, we can be confident in stating that the most difficult phase has passed.

The challenge right now at the hands of HR managers is employee engagement. Because of the change in the work model, there are huge opportunities to redefine employee engagement. This includes the experience of employees in learning, career, well-being, welfare, to name a few.

For instance, in the next week, if 100 employees are to join the organisation across the globe in different countries, in different roles across different experience levels, can HR guarantee seamless employee experience? What would be the experience of the existing employees in integrating these newer employees into the global workforce? This could prove to be a meaningful pilot for defining the experience of the future, and what all can be done contactless as part of these employee experiences.

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

A Ethical stalking related concerns are on the rise. Organisations might have to work on revisiting their policies to balance regulations, business requirements, and employee safety.

Changes in travel policies, internet-related policies, health insurance policies, leave policies and many others that would have linkages to compensation and benefit are likely to come into play.

> **"Ethical stalking related concerns are on the rise. Organisations might have to work on revisiting their policies to balance regulations, business requirements, and employee safety."**

Clear communication and getting rid of ambiguity would be essential to retaining the trust of employees and keeping up their morale.

Q When it comes to addressing key concerns such as changing business needs and boosting employee morale, what are the vital points that function as an imperative for an organisation in the IT sector?

A Retaining the trust of existing employees and gaining the trust of newer employees would depend heavily on HR practices, policies and procedures. Some of the low-hanging fruits could be:

Enabling Employees: An employee is most productive when they are enabled. With all the flexibility that is already available, it is now time to add on the aspect of infrastructure or any other support that would enable the employees to be at their best.

Empowering Managers: The nearest touchpoint for an employee is their manager. The more empowered the managers are, the faster the need of the employee is met.

Non-Stop Exhaustive Learning Opportunities: Providing a variety of learning opportunities to enable employees to stay relevant would be one of the critical priorities of HR. This is essential more than ever, and it is an important role of HR to inspire associates to take as many learning opportunities as possible, per the business requirements and aspirations.

Clarity in Communication: Performance management, increments, promotions and related decisions must be communicated upfront with justifications to cut off any ambiguity that could arise out of them. Travel policies that need changes and processes around those with FAQs could provide clarity to frequent travellers in organisations. There are several other policy and process changes that could be thought of and communicated clearly for employees' consumption.

Celebrating Moments: Bringing teams together and keeping connections intact between employees with events that highlight positive memories could become a key differentiator in keeping employees bonded. **HC**

BISWARUP GOSWAMI
CHRO, GHCL

Q **The COVID-19 Pandemic and the subsequent lockdowns has completely disrupted the supply chain in the manufacturing sector. Speaking from a HR Perspective, what are the positives that have emerged for the days ahead?**

A The COVID pandemic has certainly been a disruptor and integrator in many ways. Despite the challenges faced by us in our business, there were quite a few learnings for the Human Resources team.

a. At the plant, we took this time to complete the annual shutdown with minimum deployment of workforce.

b. Another positive clearly was Work From Home (WFH), as people quickly acclimatised to digital technology. WFH was not something which came naturally for us. Hence, it was important that we plan and ensure that the business continues to operate in a digital environment. E-learning was put to good use.

c. We also ensured that the leadership was constantly communicating with our colleagues, down to the last level, at regular intervals. We wanted everyone to stay positive and connected. In these tough times, with layoffs happening all around us, regular Webinars and sessions with senior management were very heartening and reassuring for our colleagues.

d. We had reconciled to the fact that COVID-19 is here with us by the time Lockdown 3.0 was announced. Perhaps this was the best time to launch the implementation of SUCCESS FACTORS for digitising the entire "Hire to Retire" HR process for GHCL.

Q **The breadth, depth, and scale of the novel challenges being experienced by the HR Managers during the course of the lockdown are indeed astounding. According to you, what are the biggest pain points for the manufacturing sector? How do the same need to be tackled by a HR Manager?**

A The lockdowns imposed due to the COVID-19 pandemic has brought in a host of challenges for the manufacturing sector, mostly because the nature of business is such that certain jobs cannot be carried out remotely. There were various disruptions and the sector was faced with demand slumps, cancellation or deferring of orders, leading to cash flows and collections under pressure. Additionally, the migrant labour issue led to the shortage of labour supply as well.

Safeguarding the health of the workforce and other stakeholders was a major concern. We put together immediate and contingent safety measures for our employees, and as the industry started opening, we decided which functions could be carried out remotely. We ensured flexible work arrangements, and of course, the change management to go with it. As an HR Manager, I believe that we are responsible for: -

(a) The health and safety of our employees as a caring organisation

(b) The growth and optimum utilisation of time for employees whether they are at office or working from home and

(c) They are well informed about the way forward.

Technology has been the biggest boon in this pandemic and has made the above possible, irrespective of the location of our employees.

Q **According to you, what has COVID-19 changed the most for HR professionals in the manufacturing sector? What are the areas of concern that employers might be called upon to address going forward?**

A The manufacturing sector lost valuable production time, and in the initial stages, logistics became a nightmare. HR learnt the art of keeping their house intact in spite of certain tough measures to take care of the rainy days, E.g. deferment of increments, promotions, expansions etc. Also, getting maximum productivity out of limited number of people deployed.

> **"The manufacturing sector lost valuable production time, and in the initial stages, logistics became a nightmare. HR learnt the art of keeping their house intact in spite of certain tough measures"**

Q **The COVID-19 pandemic has been instrumental for the rapid transformation and extinction of certain job roles and the emergence of newer job roles. How has this affected the manufacturing sector in terms of job prospects?**

A I will not say it was truly the extinction of certain jobs, but the focus was more on the "Teeth" functions. Filling of vacant positions was deferred in terms of priority. I will not say that there was a big emergence of new roles, but certainly, there was some extra scope for increased job opportunity in new products linked to PPE and Mask making.

Q **When it comes to addressing key concerns such as changing business needs and boosting employee morale, what are the vital points that function as an imperative for an organisation in your sector?**

A The dilemma of keeping the employee morale high while working from home persists, and more so, when the business prospects are poor while the economy is facing a downturn. However, we could carry out some very engaging sessions online for our value deployment effectively with e-learnings, leading to improved competencies. In addition, some Top management communication in terms of "MD Speaks" webinar sessions help in building trust and faith. Employees need to be aware of the exact business scenario and impact of COVID19 from the top leader. Last but not the least, in such challenging times, you rely on your intrinsic strength, and the core values of Respect, Trust, Ownership and Integrated teamwork must work as the guiding force in making the right decisions and keep everyone safe and positive during these tough times.

Q **The largescale exodus of migrant workforce, who make for the frontline of any manufacturing organisation, comes as a huge setback, since it is near impossible to replenish fresh workforce post the lockdown. How do HR Managers convert this challenge into an opportunity?**

A After about three decades of functioning in an organisation, you add on to the fat and forget to work in a nimble footed manner. Therefore, with reduced workforce you learn to work more efficiently and productively. 12-hour working shifts helped to a certain extent. We were able to improve our efficiency in a lean environment. Moreover, lower numbers in workforce also ensured lesser job cuts without the need to say the obvious. Such situations help you to think and deliver creatively, be it automation or elimination of non-essential jobs. There is more time to reflect on your past deliverables and course correct things in the right way. **HC**

SASHI KUMAR
Managing Director
Indeed India

Q **There have been divergent opinions on the job market owing to the COVID 19 pandemic, with one portal claiming that there will be enhanced recruitment in the coming days and another claiming that there will be a huge retrenchment. As a leading job portal, what are your views on the same?**

A As of May 15th, job postings on Indeed India were growing 49% slower than in 2019. The trend in job postings was roughly in line with last year's trend until the second week of March. The slowdown accelerated in the second half of March and through April to May.

Hospitality and Tourism have seen a big decline. Job postings have fallen more in occupations most directly affected by the COVID-19, such as hospitality and tourism. As of May 15th, job postings on Indeed India in hospitality and tourism were growing 69.2% slower than in 2019. Job seekers across the country are showing greater interest in working remotely amid the COVID-19 crisis. Job seekers are increasingly searching for terms like 'remote', 'work from home', and related phrases. Searches for remote work have also increased by over 380% as a share of all searches on Indeed India from February 2020 - May 2020.

Q **With reported layoffs in leading organisations in the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, which was followed by interventions by the Government as also the judiciary, what according to you has come about as a huge learning for HR Managers?**

A As a leading labour market researcher, we can say that one of the bigger conversations that are happening as a result of the COVID-19 situation is focused on the future of how we work. This has created a new opportunity to see how workforces can have more work from home flexibility or could even allow for more remote work options in the future especially if employers see the benefits.

Q **With employees operating from homes and remote sites owing to the lockdown, there has been a huge thrust on digital upskilling and learning. Do you believe that digital learning will replace conventional learning?**

A In this environment, the importance of learning has come to the fore. When the dust settles, we need to take into consideration the changes we need to make to the traditional mode of L&D of employees. Data from Indeed indicates an increase in the demand for companies using 'E-learning' to ensure access to learning and administrative efficiency in job postings. Overall, job postings referencing 'e-learning' has seen an increase of 71% in the last three years (2017-20), with an increase of 8% in the last year (2019-20) alone, and a surge of 3% in the last three months (Jan-Mar 2020).

Q **The COVID-19 pandemic has rapid extinction of certain job roles and the emergence of newer job roles. Do you believe this comes about as a positive for the job market in India?**

"**COVID-19 has created a new opportunity to see how workforces can have more work from home flexibility or could even allow for more remote work options in the future especially if employers see the benefits.**"

A It is too early to say since the situation is evolving, and at Indeed, we are still gathering data on what is occurring across the economy. From our recent data, we can say that jobs such as 'online tutor', 'customer care representatives', and 'tech roles' are seeing increased traction.

Q It has been contested that a technically skilled HR Manager functions more efficiently as against one who is not tech-savvy. How does this scenario function in the period post the COVID-19 pandemic?

A Firstly, it is necessary to understand the importance of being 'human-first'. As many employers are practising social distancing precautions amid COVID-19 concerns, companies are having to rethink their interview processes. There is a shift to conducting interviews using video conferencing technology, in order to help identify a candidates' applicable skills. Adapting to these new hiring and recruiting tactics can be challenging for a company to implement on a large scale. To date, most companies have relied on in person interviews so it can be hard to move away from the norm.

With all of these shifts to working remotely and interviewing over video, it is important to shift your mindset. Technology allows us to stay connected and actually see the candidates and hiring managers, rather than simply relying on phone calls and emails for communication. In the hiring process - from interviewing to onboarding - you can still communicate the company's core values and company culture, etc., virtually - that does not go away.

Q What according to you have been some of the positives that have been brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic for Corporate India?

A I think many companies have experienced that there is no impact on productivity - especially given the circumstances people are working in. The fact that we have not seen a drop in productivity is remarkable, and shows that work from home is a viable option. Of course, we do still see value in having teams together, but we have seen that remote work can be a part of the workforce. **HC**

P K SINGH
Director (Commercial) and In Charge HR, Power Finance Corporation.

Q **The power sector, already reeling under severe losses owing to nonpayment of dues by the Discoms, has been impacted further by the lockdown due to the COVID-19 Pandemic. In the wake of such a crisis, how will it impact the job market in the power sector in the coming days?**

A The outbreak of COVID-19 has affected the global economy across sectors, including power. Though the demand for power was hit during the initial phase of the lockdown, it is expected to normalise during the phase-wise unlocking of the economy. The unparalleled dependence on power will increase in order to ensure the continuity of business for industries across sectors. While the outstanding dues of the Discoms towards power generation companies have been indicating financial stress, the relief measures announced by the government in the form of Rupees 90,000 Crore liquidity infusion for Discoms, is expected to ease out the pressure, and address the issue of nonpayment. As such, this will have a positive impact in the job market, especially in the Power sector, as the new package offered by the government will further boost the sector, and will offer employment opportunities to young electrical engineering graduates. Further, the demand for competent manpower will by and large increase, and will change the landscape of the job market in the sector.

Q **The breadth, depth, and scale of the novel challenges being experienced by HR Managers owing to the COVID-19 Pandemic are indeed astounding. According to you, what are the biggest pain points for the power sector? How do the same need to be tackled by an HR Manager?**

A The uncertainties brought in by COVID-19 have emboldened the need for a wellcrafted human resource strategy for capacity addition in generation, transmission and distribution sectors, and also to ensure consumer satisfaction. It is time for traditional HR Leaders to rethink their philosophy.

While it involves a huge investment in financial and material resources, it also calls for developing human resource competencies. The need for skilled manpower is becoming increasingly essential. The technologically upgraded human resource will play a major role in organisations, and more so in the Power sector. There is no doubting the Universities and colleges in terms of providing competent manpower. However, the challenge posed by the new environment warrants people to take a proactive approach, and to be intuitive, keeping in view the long-term impact of the situation. In this context, the Human Resource Department needs to constantly work on innovation, aligning HR with the business strategy, enhancing online learning ability, besides developing a culture of oneness and bonding with employees by the top-level management. This is more so when Work From Home (WFH) has become the order of the day despite the challenges. Interpersonal relationship, especially by those at the helm of affairs is the topmost requirement and is the greatest challenge today. HR needs to chart out procedure and streamline processes, so that they can provide continuous input to the top management. In a nutshell, HR has become most inevitable linking pin between management and employees. This will enable organisations to move beyond employee satisfaction and focus on the culture of personal care.

Q **The COVID-19 pandemic has been instrumental for the rapid transformation and/or extinction of certain job roles and the emergence of newer job roles in almost every sector. In terms of job roles, what changes do you foresee for the power sector in the days to come?**

> **"HR has become most inevitable linking pin between management and employees. This will enable organisations to move beyond employee satisfaction and focus on the culture of personal care. "**

A It is a fact that the future demands that everyone transform themselves rapidly, and adapt to a technology driven world, whereby the manpower has to be well versed with IT enabled infrastructure. But organisations in general and HR in particular needs to focus on the engagement of employees, even if it comes at the cost of redefining the job role. Yes, it could be possible to redefine the job role of some of the functions such as IT, HR, Public Relations, Finance, and Accounts to enable them to be more WFH friendly and need to be more sensitive towards employees and external stakeholders who mostly interact with them through the virtual mode. At PFC, through our integrated processes, we are ensuring that our workforce is quickly adapting to the new norms, and the results in the last quarter of FY 2019-20 bear testimony to this aspect.

Q **The roadmap for the power sector announced by the Indian Finance Minister to revise the existing policies must come as some respite for the power sector. How do you advocate HR Managers to utilise such a fillip for boosting employee morale?**

A In unprecedented times, the role of HR managers in the organisation becomes all the more crucial, such as

tackling immediate issues of keeping employees safe with seamless work transition and ensuring optimal utilisation of staff. HR managers need to ensure that the organisations adopt the best practices from across the globe for its employees. Our employees have risen to the occasion and made exceptional contribution during the last few days of FY 2019-20 after the lockdown was announced.

Considering the WFH model, this can well be the new norm in the coming days. Also, a flexible working system can be introduced, which includes WFH and flexi-working hours. Such steps could create a new work culture and environment. This may promote enhanced productivity and greater motivation.

Q **What according to you are the biggest opportunities that the COVID-19 has brought forth for the energy sector?**

A Volumes have been written over how the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted cities, countries, and continents worldwide, while causing high rates of morbidity and mortality. Nonetheless, every dark cloud has a silver lining. Increased technology adoption by corporations alike has been one of the biggest opportunities for companies to ensure business continuity. This has also led to universal acceptance of the WorkFrom-Home culture. In PFC, we see every challenge as an opportunity for growth and development. More specifically, I foresee a great opportunity for learning and development for employees through the virtual mode of learning. It is also offering newer avenues to employees to think differently in terms of their time utilisation and enhanced relationship with family. In the coming days, we may need to explore the possibilities of performing more with lesser resources. I am confident that human resources will come out with flying colours despite the challenges, and the performance of PFC and its team comes forth as a testimony for the same. **HC**

SAKSHI SOOD
HR-Business Partner, Merck, Sharp & Dohme Corp

Q Irrespective of the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has been having on all the other sectors, the attention has now shifted to the healthcare sector in terms of providing medical aid to those infected, providing safety equipment to healthcare workers and so on. Given such an impetus, do you feel that there is sufficient thrust for jobs in the healthcare sector in the coming days?

A While most other sectors are reducing their hiring, there is an increased demand for healthcare workers worldwide due to the ongoing COVID-19 crisis. The demand is not just for doctors and nurses, but also for the paramedical staff which includes ward boys, diagnostic technicians etc. This epidemic has brought these roles to the forefront, thereby increasing their value and respect by many a fold.

A lot of contractual jobs have also sprung up with companies requiring workforce only to help tide over the crisis. As far as India goes, the demand for our doctors and nurses has gone up not just in the country, but also worldwide. In fact, as per NHS data, over 40% of the doctors in the UK who have been working tirelessly to fight the COVID-19 are Indian.

Q Owing to the COVID-19 Pandemic, working practices such as remote working and telecommuting have emerged as the new normal among corporates. Is this an indicator of the things to come in the future in the healthcare sector?

A Yes, absolutely. The entire job market is evolving and undergoing a paradigm change – key skills are changing, digitisation is becoming critical, remote working is becoming the norm etc.

I strongly believe that the focus now will shift to hiring for roles which have remote working as an inherent feature. As a matter of fact, a lot of companies are now creating roles keeping in mind that remote working is going to be the norm at least for the foreseeable future. Talent pipeline will see a major change because of this.

Another perspective is that this evolving job market bodes well for women who are trying to re-enter the corporate workforce. Gig workers will also be factored in when the hiring plans will be revisited this year. Even the hot skills are undergoing a change with renewed importance being accorded to adaptability and the ability to work in uncertain market dynamics. HiPos of earlier days will not continue to remain so if they do not prove their mettle in adapting to this new work environment. This means revisiting succession planning will become a key focus area for HR professionals this year.

Q The COVID-19 Pandemic has rendered some job roles as redundant and led them to rapid extinction and at the same time led to the creation of newer job roles in various sectors. What job role changes has it brought about for the healthcare sector?

A Just like a lot of other sectors, pharma roles have undergone a sea change. Digitization has become a core focus area for us with roles coming up in predictive analytics and multi-channel marketing.

Role profile of pharma representatives has also undergone many changes
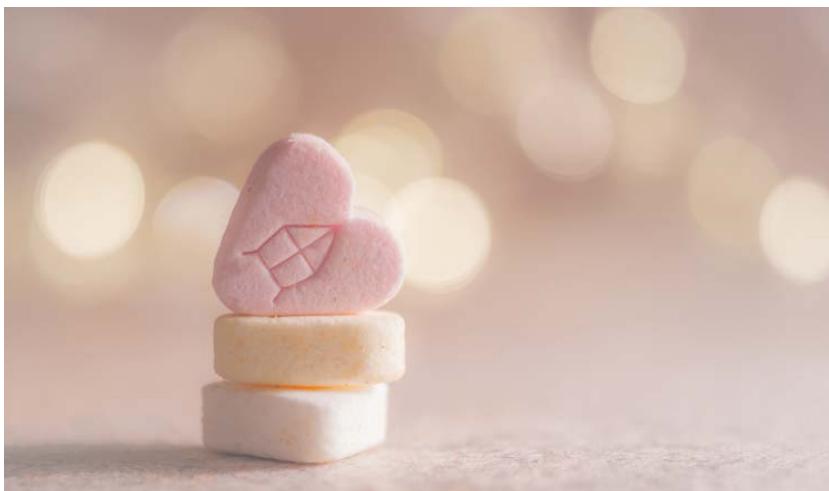
> **"HR must ensure that the safety of employees is at the crux of every business decision, and this must be made known to the front-line employees as well."**

with e-detailing and virtual connect with doctors becoming the norm. Most medical representatives no longer perform their usual sales promotion activities with just the doctors, their role has now evolved into key account management which involves end-to-end management of all personnel involved in generating orders through prescriptions. These include doctors, pharmacists, stockists etc.

Q **According to you, what has COVID-19 changed the most for HR professionals? What are the areas of concerns that employers might be called upon to address going forward?**

A The biggest challenge emerging for HR during these crisis times is keeping the teams motivated and maintaining a business connect virtually. In the healthcare sector in particular, where more than 85% of the workforce is field-based and not used to staying at home and working, it becomes a monumental task to keep employees engaged.

A lot of healthcare workers also bear the brunt of being the front-line fighters in this battle against the COVID-19 pandemic, which has taken a toll on their lives. This further poses a problem of keeping people motivated to continue doing their work amidst their own health concerns, family pressures, lack of availability of protective gear etc.

Going forward, HR professionals will need to redefine existing job roles and build in remote working as an essential component, devise ingenious ways to boost employee motivation, and, most importantly, train people managers to deal with uncertain situations and manage their stress in high pressure situations so that their team members do not face any additional pressures.

Q **Even though the frontline medical staff have been hailed as heroes and also applauded worldwide owing to the zealous service rendered by them, they have also fallen victims to the COVID-19 Pandemic. How do HR Managers function to keep the frontline employees in the healthcare motivated?**

A The fact that the efforts of healthcare workers are for a truly noble cause is what keeps most of them motivated. With the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the role of the healthcare sector has been brought to the forefront. It is therefore a crucial time for HR professionals to provide the bigger picture to all employees to build up the motivation. HR must ensure that the safety of employees is at the crux of every business decision, and this must be made known to the front-line employees as well. It has been observed, for some time, by HR professionals across many pharma companies since the lockdown has begun that when employees see that the company prioritises their safety and wellbeing, the engagement levels improve.

Periodic checks on health condition, issuance of safety advisories, sessions to understand and manage COVID-19, sessions to manage stress and lifestyle during lockdown etc. are some of the other commonly adopted techniques by HR professionals of the healthcare sector to keep in touch with their employees and continually engage with them. **HC**

KAUSTUBH SONALKAR
Group President-HR, Essar, and CEO, Essar Foundation.

Q **The Oil & Gas Sector, particularly in West Asia, has been greatly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. What according to you are the challenges it brings to the oil & gas sector in India?**

A The oil & gas sector has a symbiotic relationship with many other sectors associated with it, like Automobile and Aviation, all of which being considered as the bellwethers of the economy. The outbreak of COVID-19 and the resultant nationwide lockdowns have severely affected the demand for oil & gas products. The saving grace is the fact that essential services have been exempted, and have necessitated consumption of fuel, albeit at significantly reduced levels. This is bound to have a ripple effect on ancillary industries and on the livelihoods of the people working in those industries. The fact that many of these industries are part of the unorganised sector compounds the problem even further.

Q **What according to you is the one remarkable transformation that has been brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic to the Oil & Gas Sector?**

A According to me, the most remarkable transformation was the sharp drop in urban pollution levels during the lockdown. However, with lockdown restrictions being eased, there is a likelihood that private vehicles will be favoured over public transport, thereby helping to save on use of fossil fuels and reduce pollution. Private vehicles enable social distancing far more effectively than public ones. While this bodes well for the oil & gas industry, it is a matter of concern for the environment.

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

A The pandemic has forced HR professionals to review organisational structures and evaluate whether some roles can be performed predominantly in a Work From Home environment. This will not only help save costs in terms of office space and overheads, but also help companies ensure the safety and security of their most important assets, their people. With no cure for COVID-19 in sight, and the economic implications of protracted lockdown, companies will need to find ways of ensuring operational synergy and maximising productivity, without jeopardising the health of their employees.

Q **The COVID-19 pandemic has been responsible for the rapid transformation and extinction of certain job roles and the emergence of newer job roles. What possible changes does it bring about for the oil & gas sector?**

A In the oil & gas sector, Essar's refining and marketing operations are in the UK where we operate the Stanlow refinery (that produces 16% of the country's road transport fuels) and a 70+ network of retail outlets. In India, we have a CBM gas production business in Raniganj, West Bengal. Since the business supplies CBM gas to nearby industries that come under the essential services category, it was imperative for the block to continue with round-the-clock operations through the course of the successive lockdowns. The contingent strategy was to sustain 24x7 operations with the lowest possible number of crew members, while making sure they adhere to the highest standards of safety and strictly maintain social distancing norms.

Q **The lockdown in various forms owing to the COVID-19 pandemic has reinforced modes of working like Telecommuting in a big way. Considering the fact that the oil & gas sector cannot function efficiently via telecommuting, what are the alternatives that the sector can function in such situations?**

> **With no cure for COVID-19 in sight, and the economic implications of protracted lockdown, companies will need to find ways of ensuring operational synergy and maximising productivity, without jeopardising the health of their employees.**

A As I have said before, organisations must make employee safety their topmost priority and evaluate which jobs lend themselves to telecommuting with minimum disruption of the status quo. At Essar, majority of our workforce has been telecommuting over the last two months. Most our India-based businesses, like oil & gas exploration, power generation, ports, and power, provide essential services and have continued with reduced number of staff managing operations on site. This, of course, has been done with zero compromise on their safety, while maintaining government mandated guidelines to curb the spread of possible infection. We have continued to hire at all levels through einterviews and virtual onboarding during successive phases of the lockdown.

Q **What according to you are the biggest HR opportunities that the COVID-19 pandemic has brought forth for the oil & gas sector?**

A The biggest opportunity that the present crisis has provided is to be able to engage with our people in a focused manner. I feel that it is during this phase that we have been able to effectively communicate the concept of OneEssar, a unified organisation held together by certain shared values that have stood the test of time and circumstance. Essar Radio has brought our people together through daily shows featuring interactions with a cross section of employees. Essar Learning TV has prompted our employees and even their families to join Zoom sessions with celebrity trainers and pick up life skills. Our CSR arm, Essar Foundation, is doing exemplary work towards providing food and medical relief to marginalised communities affected by the pandemic. It is our people who are the forefront of these activities, and who are spreading the good word through social media sharing. **HC**

URVI ARADHYA
CHRO, K Raheja Corp

Q According to an ANAROCK Consumer Sentiment Survey, 'home ownership' carries significant preference among the new-age millennials, and it has also not been dented by the COVID-19 pandemic. Does this imply that the real estate sector will not see job losses unlike the other sectors?

A The Real estate sector is witnessing a unique situation, where, despite the general slowdown in the economy, a certain segment of homebuyers who are still looking out to buy their first home, and multinational companies are still looking to bring business back to normal as they wait to restart their office. All of these clients need to be serviced. This means upskilling by our employees. We have intensified our learning and development during this time to help our employees strengthen skills. I cannot speak for the sector as a whole, because there will surely be consolidation, but at K Raheja Corp, we are encouraging our people and honing skills during this time.

Q It has been claimed that online home sales will witness a significant spurt owing to the COVID-19 Pandemic. Does this mean that the real estate sector will be hiring people with updated skillsets such as digital sales in the days to come?

A The online medium makes the cut when drawing a customer to a project. Beyond that, the millennial audience would definitely be putting in a large part of their savings and will want to touch, feel, and physically see their home and the amenities before they decide to buy. That said, we routinely introduce advanced programmes for our employees so that they are able to get a hands-on training on enhanced tools, understand demand trends, and study consumer data analytics to leverage them in their area of work. While technology will never be able to fully replace people, it has become imperative to build a workforce of the future which is digitally skilled and is transforming the very way we operate.

Q Migrant workforce has been a vestigial part of the real estate sector. With the large-scale reverse migration of this ever-important workforce, are we going to witness a change in strategy when it comes to employing frontline workers in your sector?

A Front line workers are not on the payroll, and are hired by the contractor. Having said that, we have implemented measures in the interests of the labourers right from the early stages of the government-imposed lockdown. Our foremost priority was to ensure safety and security during these testing times - providing them food, healthcare and extensive sanitization.

Through this pandemic, we have kept the supply chain in place, by paying contractors who have further paid the wages to their workers. In fact, the workers on site recently collaborated to come up with innovative solutions for our ongoing project sites where they built and installed no-touch wash basins in the premises to maintain hygiene and follow the safety protocols instituted

> **"The Real estate sector is witnessing a unique situation, where, a certain segment of homebuyers who are still looking out to buy their first home, and multinational companies are still looking to bring business back to normal"**

by WHO. We do see increased use of technology and AI coming into construction, along with health security as an emerging trend for frontline workers.

Q When it comes to addressing key concerns such as boosting employee morale, what are the vital points that function as an imperative for an organization in your sector?

A Employee morale boosting is critical and is sector agnostic. For the real estate sector, Work From Home (WFH) is a new experience and is not a normal given. Keeping employee morale high through town halls, informal quarantine chats, yoga and cooking lessons online, to even guitar lessons, we have innovated in the ways in which we engage with our people ensuring they stay mentally fit and active.

Q What according to you are the biggest opportunities that

the COVID-19 has brought forth for the real estate sector?

A There are couple of key outcomes for the sector:

1) Covid 19 has led to an increase in home demand: Millennials seek a home as a sense of security that physical assets provide during such exigencies. Also, lower home loan interest rates, which are currently at an all-time low are encouraging them to consider buying their home now.

2) Consolidation: The smaller fly-by-night players will perish, and the ones with reputation and financial standing will withstand this.

3) Design and other innovation: The times have opened an opportunity to create new designs and layouts for office space, which can be refreshingly different.

COVID-19 has made all of us to think out of the box, and we are doing our best to create value. **HC**

AMOL GUPTA
People Leader- India and
Philippines, FIS

Q **With businesses having closed owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, the country's finances have gone into a turmoil. From an HR standpoint, what are the positives that have emerged for the BFSI sector?**

A The COVID–19 pandemic is an unprecedented event. Like many other sectors, BFSI has also been majorly impacted. While we see the negative impact in many ways, like the two sides of a coin, it also has a few positives.

From an HR standpoint, the speed of implementation of change and the digital solution is phenomenal. The pandemic has busted many myths around the kind of work which can be done as Work From Home (WFH), and India's readiness as a country to assimilate this new norm. In spite of the lockdown, the productivity of employees has not dropped and we continue to resolve for the future. These are special circumstances, and one that has not been faced by anyone. The employees were challenged to improve and simplify the way things are done to keep the output level, and we witnessed employees rising to the occasion. Employees are spending time to learn new technology and the usage of our Learning Management System has increased. Employees are engaged in learning Blockchain, Python, AI and Big Data etc. to be able to serve the customers better.

Q **In the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, what according to you are the biggest pain points for the BFSI Sector? And how must they be addressed by the HR Manager?**

A According to me, the biggest pain points for the BFSI Sector is the rising NPAs in India. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the problem in the agricultural and corporate sector will further be joined by consumer loans. It is the time for the acceleration of the Fourth Industrial revolution. In my opinion, marrying new technology and big data along with Customer eXperience (CX) for digital products will help us to survive in this sector.

HR managers, today, need to focus on keeping employees up to date on future technologies. We are looking to build a culture of Intrapreneurship with hackathons, design thinking, and innovation labs and bringing in fresh talent directly from campuses. In addition to this, a regular review of the start–ups in the BFSI sector is mandatory.

Q **What has COVID-19 changed the most for HR professionals in the BFSI Sector? What are the areas of concern that organisations in the BFSI sector need to look out for?**

A The likely impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing nation-wide lockdown in the country is very significant for the Indian economy and the BFSI sector in particular. Now that more and more companies are dependent on technology as an alternate channel to continue with the same pace of productivity, ensuring Work From Home and aligning policies for the same is on the top list of HRs. E-hiring, e-joining and e-induction to ensure smooth recruitment and assimilation to the culture of the company is the new norm. The future workplace will be one which has a more shared sense of purpose, a culture of collaboration, and a way of tapping an ecosystem specially built to drive business value. And HR professionals are ensuring this seamless transition for the employees as well as the customers.

Q **The COVID-19 pandemic has also been instrumental for the rapid transformation and extinction of certain job roles and the emergence of newer job roles. How has this impacted the BFSI sector in terms of job prospects?**

A Even before the current crisis, changing technologies and new ways of working were disrupting jobs and the skills of employees. The COVID-19 pandemic has made this question only more urgent. Employees across industries are trying to figure out

how they can adapt to these rapidly changing conditions, and companies are trying to match those employees to new roles and activities. Implementation of AI, Big Data, and growth of the gig economy is changing the dynamics of the BFSI sector and the job prospects along with it. This dynamic is also about how leaders can reskill and upskill the workforce to deliver new business models in the post-pandemic era, as even CX is undergoing transformation and the jobs will too.

At this point, HR should devise a talent strategy that develops employees' acute digital and cognitive abilities, their social and emotional capabilities, and their adaptableness and pliability. Now is the time for businesses to magnify their learning budgets and promise to reskill. This will strengthen the organisations for future disruptions as well.

Q **When it comes to addressing key concerns such as changing business needs and boosting employee morale, what are the vital points that function as an imperative for an organisation in the BFSI space?**

A The world of work is changing. While the current lockdown continues, many organisations have successfully implemented Work From Home. HR and business leaders are working together to meet workforce requirements. It is imperative to uphold and maintain employee experience while working remotely, since it is very different from the way it used to be when people were working from an office. Presently, the most important criterion is to take care of employees who are not only burdened by the working dynamics, but also immense health scares. Businesses need to let the employees know that they are cared for with engagement activities like employee touchpoints.

Since the future jobs will entail an increase in the number of employees working remotely, we are ensuring many available tools for digitization, risk mitigation, and productivity

measurement, while a major emphasis will be on employee experience and well-being. The thing is that businesses will continue to function, it may just look different than before.

Q **What according to you are the biggest HR opportunities that the COVID-19 has brought forth for your sector?**

A These are unprecedented times and unchartered territory for all of us. COVID-19 has taken the world by storm and brought forth a new norm as to how organisations manage the business. Organisations worldwide are tackling immediate issues of keeping employees safe, ensuring optimal utilisation of staff, and maintaining the continuity of business operations. Regardless of the case, businesses globally are going out of their way and doing their best to ensure smooth deliveries and constantly improving productivity even during these extraordinary circumstances. At FIS, we are doing our best to accept and implement the below:

➤ **Social Distancing**: We have undergone the checkers format where we have distanced our machines at-least 1-meter apart to keep our employees safe

➤ **Online Training Modules:** Providing training on new technologies as well as to young leaders to manage their WFH team

➤ **Wellness:** We have launched the Virgin Pulse programme which offers more ondemand resources to keep them active and mindfully fit

➤ **Employee Health:** We have partnered with Practo, an online digital platform to support the healthcare needs of our employees. Employees and their families can access 24 X 7 medical support via call/chat/video

Employee Care - **Right kind of insurance and financial support:** We have launched FIS Cares and included the pandemic into our Medical Insurance **H C**

> **"HR should devise a talent strategy that develops employees' acute digital and cognitive abilities, their social and emotional capabilities, and their adaptableness and pliability."**

A Psychological Contract

The COVID-19 Pandemic has evidently altered the very way of life and work and the thought of layoffs is also lurking in the minds of employees. However, in the recent past, the largescale layoffs that were undertaken by Deutsche Bank, Wells Fargo, Verizon Wireless and many others at different instances was viewed more as a company's struggle rather than a life changing human disaster.

BY **DR. SONAL SHREE**

2019

It was 2 PM on a sultry Delhi afternoon. Anish desperately needed to get away from the glare of his monitor. He got up and headed towards the pantry to get himself some coffee. Standing near the vending machine, he absent-mindedly looked at two interns talking at the water cooler adjacent to the pantry. They were engaged in an animated discussion making plans for the weekend. This provided Anish with a déjà vu moment and he went down memory lane.

2010

Anish had planned to utilise the weekend to the fullest with his wife Shalini and his kids. The hotel booking had been done. It was an extended weekend with Monday being a closed holiday. Skipping breakfast was an automatic choice as he was getting late for office. And by the time he managed to reach office, manoeuvring all the traffic, he was twenty minutes late. His boss, Dilip, was standing near the reception of TBC Ltd. Anish apologised for the delay, but Dilip left in a hurry without saying a word.

Maybe he's stressed about the project. There was

tremendous pressure from the clients to finish it within the coming week, a confused Anish thought. *Will talk to him about it to figure something out.*

Thinking over and brushing off the odd behaviour from an otherwise jolly Dilip, Anish reached his cubicle. He took off the laptop bag from his shoulder and sat on the chair. Within a minute, Rakesh, his colleague, knocked at the door. He conveyed to him that Vikram, the HR Manager, had asked them

to come to the conference room. He had no clue about the agenda for the sudden meeting.

The conference room seemed more crowded than ever. There were about forty people.

Vikram had already begun talking about the economic turndown, the need to contain costs, the necessity to take tough calls and so on. Anish's heart sank. *What was this about? Was Vikram talking about laying off employees?*

By the time Vikram concluded his address with, "*I am sorry, but we have no other option,"* Anish had missed most of what Vikram had said. He was perspiring profusely. And the world suddenly seemed to have turned upside down.

Of the 200 employees who had either been asked to quit or face dismissal, only a few had been called into the conference room. It was also demanded that the employees mention that they have resigned 'voluntarily'. They were being provided with a two month severance package along with a month's salary for every year of completed service.

Anish had been a star performer, and Dilip had been vocal about it on multiple occasions in the past. The layoff was therefore unexpected and shocking.

How can I be laid off, has there been a mistake? How will I manage all the expenses? What would I tell my parents and Shalini? The kids?

When he tried to meet Dilip, he was told that the latter was in an urgent meeting and would not be able to meet him. Hence, he sent several messages to Dilip on WhatsApp.

12: 30 pm: *Hi. I have been trying to reach you to discuss my case. Vikram addressed some of us and told us that today would be our last day in office. How can this be? Please discuss my performance with him. On what grounds have I been handed over the pink slip?*

Please tell Vikram to reconsider the facts.

4:30 pm: *Dilip, I need to talk to you. Please ping once free.*

9:00 pm: *You'd have reached home by now. Can I call?*

For days, there was no reply. Anish was dejected.

This was now an extended weekend with neither a plan for the present nor the seemingly dark future. Dilip avoided him on most days. A few days later, Anish received a reply from him. *Sorry Anish, am helpless. I can put in a word for you* in *case you need a strong reference in your job search. Good luck.*

Anish's immediate instinct was to call him, but the delay had already left a bitter taste in his mouth. The least that Dilip could have done was to have sympathised with him rather than ignoring him. He was lonely on his last day at TBC. Most of his colleagues had been relieved from their duties.

Post his layoff, life was an emotional and physiological struggle. Sleep eluded him for several nights. After battling for around six months as if possessed, he finally landed a job in a smaller company as a makeshift arrangement. He was neither happy with the salary nor the work culture, but had to settle for a lower grade and an average package.

Two years passed. TBC Ltd., on its part, had global expansion plans, and Anish's ex-boss Dilip had been given the task of recruiting competent candidates for the purpose. Teams had to be raised quickly. The rising attrition, coupled with immense competition for the best had made sourcing difficult across the industry. Every time Dilip asked the line managers for an update on staffing, they had a new list of candidates and excuses.

He fumed one day. *I'm sick and tired of raking my grey cells for solutions. What if we had our ex-employees with us, they could have managed it better!*

This sudden outburst gave him one eureka moment. He could have the recruiters approach the past employees who were suitable for the new roles. Anish, and some others like him, were contacted at his behest.

The day Anish was contacted, he was in a contemplative mood. The first call he had received in the morning was a cold call from a bank executive for a personal loan. He politely said no and smirked mentally, *there was a time when I needed it but wasn't considered eligible. Today when I don't need it, these guys are following up every second day.*

As he sipped coffee leaning against the windowpane, there was another phone call that took him completely by surprise. The recruiter at the other end wanted him to join back TBC Ltd., the same organisation that had left him to fend for himself two years ago.

The offer was attractive, both in terms of designation and compensation. The additional truth was that Anish was considering a switch from the present company for some time. After a lot of deliberation, he decided to take up the offer. He soon started working closely with Dilip again. The first year of the job was full of multiple learning avenues and opportunities for growth. As time passed, he was given more responsibilities and thereafter, earned a promotion as well.

Just when Anish thought he had re-settled well at TBC, he got a call from a head hunter one evening. She had come across his profile via an executive search site and wanted to discuss a job opportunity suitable for him. He was offered the position of Vice President and a hefty joining bonus within ten days of joining.

By the time the conversation was over, he was in deep thought.

Anish had been working together with Dilip on a project. He thought of professional ethics and his own commitment to the project. Could he leave midway? There was no denying that he had been given a second chance in a company in which he had loved working. Then and now. Should he ignore that?

It was a restless night. He closed his eyes for a while and woke up with a start an hour later. The conference room, Vikram's speech, Dilip's enigmatic behaviour, his shame and frustrations, the social stigma- all the nightmares flooded back to haunt him at once. He was in a dilemma now.

He had presumed that he had recovered from that bad phase, but clearly had not! After many years, the haunting memories sucker punched him that night.

At 3 AM, he finally got up from his bed and started typing his resignation letter. His mind advised him against it while the heart said- *go ahead*. There was no right or wrong for him at that moment. 🄷🄲

About the Author

Dr. Sonal Shree is Assistant Professor, SIBM Pune, a constituent of Symbiosis International University. Her academic assignments are in the areas of Human Resource Management and Organizational Behaviour. Her research interests are interdisciplinary and include Recruitment, Learning and development, Positive Psychology and Arts based Interventions in management. She has professional certifications, including HRM (XLRI, India); Instructional Design (ISET, USA); The Science of Happiness at Work (Berkley Institute of Well Being, USA).

Analysis By **Ravi Mishra**

Anish's conscience was right when he finally decided to type out the resignation letter at 3 AM on that fateful morning. At times, the premise of judgement cannot be drawn without considering and analysing factors without engaging one's gut feelings. Anish is right when he prescribes; *"There was no right or wrong."* He had gone through turbulent times 10 years ago, which led to the creation of delusion and dilemma in his mind and conflicted with ethics and personal morality.

As an HR professional, I can feel the pain and dejection experienced by Anish during his first stint in TBC Ltd. Why did Dilip not respond to Anish's WhatsApp messages for days - are we professionals the metaphorical pawns on a chessboard? Organisations today talk about culture, ethics, values and importance of employees in glittering words at various forums. Is this a mere rhetoric similar to building a sandcastle on a beach?

Also, it is worth contemplating how Vikram would have responded if he had been in Anish's shoes. One also needs to imagine the trauma experienced by an employee's wife and family upon hearing that her husband or father had been terminated for no fault of his. They will henceforth have no faith in the institution of trust. There definitely could have been other alternatives other than calling out the names of the employees on that day.

And I always question the authenticity of an organisation where the engineer has no knowledge of engineering, and the HR professional has no understanding of the value of human resources and its impact.

Whenever there is a downturn in the economy, the simplest thing that comes to the mind of a business leader is to reduce the headcount. When leaders meet in board rooms they talk about strategy, robust plans for mitigation, unforeseen challenges, crisis and risks. But usually, I find a single panic button to handle all such eventualities i.e. reduce the headcount.

Vikram, the HR Manager, may well have called for a town hall meeting with employees at the senior level and shared with them the challenges the company is going through in terms of financial and economic downturn. He could also invite suggestions from employees to deal with the downturn. In addition, the top rung employees could offer to take a pay cut for a year, with the rider that the company would pay back the amount along with the prevailing rate of interest within 3 years, once the company returns to profit. The company can brainstorm and navigate various other options to capitalise on human power of creativity and blue ocean strategies.

How can we leverage an organisation on the basis of the employees' bonding and their ownership with it? Why does HR ignore the value of relationship and psychological bonding? Millions of people across the world have sacrificed everything on a single call of their leaders, which reflects the power of contract-based on emotions and truthfulness.

Anish's story may be fictional, but it is not uncommon to witness employees going through such trauma in organisations like TBC. At the same time, I have seen many HR leaders who have made a difference and have set the footprint to avoid the repetition of an incident that Anish had to undergo. Further, like IBM, the debacle in fact enabled the organisation to bounce back against the crisis with the support of high performing employees. Organisations like TBC must learn how to build the block based on the strong foundation of the bond between employees and organisations. 🄷🄲

About the Author

Ravi Mishra is Senior Vice President-HR for Global Epoxy Business, Aditya Birla Group. He is associated with the Group since 2005, and has worked in different businesses i.e. Grasim Chemical, UltraTech Cement, and Birla Carbon. Prior to joining the Aditya Birla Group, Ravi was associated with diversified organisations such as, Nicholas Piramal Group, Mardia Group of Industries, and Nova Petrochemicals Ltd.

Analysis By **Pramod K Tripathi**

"A bend in the road is not the end of the road ... Unless you fail to make the turn" – Helen Keller

Before analysing the situation in which Anish is presently in, it would be justified to examine the situation within TBC Ltd.– its state of affairs and the mindset of Dilip and Anish. In 2010, Anish, an efficient performer, had been thinking over his weekend plans with his family when he was summoned to the office meeting. He was left shattered when the company's rationalisation plans were announced, and later, his boss Dilip did not rise up to the occasion to support him. However, he failed to take the company's financial position into account, which was an essential element for such a measure.

Anish re-joined TBC Ltd. when the company was looking to expand globally. This adds credence to the faith imposed on Anish's performance by TBC Ltd. and also by his boss Dilip. Also, since TBC Ltd. had recorded good growth, Anish was offered a good position and provided with a handsome package. At the point in time when he received a call from an Executive Search Firm for the position of VP with a huge joining bonus, he had been working on a prestigious project along with Dilip. Here, Anish's professional ethics come into play, landing him in a state of quandary, since he was in love with the work culture at TBC Ltd.

When he received the offer for the role of VP, Anish was probably thinking that his career had dead-ended and hence seized the opportunity to rise to a higher level. His conscious is bound to question him over his wisdom to resign. Moreover, it is prudent for Anish to carefully contemplate the twists and turns in his journey in a hitherto unknown company.

Anish also needs to bear in mind aspects related to employee loyalty and the company's expectations from him before submitting his resignation to the Management at TBC Ltd. He needs to analyse and acknowledge that the circumstances may have changed, learn the new laws of the land to survive, and so on. There are bound to be characteristic changes in terms of culture and processes, and Anish must not be disenchanted if he finds it vastly different in the new company than what it was at TBC Ltd. He needs to be prepared to inject new ideas and make some tough decisions right away. On the other hand, if things in the new organisation are appealing in terms of work culture, he must get re-acquainted with the company, engage in dialogue with people, rather than going in all guns blazing.

At this point of time, Anish has developed a new perspective and approach about TBC Ltd., and maybe exploring a new opportunity in terms of money and position with a different set of eyes. He has pondered tirelessly to decide whether he needs to resign or not, but his apprehension is finely tuned to do so. Conceivably, the one other thing that may have really struck Anish's mind is to continue at TBC Ltd. or come back with a higher status. He, however, needs to avoid gratuitous criticisms over his decision. **HC**

About the Author

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Winning Talent in Turbulent Times

As HR professionals, we need to broaden our horizons and be ready for what's next. The future which was expected ten years down the line seems to be just around the corner now.

BY **DAKSHDEEP SINGH AND PRIYANKA SHARMA**

Amidst the coronavirus outbreak, organisations are focusing on new ways of working and devising business strategies to cope with the global health crisis. This is not just a health crisis but also a threat to our economic stability. However, this phase has a silver lining: Many people are working from home and keeping themselves engaged by following their passion. No more must they endure the hustle and bustle of traffic and invest hours in commuting. Working professionals are a bit more relaxed and investing their time in upskilling themselves by online learning, reading more books, and navigating through social networking sites like LinkedIn, etc.

"Gig workers" have become a buzzword lately, and Gig work is being visualised as the "future of work" by 2023. A report by Noble House revealed that nearly 45% of CHROs surveyed wanted to hire gig workers to supplement the skills of the existing workforce, 39% would do this to reduce cost, and 10% to fill temporary vacant positions.

With COVID-19 hitting the world, the distant future of work seems to be arriving earlier, wherein people might think of picking up jobs that are not full-time, allowing them to follow other interests and passions. Home spaces will be the new office spaces, and we can expect the workforce to be more learned as

people are focusing a lot on their self-development.

From the job market standpoint, we might expect a decreased rate of hiring in tourism, aviation, and the hotel industry. On the contrary, according to Forbes' review, we are likely to witness an increasing hiring trend in pharmaceuticals, technology, biotechnology, medical research, teleworking software, tech support, etc.

We are currently living in unprecedented times, surrounded by uncertainties, and HR is grappling with the new code of work, which talks about remote working and dealing with the economic slowdown. Design thinking is the key to success in these challenging times, and as HR professionals, we need to redesign the processes woven throughout the gamut of HR, ranging from hiring to retirement. We need to act as enablers and align ourselves with the business requirements instead of just thumping the waves.

If you are in the talent acquisition arena, the world is – and will continue – to change for you during and post COVID-19. The new normal will be completely different from what the talent market used to be. To manage the situation at hand, we need to find out the answers to the following questions:

• How do I reach out to the potential candidate?
• How do I ensure that the candidate experiences a seamless interview process?
• How do I ensure that post-joining activities are not challenging for the employees?

The answer seems to be quite simple: *Digitise your recruitment and onboarding process.* A recent article in Forbes talks about how the majority of legacy systems cannot see candidate potential because they are designed for transaction scale. Bridging the gaps between legacy talent management

systems, virtual recruiting events, and AI-based talent management platforms will place the candidate potential at the centre of their architecture.

A digital solution should focus on the following key actions:

• AI-enabled candidate profiling
• Being linked with all the hiring sources
• Driving engagement, collaboration and communication with the candidates
• Managing talent pipeline and creating talent relations by acting authentically
• Looking for adjacent skills and then suggesting upskilling for the employees, thereby sustaining the talent
• Putting the business managers in the driver's seat for hiring

The current crisis cycle has repeated several times in the last two decades when the dot-com bubble burst in 2000, NASDAQ

tanked in 2001, the 9/11 attacks happened in the US, and when SARS hit Asia and Toronto. Many organisations felt they had no choice but to lay off experienced and talented professionals. Currently, there is a large and expanding pool of talent available in the market. Instead of hitting the panic button whenever the stock market crashes and the economy spirals downward, it is important to have a long-term outlook.

As HR professionals, we need to broaden our horizons and be ready for what's next. The future which was expected ten years down the line seems to be just around the corner now. Business objectives and strategies have become quite dynamic during this phase. It's highly important that all HR strategies align with their respective businesses and act as strategic enablers. We need to leverage and capitalise on technology to create a value position and move up the value chain. 🄷🄲

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Automation, HR 4.0, and the Future of Work

Human Capital interacted with **Ravin Jesuthasan,** *Managing Director at Willis Towers Watson, author, futurist, and a global thought leader, to gather an understanding about applying automation to create optimal human-machine combinations, the imperatives comprising HR 4.0, why the HR profession needs to rethink its role as a steward of work, and how COVID-19 is shaping the future of work.*

BY **ANKITA SHARMA**

Q **The ongoing crisis has forced organisations to rally around bold ideas and radically rethink the way they work. It is no wonder, then, that leaders desperately want to harness the disruptive power of automation. But the nagging question is: How? In what unique ways does your recent book, *Reinventing Jobs,* address this challenge?**

A We know from history that every time we've had a recession, we've emerged from it with more automation than we entered it with. We are currently in the mother of all recessions, and the adoption of automation is expected to increase exponentially. A recent global survey by Willis Towers Watson indicated that 48% of organisations have taken action, are planning to take action, or are considering automating work to reduce cost or increase productivity. It is essential that organisations "lead with the work" and not the technology, or we run a real risk of a jobless recovery.

Reinventing Jobs is intended to be a guide for business leaders to help them achieve the optimal combinations of humans and automation. It demonstrates

(with over 120 cases) how the deconstruction of jobs into tasks can help identify where automation should substitute, augment or create human work.

> 66 **We know from history that every time we've had a recession, we've emerged from it with more automation than we entered it with. We are currently in the mother of all recessions, and the adoption of automation is expected to increase exponentially.** 99

Q **Your book describes a unique four-step framework for applying work automation. Could you briefly explain how each step in this framework can help optimise human-machine combinations?**

A The first step involves deconstructing jobs into tasks and categorising the tasks along three continuums: (1) Is the task repetitive versus variable? (2) Is the task performed independently versus interactively with colleagues or customers? (3) Is the task physical versus mental?

The second step is identifying the goal of the task. Is the goal to eliminate errors, reduce variance, improve performance or achieve a breakthrough?

The third step is identifying the relevant type of automation: robotic process automation (RPA), artificial intelligence (including machine learning and natural language processing) or social robotics.

Once you analyse work with these three steps, the fourth identifies the optimal outcome: substitution, augmentation or transformation.

As an example, assume you work at a bank processing mortgage applications. A key task would be to verify information on the application. This involves checking the data provided by the customer against bank records, government data, credit bureau records, etc. This is work that is repetitive, independent, and mental with the goal of eliminating errors given the significant consequences of a mistake (fines, sanctions, lawsuits, etc.). The relevant technology here would be robotic process automation, and the optimal outcome would be to substitute this activity with automation, freeing the employee up to take on other tasks.

Q **You recently co-authored a white paper titled *'HR 4.0: Shaping People Strategies in the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR)'*, published by the World Economic Forum. Could you share the six key imperatives that underpin HR 4.0 for our readers?**

A The six imperatives are:

i. Developing New Leadership Capabilities for the 4IR: As organisations operate more distributed business models, leaders will need to lead from the edge, adopt the right technologies, drive a new vision of organisational culture and shape innovative people strategies for the future of work.

ii. Managing the Integration of Technology in the Workplace: The way work gets done is changing. A growing area of responsibility for HR is to partner with CEOs and other C-suite executives to achieve the optimal combination of human workforce and automation to ensure a positive impact on the future of work.

iii. Enhancing the Employee Experience: The increasing complexity of the workforce and the use of technology is calling for a change in the way work is experienced. HR plays a vital role in defining, measuring and enabling

the meaningful employee experience in the 4IR.

iv. Building an Agile and Personalised Learning Culture: HR plays a leading role in fostering a culture of lifelong learning in the context of declining demand for certain skills, the emergence of new ones and the requirement for talent to continuously learn, unlearn and relearn.

v. Establishing Metrics for Valuing Human Capital: The mutually beneficial relationship between the workforce, organisations and society makes it essential for HR to create a compelling case for establishing viable and scalable measures of human capital as a key performance driver and continuously demonstrating the impact of its work on business performance.

vi. Embedding Diversity and Inclusion: Changing social, economic and political forces bring an opportunity for organisations to profoundly advance inclusion and diversity. HR plays a pivotal role in promoting a sense of purpose and belonging in the workforce, equality and prosperity for the communities and regions in which it operates.

> 66 **As organisations operate more distributed business models, leaders will need to lead from the edge, adopt the right technologies, drive a new vision of organisational culture and shape innovative people strategies for the future of work.** 99

Q **You say that the role of the HR function is shifting from**
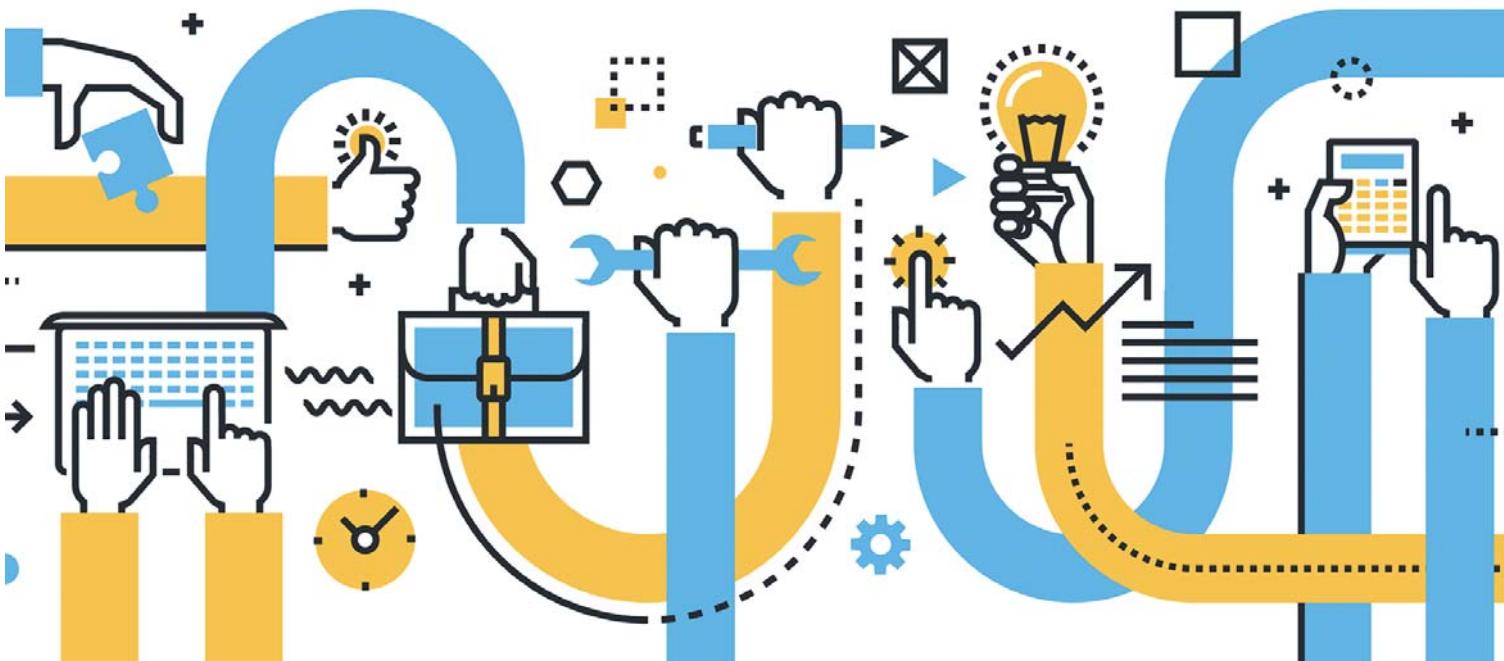
being a "steward of employment" to becoming a "steward of work". Could you elucidate this?

A When Klaus Schwab, the founder of the World Economic Forum, wrote his book on the Fourth Industrial Revolution, we wondered about the work implications. We questioned whether this represented a fundamental change in work or was just technology continuing to do what it had always done — making things more efficient, raising the speed quotient, etc. But what we're seeing is something fundamentally different.

Artificial intelligence has been with us since the late fifties, but we have never had the enabling infrastructure that we have today. The convergence of multiple technologies, such as cloud-based computing, transformations in mobile, the emergence of 5G, rapid proliferation of low-cost sensors to generate data, and the increasing speed and falling cost of graphic processing units, is empowering technologists, business leaders and people managers to realise the true potential of AI and other technologies. The other key

variable is the democratisation of work, which is the ability to distribute work anywhere in the world and tap into talent at any time without the frictional cost of hiring a person into a job.

The convergence of these factors is presenting organisations with significant challenges in terms of thinking about how to get work done in the best possible way. At the same time, these factors are also creating options we've never seen before. Today, as business leaders, we have at least eight options for getting work done: from employees to independent contractors to gig workers to outsourcing and alliances to tapping into volunteers for crowdsourcing innovation or promoting brands on social media to the more intriguing options of robotics and AI.

These choices also pose real opportunities for HR to rethink its role. Increasingly, this profession needs to shift from being a steward of employment to being a steward of work, enabling leaders to orchestrate the various options to achieve the optimal combinations of machines and human talent of all kinds.

Q The world of work is set to look remarkably different than before, and there is a need to keep an eye on the many lasting changes that are underway. What are your views on COVID-19 and the future of work?

A I believe that this pandemic is accelerating many of the trends underpinning the future of work. For example, we have been talking about remote work for 50 years but made precious little progress until this pandemic ensured that any work that could be done remotely was done in such a manner. We expect to see continued advances in automation, and companies will need to ensure that they are approaching this with a view to a sustainable and equitable outcome for all stakeholders. **HC**

Strategy Amidst A Pandemic

Talent strategy has now emerged as one of the top three agenda of senior leadership across every organisation from essential services to brick and mortar businesses.

BY **KALPANA BANSAL**

The unprecedented changes wrought upon the corporate sector in the last few months as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and its after-effects is pushing the limits of organisations' resilience. An organisation and its external business environment influence each other, and any change in the business environment invokes a response from the organisation. Therefore, it is imperative to analyse the external environment as the response of an organisation modifies according to the external stimulus, impacting organisational people imperatives.

The talent function builds the underlying fabric of what is undeniably the most critical resource to organisational success = people. Talent strategy has now become one of the top three agenda of senior leadership across every organisation from essential services to brick and mortar businesses. With the dual agenda of cost optimisation and safety, no other resource is being talked about as much.

Resource availability

Organisations today are dealing with challenges on multiple fronts, primarily Resource availability. Given the looming uncertainty, it has become essential to have a set of critical roles and activities ready with possible succession plans. And in order to ensure business continuity, providing sufficient backup and training someone through shadowing or double hatting have almost become mandatory. Short term workforce plans are being drawn up to facilitate redeployment of pools of people to address unplanned needs or sudden changes in business requirements basis change in plans.

From a Capability Perspective, skills are gaining centre-stage. The kind of adaptability and resilience the situation has called for has stretched the best of resources, and only the crème de la crème would be able to survive the mounting pressures. Work-life balance challenges coupled with increased hours at work and home, doing things that would otherwise have been done by others, has widened the talent gaps and pushed organisations to reconsider job roles. Resource reallocation basis skills has become the most important

contribution that the Talent Management function could deliver.

> **"Work-life balance challenges coupled with increased hours at work and home, doing things that would otherwise have been done by others, has widened talent gaps and pushed organisations to reconsider job roles."**

In such a scenario, business goals and objectives have gone through a 360degree turnaround, and it has become necessary to ensure that employees are made aware of revised work plans for the immediate and near future, along with clear communication about measurement yardsticks. It is important to remember that most people have been pushed into new roles or asked to work on new objectives without much time to train or upskill, and this needs to be factored in while considering their performance. Further, there is an increased emphasis on

dashboards and the tools that make these goals visible, and everyone is aligned to achieving the same. There is also an increased focus on reviews and monitoring.

Collective and individual productivity

Collective and individual productivity has garnered the attention of the senior leadership, and companies are struggling with ways to identify, address, and measure resistance when working remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic. One of the dilemmas faced by the senior leadership is a way of tracking productivity, and ensuring work is delivered without being overly intrusive and dealing with personal challenges faced by employees in an empathetic manner. Trot, teamwork, and resilience are traits that are becoming critical to delivery, and organisations are grappling with ways to ensure that these are augmented and reinforced using virtual delivery mechanisms, especially in the light of pay cuts and loss of bonus, which are likely to create widespread disengagement and a sense of anxiety.

One of the interesting positive fallouts of the crisis is the opportunity present to the people function to identify "New Leaders" who emerge through the situational crisis – a move away from traditional succession planning! These are people who are stretching themselves, and are creating a visible impact on the ground. Words like crossfunctional projects, volunteering, and gigs, which never integrated into mainstream Talent Management strategy are now at the heart of deliberations and consume senior leadership bandwidth. Can we fill gaps which will get created because of attrition / superannuation with these potential young leaders?

Organisations are also learning new ways of retaining exceptional

talent and keeping them motivated. Communication, challenges, and non–monetary reward systems have become the centre point of discussions around workforce strategy. In some cases, Job/Role Re-alignment has been undertaken to move people to roles that are beyond their original role; or in cases where the role itself cannot add value in this situation, the role has been morphed. The incredible turnaround made by People managers and Leadership on these initiatives signifies how central talent strategy has become.

Jobs/Projects/Functions that have become redundant are being relooked to come up with a manpower optimisation strategy. There is significant work happening on which of these jobs/roles are likely to become permanent and those that will revert to pre-pandemic state. Their role adjustments are becoming an integral part of the Leadership Development or Job Rotation/Shadowing strategy.

Career enhancement

Organisations are not looking at Career Enhancements in terms of role changes, horizontal expansion more than Progression. This has impacted the process of Internal Job Postings and altered the way Annual Talent reviews are conducted. There is an emphasis on a talent marketplace as a lattice of loosely tied-up roles and jobs with an underlying skill gap requirement which lends fluidity to the talent pool and builds up employee skills.

The recent changes in labour laws, as well as government announcements, have led to changes on the Policy/Regulatory front. Concepts such as Work hours, leave, and attendance need to be revisited. Medical facilities and insurance schemes are being re-examined, and benefits are being extended beyond the regular direct pay premise to more intangible benefits such as being

part of a larger community, access to helplines, counsellors, mental and emotional wellness initiatives, and home delivered assistance for personal chores. Organisations are examining which of these changes would be made permanent, and which would remain temporary. Compliance with regulatory processes and adherence to things like the code of conduct are also important agenda items for leadership.

> **"Collective and individual productivity has garnered the attention of the senior leadership, and companies are struggling with ways to identify, address, and measure resistance when working remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic."**

Leadership has gone through a fundamental shift in the times that we live in. There has been shift from compliance to autonomy, certainty to fluidity, and regimentation to acceptance. This has also required organisations to relook their leadership priorities and build up training/tips to manage and lead teams in these times of crisis. There is also a new focus on ensuring that there are enough mechanisms to ensure that leaders are aligned to current requirements and adaptable enough for sudden changes in the near future.

Risk and Mitigation have probably gained the most traction in these times. Succession planning, which always seemed like a pen and paper exercise, and had 'far away in the future' implications have now become real action items with most organisations identifying ready now successors, looking at

critical roles and identifying areas of strength and development, having contingency plans for talent to be able to quickly step into roles. Organisations are also examining risks w.r.t talent management if this pandemic becomes worse and people are affected. Crisis mitigation plans are being drawn up. At the same time, remote worker cybersecurity has gained emphasis and is an item of focus.

The current situation presents us with an opportunity to transition from singular to circular economy, and balance the trade-off between short-term financial results and long – term sustainability. It also raises fundamental issues round the impact on global talent mobility, business continuity, and wellbeing and safety. Organisations are shifting to focus on networks and community and the virtual workplace of the future will demand a new landscape with new roils, and continuous upskilling. At the core of this is an integrated strategy with communication round the leadership imperative, aligned with the situation with a feeling of empathy and compassion for the unprecedented stereos and anxieties that employees are going through. There is potential for a new *"humanocracy"* of talent in the near future. 🟠🟡

About the Author

Kalpana Bansal is Head - Competency Assessment and Development, Reliance Industries Ltd. She comes with an experience of more than 20 years and has worked in organisations such as Tata Unisys, Star TV, IMRB, Mudra Communication and Watson Wyatt (I) Pvt. Ltd and the RPG Group. Kalpana has an MBA and has completed her Executive Masters in Consulting & Coaching for Change from Said Business School, Oxford University.

Pre-Requisite For Forfeiture Of Gratuity

BY **K V SINGH AND NACHIKETA GOYAL**

The Payment of Gratuity Act, 1972 **("Act")** is a beneficial legislation that provides for the payment of gratuity to an employee at the time of termination of the employee's service, provided the employee has served a continuous service of not less than five years with the employer. The amount of gratuity is determined basis the number of continuous years of service of an employee. The Act is applicable to any establishment employing ten or more persons.

Despite the Act being a beneficial legislation, there are certain provisions in the Act under which gratuity can be forfeited. One such provision is Section 4 (6) (b) (ii) of the Act. As per Section 4 (6) (b) (ii) of the Act, the gratuity payable to an employee may be forfeited if the services of an employee have been terminated for an act which constitutes an offence involving moral turpitude. The aforementioned provision is produced here under:

"4. Payment of gratuity

(6) Notwithstanding anything contained in sub-section

(1) –(b) the gratuity payable to an employee [may be wholly or partially forfeited]–

(ii) If the services of such employee have been terminated for any act which constitutes an offence involving moral turpitude, provided that such offence is committed by him in the course of his employment."

Recently, the High Court of Bombay in its judgment of Western Coal Fields Limited vs. the Presiding Officer, Appellate Authority under the Payment of Gratuity Act, 1972 & Anr. [Writ Petition No. 6006 of 2016], held, in order to forfeit the gratuity of an employee, the act of moral turpitude should be proved as an offence in a court of law despite the same having been established in the internal enquiry conducted by the employer.

The brief facts of the case are that one Mr. Manohar (Respondent No. 2) joined service with Western Coal Fields Limited (Petitioner) in the year 1990 and was regularised in general Mazdoor category on 01.01.1992. On 21.04.2002, a complaint was received at the headquarters of the Petitioner that Respondent No. 2 had entered service by falsely claiming his date of birth as 01.07.1960 while the actual date of

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birth of Respondent No. 2 was 01.07.1953. On the basis of the aforementioned complaint, a chargesheet was issued against Respondent No. 2 on 07.09.2012. Further, an internal enquiry was conducted against Respondent No. 2. Pursuant to the enquiry, a report dated 05.02.2013 was submitted. Basis the findings of the enquiry report, Respondent No. 2 was dismissed from service on 28.03.2013.

The Petitioner issued a show cause notice on 25.04.2013 to Respondent No. 2 as to why the gratuity payable to him ought not be forfeited on the ground that he was dismissed for misconduct of giving false information regarding his date of birth for the purpose of fraudulently seeking employment. Respondent No. 2 claimed gratuity under the provisions of the Act basis his continuous service. The Controlling Authority passed an order holding that Respondent No. 2 was entitled to receive gratuity for such continuous service. The Petitioner preferred an appeal before the Appellate Authority against the aforesaid order of the Controlling Authority. The Appellate Authority upheld the order of the Controlling Authority after concluding that even if the service of Respondent No. 2 was terminated for misconduct under standing order, "misconduct" was different from "offence". The Petitioner filed a writ petition against the order of the Appellate Authority.

The question before the High Court of Bombay was whether an act of providing false information with respect to the date of birth which was proven in a departmental enquiry by the Petitioner would constitute an offence involving moral turpitude. The Court observed that since Section 4 (6) (b) (ii) of the Act empowers an employer to forfeit gratuity wholly or partially, it is an exception to the general rule under the Act regarding payment of gratuity to an employee. The Court observed since Section 4 (6) (b) (ii) of the Act was an exception to the whole object and purpose of the Act to pay gratuity to an employee for the continuous service put in, it has to be interpreted strictly.

The Court relied on the judgment of Union Bank of India and Ors. vs. C.G. Ajay Babu and Anr. (2018) 9 SCC 529 wherein the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India observed *"...It is not the conduct of the person involving moral turpitude that is required for forfeiture of gratuity but the conduct or the act should be made punishable under law. That is absolutely in the realm of criminal law. It is not for a bank to decide whether an offence has been committed. It is for the court. Apart from the disciplinary proceedings initiated by the appellant Bank, the Bank has not set the criminal law in motion either by registering an FIR or by filing a criminal complaint so as to establish that the misconduct leading to dismissal is an offence involving moral turpitude."*

The High Court further relied on the law laid down in Union Bank of India and Ors. vs. C.G. Ajay Babu and Anr. (supra), wherein, the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India held, "*In the present case, there is no conviction of the respondent for the misconduct which according to the Bank is an offence involving moral turpitude. Hence, there is no jurisdiction for the forfeiture of gratuity...*". The High Court accordingly, in the facts and circumstances of the case, held that there was no substance in the writ petition and the same was dismissed.

It can, therefore, be summed up that in order to forfeit the gratuity of an employee under Section 4 (6) (ii) of the Act, the initiation of criminal proceedings with respect to the activity of the employee involving moral turpitude and the same resulting into conviction of the employee, is a pre-requisite.

Q&A

Q **I am a human resource manager in a real estate company in Gurgaon. In light of the recent COVID-19 situation, our company intends to issue offer letters with digital / electronic signatures through e-mail. Can an e mail acknowledgement from the employee on accepting the offer letter issued by our company be valid and enforceable under the law?**

A Kindly note that Section 5 of the Information Technology Act, 2000 **("IT Act")** provides for legal recognition of electronic signatures. However, as per Section 3A of the said Act, the electronic signature or electronic authentication technique should be such: (i) as can be considered reliable; and (ii) may be specified in the Second Schedule to the Act. Therefore, electronic signatures valid in terms of Section 3A and Second Schedule of the IT Act can be used.

Section 10 A of the IT Act provides:

"Where in a contract formation, the communication of proposals, the acceptance of proposals, the revocation of proposals and acceptances, as the case may be, are expressed in electronic form or by means of an electronic record, such contract shall not be deemed to be unenforceable solely on the ground that such electronic form or means was used for that purpose."

Therefore, the email acknowledgment by an employee would be valid and enforceable by virtue of Section 10A of the IT Act. In *Trimex International FZE Ltd. Dubai vs. Vedanta Aluminium Ltd.,* (2010) 3 SCC 1, the Supreme Court has laid down the following with respect to the validity of a contract entered into over an email:

"...Once the contract is concluded orally or in writing, the mere fact that a formal contract has to be prepared and initiated by the parties would not affect either the acceptance of the contract so entered into or implementation thereof, even if the formal contract has never been initiated."

Therefore, letters/agreements which are signed electronically are valid and enforceable. However, the application/service which is used for affixing electronic signatures should be reliable (in terms of Section 3A of the IT Act) and should use Aadhaar or other e-KYC based authentication (as specified in the Second Schedule to the IT Act).

Q **I am the proprietor of an information technology based start-up in Mumbai. The salary structure of our company is basic salary + house rental allowance. Will the overtime pay be calculated on the basic salary or the total fixed salary?**

A Please note that as per section 2(h) of the Minimum Wages Act, 1948, "*Wage*" means all remuneration, capable of being expressed in terms of money which would if the terms of the contract of employment express or implied, were fulfilled, be payable to a person employed in respect of his employment or of work done in such employment **and includes house rent allowance**. However, it does not include the value of the following –

(a)   any house-accommodation, supply of light, water, medical attendance;

(b) any other amenity or any service excluded by general or special order of the appropriate Government;

(c) any contribution paid by the employer to any Pension Fund or Provident Fund or under any scheme of social insurance;

(d) any travelling allowance or the value of any travelling concession;

(e) any sum paid to the person employed to defray special expenses entailed on him by the nature of his employment; or

(f) any gratuity payable on discharge.

Therefore, the overtime wage will be calculated on the basis of total fixed salary of an employee. **HC**

Snapdeal Onboards Counselling Experts to Help Employees

BY **ANUSHRUTI SINGH**

Snapdeal has onboarded experts from the Indian Institute of Counselling to provide easy access to its employees who wish to seek counselling support to handle any issues of anxiety or stress in their lives. The initiative is an attempt to build a positive and relaxed frame of mind by providing access to mental health professionals who are trained and experienced in helping people deal with anxieties. The entire process is confidential, and counsellors can be contacted via a telephone number available to the team.

With all teams working diligently from home, the company has also launched a Snapdeal Radio featuring curated songs to begin the day positively as well as a daily tip that makes WFH more productive and helps the teams balance their work and personal lives. **HC**

Zomato Launches 'Talent Directory' to Help Outplace Laid-Off Employees

BY **ANUSHRUTI SINGH**

Food tech giant Zomato has launched a unique "talent directory" to help laid-off employees find a new job. The list is available online and can be easily accessed by employers who are looking to recruit talented professionals for different roles in their businesses through location/resume/qualification filters.

Zomato CEO Deepinder Goyal tweeted: "Zomato has been built by some of the most passionate people, who have brought us closer to our vision every day. A humble request to all organizations that are hiring to review the Zomato Talent Directory. We are deeply grateful to have had these folks as part of our journey. And we assure you, you will be too. If you need a more curated/filtered list, please write to us at talentdirectory@zomato.co." **HC**

Standard Chartered Extends Medical Benefits to LGBT Partners of Employees

BY **ANUSHRUTI SINGH**

Standard Chartered Bank has announced the extension of medical cover and relocation benefits to LGBT+ partners of its employees in India.

Under the bank's medical reimbursement policy, employees will now be able to declare an LGBT+ partner as an eligible beneficiary. The declared partner will also get covered under the domestic relocation policy.

"Equity in employee benefits is one of the critical initiatives in ensuring that these workplace standards are met. Treating all colleagues, regardless of their sexual orientation, with dignity and respect, is the right thing to do," the bank's Human Resources- Head Sachin Gupte said.

Over the last year, the British lender has launched an Employee Resource Group (ERG) for LGBT+ and allies called GLAD (Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, Allies and Advocates) in a bid to ensure it becomes an equal and inclusive workplace. **HC**

A Man of Many Shades

*From being a national award-winning actor who has worked in over 200 films across twelve languages, to now also becoming a motivational speaker, storyteller, thought leader, and so much more, **Ashish Vidyarthi** can be aptly called a man of many shades. Finding new reasons to be passionate about every single day is by no means an easy feat, and this is exactly what Ashish does. In spite of donning so many hats, Ashish is still willing to try new things and considers himself a professional learner. It's little wonder that Avid Miner, of which he is the Founder, is just over seven years old, and it has already made a strong mark by contributing profusely in transforming people and organisations to realise their unique identity and extraordinary potential.*

BY **ANKITA SHARMA**
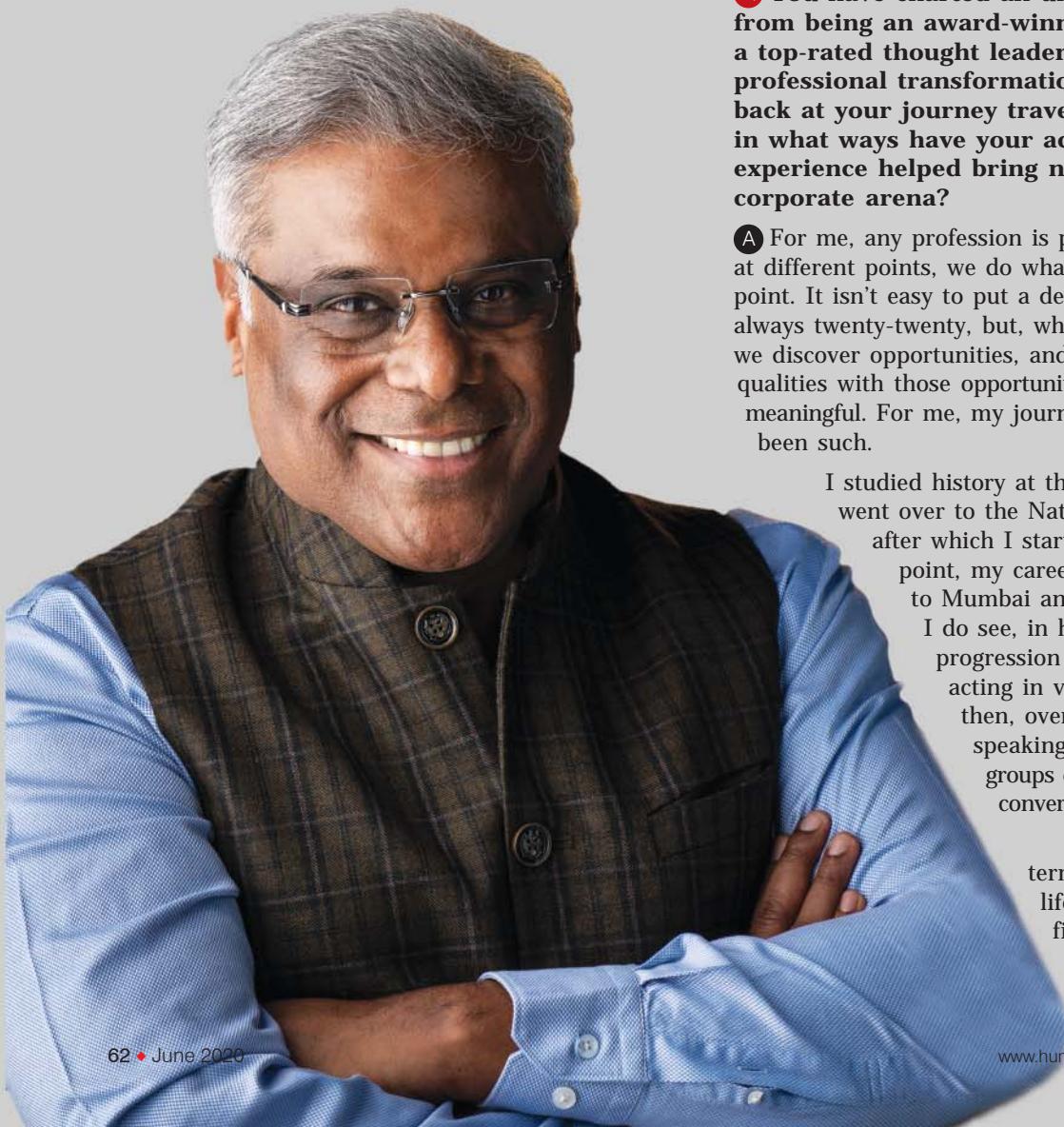
Q **You have charted an unusual career path from being an award-winning actor to becoming a top-rated thought leader on personal and professional transformation. How do you look back at your journey traversed thus far? Also, in what ways have your acting and theatre experience helped bring new perspectives to the corporate arena?**

A For me, any profession is part of life's journey, and, at different points, we do whatever is needed at that point. It isn't easy to put a design to it. Hindsight is always twenty-twenty, but, when we travel through life, we discover opportunities, and we try to match our qualities with those opportunities to create something meaningful. For me, my journey as an actor has also been such.

I studied history at the Hindu College, then went over to the National School of Drama, after which I started doing theatre. At that point, my career choices made me move to Mumbai and start doing Hindi films. I do see, in hindsight, a logical progression of me acting in Hindi to acting in various languages, and then, over the last six years, speaking to organisations and groups of people as an Ignite conversationalist.

The way I have grown in terms of my outlook towards life involves seeing myself finding a container or containers, if your career

choices may be called that, which I fit my life into. Each time that container can't contain me, though it comes close, I have my aspirations, which are wider and further than that. At this very point, until a few weeks back, it used to be one-on-one in front of people, igniting conversations with large groups of people, and coaching or doing workshops. Now, over the last few weeks, I have been pouring myself into the digital space, where I'm expressing myself and reaching far beyond what I ever thought I could do. I am a natural progression of myself, and it's not at all by design.

For me, acting in theatre and films can never be separated from who I am. Everything that I do or everything any of us does bears witness to what you have experienced in life, what has touched you, and what has impacted you. My theatre acting, travel, relationships, the people that I've met, the thoughts that I've been privy to, things that I missed, things that I wanted, etc. all come into play in my conversations and workshops. I help people make the most of what they have. Therefore, for me, this element of acting in theatre allows me to captivate and engage people in interesting conversations. Communication is a key skill for any leader or person.

Q **Now, more than ever, leaders must use their executive presence to instill hope and inspire action. However, many find it hard to define and even harder to embody. What, according to you, is executive presence? Also, how can leaders uncover and cultivate their unique presence?**

A Executive presence, on the one hand, is a badge which people wear—or want to wear—and on the other hand, is something ethereal that is felt when a person walks in

and speaks of vision. To me, the ability to draw people towards you by connecting with them on an authentic level is executive presence.

In our executive presence workshop, one of the things that we are continuously dealing with is convincing people that this is not a matter of strategy. It is, in fact, a connection with their own extra-ordinariness. The extraordinary is inside each of us; for me, it is my inner voice. Once leaders relate to their own voices, that is when they realise that their life, their culture, their upbringing, and their background have shaped who they have become as a unique individual. And when they bring these unique perspectives and experiences into their daily work through communication with others, and by sharing dreams and passions with teams, their executive presence is defined.

> **❝Today, as we aspire for a wider impact, our skill as an effective storyteller—to create compelling narratives of what we are committed to—is an amazing power that is available to each of us.❞**

Q **Storytelling has become a mainstream management tool that offers a wealth of business benefits. How can leaders use stories to authentically engage and influence people in accomplishing organisational goals?**

A Apart from being a hot topic, storytelling has always been an inseparable part of our lives. We have loved stories since we were children. Every story, parable, and fable were meant to communicate certain key points. Rather than

being instructional, a story should be crafted in a way that the learnable part touches people to inspire action. Today, as we aspire for a wider impact, our skill as an effective storyteller—to create compelling narratives of what we are committed to—is an amazing power that is available to each of us.

Everyone in your immediate circle—be it your parent, sibling, or a close friend—believes in a story about you that they comprehend and see in you, that they imagine you to be. As we expand our narrative to reach a larger audience, we must keep in mind that those people may not have the same kind of interest as your immediate circle. So, the need to be a listening communicator is a vital part of storytelling. Our workshops are created around allowing organisations to see and hear the people they are communicating to, providing the value those people want, and connecting that value with what the organisation has. Storytelling is something that captures the imagination of people and allows them to take action when they are touched.

Q **Teamwork is a timeless management topic, and its**

Up-Close and Personal

Q What's one of your favourite memories from the past year? Also, what's something you are doing or want to do in 2020 that you've never done before?

A My favourite memories from last year were a few similar ones, but I will share. Earlier, people used to stop me at airports and elsewhere for a selfie, and they would say that they liked me in this film or that movie. Over the last year, a lot of people have been stopping me and saying, "We loved that video of yours; loved that session you took for our organisation." So it's fulfilling that people are also relating me to another field which I've taken on. It's a great feeling to see that you are making a difference to different sets of people.

Q What are your top productivity hacks?

A For me, the first step in being productive is to engage in early-morning ideation, followed by putting ideas into words, soliciting feedback from others, and finally, finding ways to make the idea a reality. Another thing, which is key for me, is keeping the idea even if people don't initially find it useful. I keep it for myself in a place where I will remember to read it and, possibly, bring it back.

Q What would we be surprised to learn about you?

A I don't know if you'll be surprised, but I love to eat, sing, and learn. I'm a professional learner, and I am on a digital learning track at this moment.

Q COVID-19 is the defining test of leadership in many ways. What would your advice be for leaders as they navigate this crisis scenario and the growth challenges ahead?

A First of all, leaders are people who, for me, speak into disbelief. So when the rest of the world doesn't believe it, a leader has the ability to speak and create a new reality, and then invite people into it. That's the first part.

Now in this COVID era—and I'm not saying the post COVID era, it is going to be the COVID era from now on—even the leader does not know what the future beholds. They did not know even in the past because the future was uncertain. But uncertainty has broken all past references and models that we had.

The pressure put on leaders is overwhelming; they're supposed to know everything, but they don't. Leaders must present themselves with an opportunity to acknowledge that it's all right not to know and to share with people: "I do not know where the future is. But I know that together we can manoeuvre and be whatever the next moment will need us to be."

A leader's game is not necessarily in knowing the final destination. The role of a leader is to get people to embark on a journey of finding their way together. Therefore, leadership does not imply knowing where the road is leading to, but rather commitment and action. This is definitely a time for leaders to nourish their teams and let them know that they have to create more from themselves, more than they have ever done in the past because this new world is going to require more from each one of us.

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importance is further accentuated by how technology continues to change the way we work. What do you feel are the biggest stumbling blocks that leaders should look to avoid when building successful teams?

A If teamwork is really a great thing to do, we should start investigating why it doesn't happen so easily. If you ask anyone, they will agree that their fist is stronger than five fingers. Conceptually, everything works. However, there's something about teamwork that stops us—not conceptually, but practically. Teamwork requires listening to other points of view; people are not just things; they have their unique way of working and set of abilities.

The moment we look at teamwork, it is about each one bringing in their best. It is akin to a set of people around a pool, in which they are pouring their best and allowing each other to partake in that offering. Teamwork requires substantial generosity and the ability to take constructive criticism. When done correctly, a team project allows its participants to be present for the times that are not so good as well as for the identification of everyone's amazing talents.

Teamwork is a two-way process. Not only do you gain from others, but as you participate, you're also contributing your best and allowing people to bring out the best in you. The context of the word teamwork should be changed from being the "right thing to do" to the added value of teamwork, in which one plus one truly becomes eleven, and more.

> **"A leader's game is not necessarily in knowing the final destination. The role of a leader is to get people to embark on a journey of finding their way together."**

What HR Leaders Need To Do?

Like a digitally created frenzied soldier's avatar, it would behove our HR leaders to take an aggressive stand and lead from the frontlines. And only then do they stand a chance of vanquishing the enemy viz. COVID-19.

BY **VIKAS DUA**

Armed to the teeth, clad in full battle gear, the soldier steps across the doorway into the expansive shop floor. With a quick turn of his head to the left, he scans the landscape through his misty goggles and tries to detect the enemy. Even though unsuccessful, he presses down on the trigger and lets his ammunition flow in sharp bursts, hoping to strike at least a few of the vermin. A shuffling of the feet, a quick turn of the neck in the other direction and there follows another staccato burst of the firepower at his disposal.

You would be forgiven for imagining the above scenario to be a first-person shooter game, given that ever since 1992, when Wolfenstein 3D was first released by ID software, the genre has been a worldwide success in computer games, a major contributor to what is today a $150 billion gaming industry. But then, we are not here to discuss fantasy land. After all, if nothing else, the recent black swan event, the COVID19 pandemic, has taught us one thing - and that is to be in the here and now.

So, to drop the suspense and bring in the main characters of this play onto centre-stage, let me clarify that the trigger-happy, bodysuit-clothed individual described above is none other than the facilities worker in any one of our office spaces, disinfecting our work areas, even while endangering himself, shift after shift. What he is letting loose from the gun slinging across his shoulder is nothing more than a humble spray of disinfectant.

And here is where the Human Resources Manual gets edited with yet another KRA (Key Responsibility Area) which is centred around ensuring the safety of the workforce. The dimensions of this KRA are, indeed, expansive. After all, the risk implications are immense. Even a single, coronavirus-inflicted employee could lead to the closure of an assembly line or a department. In a worst-case scenario, it could lead to shutting down of a plant, a store or corporate office.

Pillars to safeguard workplaces

As employees troop back cautiously into their workplaces, the task at hand for HR managers is to adhere to social distancing protocols, for that is the only defence humanity has against this infliction as we stand today. Let us examine what all this encompasses and what needs to be addressed in each aspect.

1. Staggered Workforce: For too long, companies have overcome the financial hurdle of expensive real estate by packing in employees like sardines. With every square inch of office space being valuable, creative ideas have been implemented to make sure that workplaces are used 'optimally'. This in turn has created what we call 'rush hour' traffic in our cities, where lakhs of office goers head towards their workplace at the same time, causing crowding in personal and public transport. In the 'new normal', for the safety of

employees, workforce planning will need to factor in another variable in the staff deployment calculation, viz. the maximum percentage of employees who can be in the facility at a particular time.

2. Physical Distance: As per WHO (World Health Organisation), the defined guideline of physical distance is minimum 1 metre (3 feet) distance between two individuals. Organisations have to facilitate and encourage their employees to follow this guideline in their own interest. In recent years, workplaces have embraced the 'open office' culture propounded to facilitate communication and collaboration, by removing barriers. In many cases, this will involve the entire redesigning of the physical layout of the employees' desks and extend to modification of areas such as meeting and training rooms, to ensure employees are, by design, physically distanced.

3. Hygiene Protocols: With extreme caution required to prevent the spread of the harmful virus, organisations have to take a leaf out of the books of hospitals. Right from providing required enablers such as masks and sanitizers to employees, to ensuring that only prepacked food is sold in their cafeterias, each possible contamination source will need to be studied and adequately addressed thorough hygiene protocols. HR personnel will also have to define the disciplinary action that would be taken in case of any wilful nonadherence to the required protocols. In a similar vein, HR would also need to define standardised action steps to be taken in the event of detection of any suspected or confirmed case of infection.

4. Tracking & Recording: The challenge of safeguarding our workplaces becomes much more acute due to the fact that they are

> **"As employees troop back cautiously into their workplaces, the task at hand for HR managers is to adhere to social distancing protocols, for that is the only defence humanity has against this infliction as we stand today."**

more akin to a 'motion picture' than to a 'photograph', to use an analogy. Not only employees, even visitors such as customers, vendors, authorities, etc. keep flitting into and out of the workplace, on a given day. HR needs to ensure that processes are put in place to appropriately track and record every movement. In case of the unfortunate incident of an individual getting inflicted by the virus, healthcare personnel can swiftly move towards tracing all those who would have been in close proximity to that individual and be potential carriers. Effective tracking, therefore, can greatly assist in breaking the 'coronavirus chain'.

5. WFH Policy: The pandemic has exponentially increased the usage of technology that facilitates remote working, almost overnight. For a very long time, WFH (Work-From Home) was a privilege of a rarified group, usually the senior leadership or those whose work was considered 'non-customer facing'. With the virus practically bringing the world to a standstill, with countries implementing a version or the other of the 'Lockdown' that has been implemented in India, every employee has suddenly found himself or herself being encouraged to WFH. While this has been warmly embraced by many, HR leaders also need to define their organisation's WFH Policy to ensure that it covers all the requirements, protocols, and enablers of this new working model.

6. Performance Management System: The social distancing protocols, as shared above, have many dimensions. The most important of these, no doubt, will be the cascading effect they have on our traditional PMS (Performance Management System) which has more often than not, risen from its setting in the physical office space. But, remote working and the blurring of lines between weekdays and weekends (as we have seen in the period of the lockdown) demand that

our PMS models be overhauled too. Driving employee performance and monitoring productivity will require combining some learnings from the new 'Gig economy' with our traditional processes. HR leaders will need to combine their wide-ranging skills from behavioural science to data science, to come up with a PMS model that is robust, sustainable, and fulfils its core task of motivating employees to operate at their peak performance levels.

These are the primary pillars on which the safeguarding of our workplaces will hinge, as we emerge from our confined environments and re-join our workplaces in the coming weeks. Much like the digitally created frenzied soldier's avatar in the opening paragraph, it would behove our HR leaders to take an aggressive stand and lead from the frontlines. Only then, do they stand a chance of vanquishing the enemy, which in this case, happens to be the respiratory virus, more commonly known as 'the coronavirus' that has literally turned the world upside down. **HC**

> **"HR leaders will need to combine their wide-ranging skills from behavioural science to data science, to come up with a PMS model that is robust, sustainable, and fulfils its core task of motivating employees"**

About the Author

Vikas Dua is an accomplished HR and recruitment professional, a TEDx speaker, and a Vlogger and Blogger on HR practices. With over 15 years of high-quality experience in the field of IT and ITES, he has worked with both start-ups and large corporations like Wipro, Concentrix and Startek Aegis. Currently, he is Chief HR Mentor at Attayn.co. An active collaborator in the campus space, he shares his learnings under his self-designed 'HR in my HeaRt' brand umbrella.

Cognitive Dominance and Leader-Follower Exchange Dynamics

The situations of mental slavery and unquestioned surrender that prevent followers from exploring and expressing alternative worldviews in a fast-changing world can be deeply damaging for all stakeholders.

BY **DR. FARAH NAQVI**

Leadership has always been a topical subject in both academic research and the business world. The success of an organisation is often attributed to its leader. Going by the research in social psychology, people use two primary strategies to navigate up the hierarchy. The first strategy is dominance, where people try to attain social rank by coercion, intimidation, fear or manipulation of behaviour, cognition and emotions. The second strategy is prestige, where a person aims at claiming a leadership position through the display of valued knowledge and skills.

Dominant Versus Prestige Leaders

A research work by Kakkar and Sivanathan published in HBR in 2017 revealed that dominant leaders become more appealing than prestige leaders when the environment is ridden with social and economic uncertainty. The reason for the same is partly rooted in people's psychological desire for restoring their sense of personal control, which is threatened in times of uncertainty. Prestige-based leaders are considered more likeable and appreciated for their warmth, but leaders associated with dominance tend to get perceived as assertive, confident and decisive.

The Leader-Follower Exchange

The presence of hierarchy is a universal feature in groups, organisations and society. Leaders matter greatly, for they are the key drivers of effective mobilisation of all resources. However, at the heart of organisational success lies the intricate exchange between leaders and followers. If this exchange doesn't happen effectively, success becomes more uncertain.

We all remember our first boss, for they have a lasting influence on how we perceive leaders. Fortunate are those who find a boss with whom they feel like nurturing a long-term relationship, for it is mutually rewarding in terms of personal learning and growth. However, the reverse can also be true. Sometimes, you get a boss whose presence makes your work experience suffocating. This can happen if the work culture is driven by domination or one-sided communication. The employees in these instances feel coerced and fearful of engaging in a dialogue. Such relationship risks taking the form of dominator (leader) and the dominated (followers) by virtue of their skewed position and authority.

The Cognitive Dominance Matrix

This article reflects on leadership, followership, and leader-follower exchange from the lens of the cognitive dominance matrix as proposed by Dr Subhash Sharma, presented below:

(II) Unquestioned Surrender	(III) Create an Alternative Worldview
(I) Mental Slavery	(IV) Resist the Dominance

The theory of cognitive dominance discusses the conscious effort on the part of the dominator to manipulate the dominated through language, ideas, theories or metaphors.

(I) The first quadrant of the matrix, *mental slavery*, is characterised by the imposition of a particular worldview by the dominator and its unquestioned acceptance by the dominated. It is important to note here that while leadership and hierarchies exist universally, they may vary from one country to another. So, a leader's behaviour may be strongly influenced by the working environment and the norms and values of the culture where s/he is operating. For example, in a culture of high-power distance, a leader may demonstrate dominance by adopting an authoritarian style. The employees may be forced to follow all commands to save their job, but this long-term mental slavery can be damaging for their self-growth.

(II) The second quadrant talks of *unquestioned surrender*, a state where the dominated is incapable of identifying cognitive dominance. It goes to an extent where the dominated himself becomes the defender of the dominator's worldview. In a leader-follower interaction, factors that can lead to such a scenario could be the strong personality of the leader characterised more by dominance and less by prestige or maybe the inexperience of the follower. Whatever the cause, such a scenario can be harmful to organisational health. It can be overly damaging in the middle- and senior-level jobs that require employees to draw upon their business intelligence and creativity. Both the leader and follower will be deprived of learning and growth, for it will kill all opportunities of discussion and dialogue, hampering innovation.

(III) The third quadrant of the matrix is characterised by the dominator's claim of the universality of his worldview, but the follower presents an *alternative worldview*. With increasing access to technology and the opportunities for new forms of democratic spaces for interactions it creates, rapid communication impacting the way we interact with each other is not an unusual phenomenon. Leaders here will have to demonstrate listening, empathy and perhaps embrace the alternative worldview presented by the follower if it seems like a more viable option. Able leaders and competent followers collaborating constructively and appreciating each other's viewpoints can pave the way for high-performing learning organisations.

(IV) The fourth quadrant is about *resistance*. It is characterised by a direct imposition of the dominator's worldview and its rejection by the dominated. In such a scenario, the followers are not motivated to follow the leader, for they may feel their inputs, though valuable, are not valued. Followers may resist such dominance by switching themselves off from the cognitive control mechanisms.

Creating a Domination-Free Environment

Reflecting on the leader-follower dynamics from the cognitive dominance perspective provides insights into the darker side of leadership, where leaders can do more harm than good, consciously or unintentionally, by unnecessary dominance.

Analysing dominance in the light of employee/follower competence presents us with other possible situations. Situation 1, characterised by high follower competence and high leader dominance, can create unwanted conflicts, disagreements and dissatisfaction for both parties. Situation 2, characterised by high competence of followers and low dominance by a leader, may provide avenues of creating alternative worldviews. Followers here may perceive low dominance as autonomy and work harder to prove their merit. Situation 3, characterised by low competence of followers and high domination of leader is more likely to lead to mental slavery or unquestioned surrender. High task orientation and optimising on leader competence and domination may become a necessity to get the work done. However, the worst-case scenario can be a situation of low leader dominance and low follower competence where keeping the work rolling itself may become a challenge. It is important to note here that other extraneous or moderating variables may change these hypothesised outcomes.

Cognitive dominance in any form must be discouraged. Organisations succeed or fail not only based on how well their leaders lead but also based on how well their followers follow. The situations of mental slavery and unquestioned surrender that prevent followers from exploring and expressing alternative worldviews in a fast-changing world can be deeply damaging for all stakeholders. Organisations build their present and shape their future with the combined efforts of followers and leaders. Fostering a domination-free atmosphere where all parties can enter in a free discourse can lead to mental liberation and high performing organisations. 🅗🅒

About the Author

Dr. Farah Naqvi is a writer, academician and behavioural scientist. She started her career with Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad and worked with institutions like ICFAI Hyderabad, IBA Bangalore, Center for Organization Development, Hyderabad as Asst professor. Currently, she is associated with the Aero Academy of Aviation Science & Management (AAASM) as a Management Professor. Read more about Farah's work on her website, farahnaqvi.com.

The Leadership Mantle

The pandemic-driven crisis has posed a challenge never confronted previously by today's leaders. So unique and peculiar is the problem that the fundamental assumptions of businesses are being transformed.

BY **DR. K N VISWANATHAM**

Executives operating amid the COVID-19 pandemic are experiencing disruptions in every aspect of their daily lives. The morbid fear of contracting a potentially lethal illness apart, they are causing a variety of concerns such as forced isolation, social distancing, economic hardship, an unsettled feeling, helplessness, and hopelessness. And the response to the COVID-19 led crisis by the organisations' leaders is a huge and delicate matter of concern. At such a crucial juncture, it becomes essential to explore the challenges before leaders and organisations and the quintessential positive leadership behaviours.

The Challenges

The pandemic-driven crisis has posed a challenge never confronted previously by today's leaders. So unique and peculiar is the problem that the fundamental assumptions of businesses are being transformed since their very existence is under threat. It is therefore natural for leaders and managers to panic in such a situation. However, they need to distinguish between facts and opinions, and thereafter, shift their focus on facts alone to successfully navigate the COVID-19 times. Leaders need to be highly calibrated in their responses and identify key vulnerabilities and pressure points keeping the organisation's survival in focus. Leaders focusing on organisational growth has now become an old

paradigm. The missed leadership lesson is the setting up of a crisis response/management team in organisations. In-depth networking, gaining greater employer and consumer loyalty, and demonstrating trust among all the stakeholders are essential leadership competencies during this crisis.

They must hope for the best and prepare for the worst. Pessimism is counter-productive, and therefore, it is essential to deliberately inculcate an optimistic outlook. A heightened level of preparedness to accept the fact that businesses will not be as usual and will remain otherwise needs to be cultivated. They must look at this situation of crisis as a test of leadership and organisations must adopt newer technology and processes.

Putting competencies to test

Age-old leadership competencies such as vision, growth, and results orientation will no longer help. Strategising as an area of competence has also gotten questionable today since nobody could predict that such a crisis would unearth.

Leadership competencies to be demonstrated are entirely diverse and different during the COVID-19 crisis which are: -

(a) Being calm and quiet

(b) Retaining confidence and being hopeful

(c) Relentlessly communicating with employees

(d) Make employees comfortable

(e) Actively collaborating

(f) Reaching out to the community/ stakeholders

(g) Being compassionate

The suggested set of competencies may come closer to the model of resonance leadership proposed by Boyatzis & McKee (2005), wherein they have mentioned three components such as hope, compassion, and mindfulness.

During this crisis, leaders must be convinced that: -

- They lead with mindful influence, not with authority
- They lead by participating and collaborating, not from a hierarchy
- They lead with purpose and higher calling, not with power

McKinsey identified five leadership practices that can help leaders respond effectively

Organising via a network of teams

Displaying deliberate calm and bounded optimism

Making decisions amid uncertainty

Demonstrating empathy

Communicating effectively

(Gemma D'Auria & Aaron De Smet, March 16, 2020)

Source: www.mckinsey.com

An incisive attention to culture

This is the time when leaders pay incisive attention to the culture more than ever. Culturally, there is a greater desire for socialisation among Indian employees, and as a result, it can lead to crowding. Crowding in public places and also in spaces within a workplace is a detriment for employees' health, and hence, the practice of social distancing is a mandatory requirement. This is easier said than done. Organisational leaders must act and react as community leaders.

For many Indian organisations, the culture of Work From Home (WFH) poses many challenges. One such challenge is the attitude that WFH is a paid holiday, which is an incorrect assumption altogether. Leaders need to trust managers, and managers, subject to the roles they play in organisations, have a huge onus in making WFH a reality. Learning programmes centred around the themes of WFH, social distancing, practising personal hygiene, handling psychological issues that are a fall out of WFH and the COVID19 crisis need to be planned for all employees across sectors, in view of the fact that COVID-19 does not differentiate between one sector and the other, or a prince and a pauper. Leaders need to be certain about what matters most when it comes to employees' presence. Work From Home/ office/anywhere or productivity is a crucial question that must be answered along with the nature of job and roles that permit employees to WFH. As long as the metrics are in place, job roles that permit WFH can be a reality.

> **"For many Indian organisations, the culture of Work From Home (WFH) poses many challenges. One such challenge is the attitude that WFH is a paid holiday, which is an incorrect assumption altogether."**

WFH has certain benefits as well. Employees can manage/ structure their time very well and in a meaningful manner. Managers cannot judge how often employees move away from their desk. There will be an increased focus on productivity and a decrease in micromanagement. New paradigms will emerge with reference to WFH in terms of managerial conversations, project deliverables, virtual colleagues, virtual lunches etc. Further, the advantage of WFH results in the possible reduction of toxicity of human interaction.

On 12th May 2020, Jack Dorsey, the CEO of Twitter, announced a new policy that employees can work from home indefinitely. Further, he stated, *"if employees are in a role and situation that enables them to work from home and they want to continue to do so forever we will make that happen."* Facebook and Google also implemented a WFH policy. Policies may be drafted that outline the potential difficulties and tensions that come with WFH. Leaders are required to handle the mantle of redesigning effective workplaces and policies to meet with COVID-19 crisis.

Underscoring the predicament

In view of the above, there is a compelling case for executives of today's organisations to underscore the predicament of the COVID-19 crisis and leaders across all functions and domains must keep the following pointers in mind:

- The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in disruption and leaders of organisations need to practice positive behaviours.

- Leaders need to be highly calibrated in their responses and not panic in such times of crisis. Leaders must hope for the best and prepare for the worst. Organisations must adopt new technology, new process, and new policies as well.

- Being calm and quiet, retaining confidence and being hopeful, relentlessly communicating with employees, make employees comfortable, actively collaborating, reaching out to the community/ stakeholders, being compassionate are the key competencies of leadership during COVID-19 crisis.

- Information and knowledge related to COVID-19 and intentional behavioural change must be disseminated to all employees in the organisation by the leaders of learning and development. As a norm, all leaders in an organisation must undergo at least four webinars of mandatory learning programmes.

- There is no quick-fix solution to handle the crisis of COVID-19, and the older and conventional methods will certainly not work and new leadership behaviours are to be practised.

- Leaders during this crisis should lead with mindful influence, not with authority; lead by participating and collaborating, not from hierarchy; lead with purpose and higher calling, not with power.

- Leaders are required to handle the mantle of redesigning effective workplaces and policies to meet with COVID-19 crisis.

HC

About the Author

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Re-imagining Learning In The Post-COVID Era

We need to decide over the changes in L&D owing to the COVID-19 pandemic. And this crisis has created an environment which can be either viewed as terrifying or thrilling.

BY **DR. MANAVI PATHAK**

COVID-19 is changing the way people learn and work across the world. As organisations have shifted to working remotely, to sustain learning during the pandemic, they have adapted to newer learning tools. COVID-19 has indeed forced us to relook at workplace learning offered by corporates.

How has the Learning and Development function in organisations responded to the crisis? Organisations that utilised digital learning platforms have transitioned fairly easily to virtual learning. Professional services firms, IT/ITES, and global firms across all sectors fall in this category. Firms with a bigger national footprint, or those that have recently expanded, are making a slower transition from the traditional instructor-led formats to virtual learning. Rajiv Krishnan, Managing Director, Korn Ferry Advisory Business, believes, *"Firms which invested heavily in infrastructure for instructor-led training, which includes corporate learning centres modelled after Crotonville and the like, are now having to re-think their approach. However, what impresses me is the remarkable speed with which firms are digitising in this aspect."* He further adds, *"Organisations*

with evolved HR practices have handled this crisis very well. They quickly analysed best practices from countries which were affected earlier than India and had worked out their game plan a couple of weeks prior to the lockdown. The

advantage of those few days was vital. Where employees could not be loaded effectively when away from work and working from home, detailed learning schedules were formed and also funded, so that employees could use their
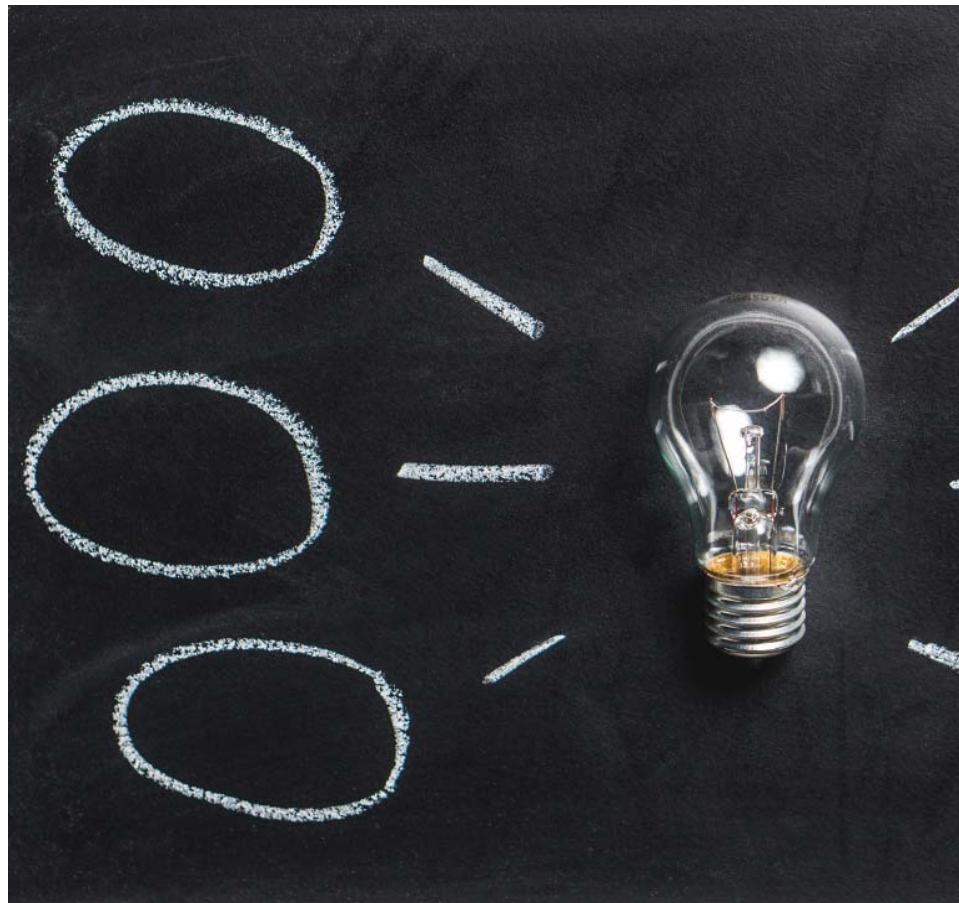
time wisely and benefit themselves and the organisation."

Initially, most organisations tried to create a substitute for classroom learning on virtual platforms. Once this was achieved, organisations also tried to reinforce engagement and make productive use of spare time, through online courses and webinars. Tata Management Training Centre (TMTC), the learning arm of the Tata Group, has delivered over 50 webinars on various topics critical to business success and personal development during the lockdown. They have also launched the Tata Tomorrow University, the digital arm of TMTC, responsible for digital offerings. A Mckinsey report, *Adapting workplace learning in the time of coronavirus*, reaffirms organisations cannot push the pause button on capability building. As the world copes with the COVID-19 crisis, the Learning and

Development function across companies is adapting to lead with innovative digital solutions, to engage a remote workforce and influence their working.

Josh Bersin Academy reports that there has been an increase in the consumption of online learning in most organisations. Companies have rapidly deployed workathome programmes, well-being, and mental health programmes to build positive thinking and alignment. With people forced to stay at home, they want to make use of this time to learn about the crisis, their jobs, and what they can do to stay ahead. Experts from the learning community believe that today's way of learning will not be the only way to learn in the future. This period of experimentation and collaborative creativity will likely shape some lasting changes. Josh Bersin firmly believes that the pandemic has accelerated one of the biggest business transformations for many organisations. It is an economic and health crisis, but for many organisations, it is also an incredible opportunity to transform. As Josh Bersin has emphatically stated, *"L&D is one of the heroes of this crisis."*

> **❝ As more and more learners latch on to the bandwagon, there is a risk of being bombarded with anything and everything resulting in 'digital dumping ground of content'. ❞**

Adapting to the New Normal

While we can anticipate an unforgiving period in the short-to-mid-term, Learning & Development will be under greater scrutiny to

make a significant contribution. Businesses are looking up to learning leaders to help organisations adjust to the new normal. Many believe that there is a real opportunity for learning teams to rise to the multiple challenges the pandemic has created. Let us examine some of the changes that we can anticipate in the Learning space in the days to come.

Prashant Pandey, Country Manager, Right Management, says, *"Learning and Development needs to reimagine its " Digital Version" and see where all they can add value."* He further adds, *"Learning Events will change in duration. Days will become hours. Small learning capsules or nuggets will be popular. We will see uberization of learning and development."* From a learner's perspective, Prashant anticipates a big change in the mindset of the learner. They will now be more aware and concerned about keeping themselves relevant in the hyper-dynamic talent landscape. Hence, there will now be a 'pull' factor (demand) for good content. This will also put a lot of pressure on content creators. If content fails to get the learner's attention fast, the learner will move on. Instruction Design principles will now become critical. Also, companies with strong cultures and desire to place learning and people at the heart of what they do have a much higher chance of success.

For Dr Shalini Lal, Co-Founder, Unqbe, this pandemic has been the true accelerator for many L&D organisations. Organisations have demonstrated agility, and there are many lessons to be learnt during this crisis. She believes, *"Sharply personalised learning recommendations (like Netflix) and intuitive technology will gain prominence in the days to come."* Kartik Mehrotra, Knolskape, adds, *"The need to suddenly shift to work from home and the related barriers to communication and*

relationships has given Capability Development experts the chance to prove the relevance of virtual and self-learning tools and technologies." Learning and development teams must seem to understand how these experiences have changed (or not), how their colleagues engage with the digital ecosystem, and what implications this has for the relevance of their offer.

Also, the crisis is pushing the L&D function to rethink and reframe its true value and relevance to the business. It makes us ask, "why do we do what we do?" Dr. Pramod Solanki, Founder, Performance Enablers, says, *"We need to ask questions as to the outcome that we are trying to achieve. For long, the Learning and Development function has been activity-oriented, instead of looking at metric around business outcomes. L&D needs to get aligned to what the business and people require."* In essence, the proof of impact will become a hard, inescapable requirement.

There has been a sudden rise in digital learning providers. As more and more learners latch on to the bandwagon, there is a risk of being bombarded with anything and everything resulting in 'digital dumping ground of content'.

Organisations need to be watchful and identify what is purposeful and intentional and offer the same to the learners. This pandemic is an opportunity to realign L&D from cost centre to organisational value creator.

> **"Those who pivot towards data-driven decision-making, experimentation, and agile solutions will prove their worth and are more likely to contribute to what their organisation will be trying to achieve under extremely testing circumstances."**

The Way Forward

Those who pivot towards data-driven decision-making, experimentation, and agile solutions will prove their worth and are more likely to contribute to what their organisation will be trying to achieve under extremely testing circumstances. Those

waiting for things to 'get back to normal' and run courses supplemented by elearning and generic content will struggle – both to convince their employers and make any difference at all.

There is a new demand for Agility. Whether the employees in the organisation are engaged in a digital or physical learning environment, the key focus should be to put the learner at the centre of the interaction, aligning user needs, and learning styles with business requirements. The catch now is to be optimistic that this new way of learning must lead to more substantial changes in behaviour and adoption of online learning, once things normalise. This is an amazing opportunity for the Learning community to show their true value, and once we are on the other side of the crisis, organisations do not feel the need or compulsion to go back to their 'old ways', but make a well-informed decision of choosing best of both worlds.

We need to decide the manner in which L&D will change owing to the COVID19 pandemic. And this crisis has created an environment which can either viewed as terrifying or thrilling. The way forward for us is completely dependent on what we do with what we have learned. L&D will have to reflect, rethink and re-engineer. **HC**

About the Author

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

Revisiting Psychological Well-Being

It is possible to convert the threat caused by the COVID-19 pandemic into an opportunity, and for this, serious measures to maintain psychological well-being need to be taken at the individual, societal and organisational levels.

BY **DR. ANURADHA M.V.**

A lot has changed since the world was struck by the COVID-19 pandemic. International travel has stopped. Social distancing has become the norm. A Harvard study has, in fact, indicated that intermittent social distancing might be necessary through 2022.

The pandemic has sparked off an active conversation about the expected economic slowdown resulting from it. While economics is important, we also need to consider the psychological impact the COVID-19 pandemic can cause. A recent survey by the Indian Psychiatric Society showed a twenty per cent increase in mental illnesses since the coronavirus outbreak in India. And for a country with a poor mental health system, this should be cause for serious concern.

Some recent articles on this aspect go to the extent of suggesting that if the pandemic is likely to lead to a global economic slowdown worse than the Great Depression, then it is also likely to lead to one of the worst mental health crises ever witnessed. While time alone can testify the enormity of these predictions, it cannot be ignored that this pandemic is bound to
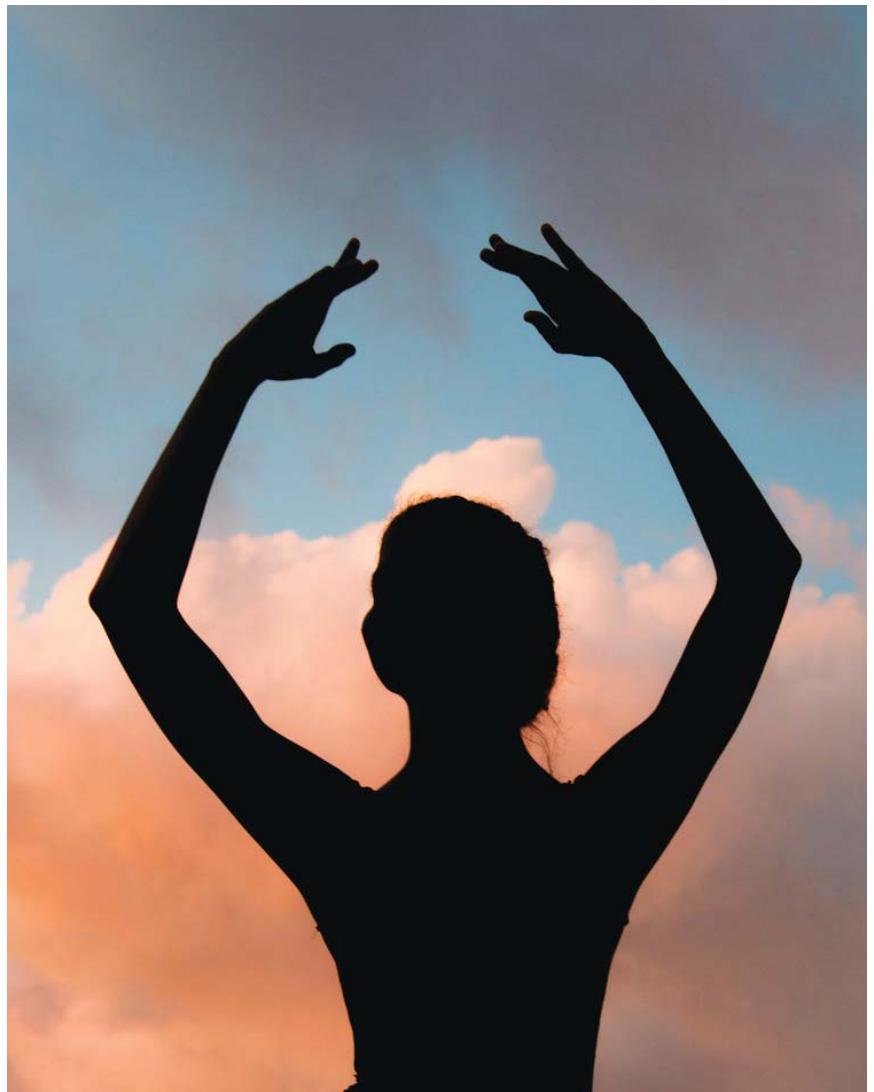
endanger the physical, financial, and social health of people. Theoretically, the three aspects put together determine the psychological well-being of any individual.

It is therefore extremely important that the aspect of mental health of the pandemic be brought into mainstream societal conversations. People need to be aware of the possible symptoms of a psychological problem, just as much as we are now aware of the symptoms of the COVID-19 infection. Everyone should know the preventive steps to be taken to avoid any kind of severe mental health problems, just as well as we know how to prevent COVID19 infections. Vulnerable groups for issues related to mental health should be identified, and facilities for psychological treatment be made available to everyone needing help in this quarter, just like it has been done for the COVID-19 infections.

Policy decisions on these issues are important, but in their absence at the moment, it becomes the responsibility of the common public to start and keep the conversations alive on these issues-through the popular press, social media, word of mouth, or any other possible means.

Contagious Pandemics and Psychological Well-Being

Well-being is a term used to refer to the holistic good health of an individual. A positive relationship with others is at the core of this holistic well-being. Research suggests that when people possess a healthy social support system, it could, in turn, lead to a greater purpose in life, higher self-esteem, better self-acceptance, greater resilience, and personal growth. This is true for most of humanity. It is only the manifestations and extent of this need that differs across personality types and cultures.

Contagious pandemics like the COVID-19 affect the psychological well-being of people by disrupting these relational patterns. Social distancing norms, curfews, travel bans etc. make it difficult for people to meet their friends and family. There have also been many reported instances of ostracization of people demonstrating COVID-like symptoms, or of health workers, pilots, and cabin crew on duty during the pandemic.

Social distancing mandates cause different emotional reactions in people from different cultures. In individualist cultures like the US, Australia etc. it could lead to frustration caused by curbing their individual freedom. In more interdependent cultures like China, Japan, and India, people might get affected by the inability to interact with others, especially family and close friends, and the lack of cultural gatherings that are at the core of these cultures.

> **"Studies show that virtual interactions can only be an effective temporary solution to deal with pandemics, but if they become the new normal, it would come at the cost of psychological well-being."**

Disruptions at Work and Psychological Well-being

An Assocham study conducted in 2018 found that 42.5 % of employees in private sector organisations in India suffer from generalised anxiety disorder and depression. Work stress and long working hours are the root cause

of these conditions. Now add to this already existing stress, the fear of losing one's job and losing increments/promotions etc.

The lack of distinct boundaries between work and one's life outside work is also one of the causes of this stress. Work from home at times adds to this boundary-fading. While many employees may find it convenient to work from home, it becomes stressful for the ones with domestic responsibilities like taking care of small children or sick elderly family members. Working from home and juggling the dual responsibilities of domestic and official work can increase stress and irritability, affecting domestic relationships at times. Twitter, Facebook and Alphabet Inc (Google) have declared that their employees can work from home till the end of this year. This has sparked a debate over the effects that virtual social engagements at work can have on individuals. While it is an optimum solution in the long run for some, others like Satya Nadella, the head of Microsoft, has cautioned against the psychological cost of a longterm work from home option for employees. He reasons that working from home can endanger the social capital that one has built at work. There is research to support his claim. For example, a study done on the survivors of the Virginia Tech shootout in the US found that when survivors interacted facetoface with their friends and family, it improved their wellbeing, but virtual interactions had no effect at all on the well-being of these people. Similarly, another study found that doctors dealing with people suffering from depression showed lower levels of empathy when interacting with them virtually, as compared to a facetoface interaction.

These studies show that virtual interactions do not increase the sense of connectivity in people. They can be an effective temporary

solution to deal with pandemics, but if they become the new normal, it would come at the cost of psychological well-being.

The Pandemic: Opportunity or Threat

Social disruptions like a pandemic provide us with an opportunity to revisit our ways of doing things. This churn is good in many ways. Some of us have got more time to spend with our families, to reignite our hobbies, and to reorganise our lives. If we were to dig deeper into the lives of people who are making the most of the lockdown, we might find that a strong social support system is at the root of this sense of wellbeing.

The pandemic becomes a threat for the vulnerable population like the elderly who might be living alone, people who were already prone to psychological illnesses, people experiencing the threat of job loss, and the ones overburdened with work to the extent that they are unable to engage in meaningful social interactions.

The symptoms of poor psychological health could range from mild to severe. Mild symptoms include a continuous feeling of drowsiness, tiredness, irritability, guilt (especially when juggling between taking care of young kids and meeting work deadlines) etc. More severe symptoms can be manifested in unexplained crying, suicidal tendencies, social withdrawal, uncontrolled negative emotions like anger, grief etc.

There are two ways of dealing with symptoms of psychological ill-health. The first is to take preventive measures. Prevention is important for everyone because even mild symptoms can affect our productivity in the long run. It is important to develop a daily routine which includes some socialising, if possible, through face-to-face interactions while maintaining social distancing. If face-to-face interactions are not possible, speaking to people over the phone, skype, facetime etc. is the next best alternative. Updates on social media sites do not count as connecting with people. Social media takes away the intimacy of interpersonal interactions. Conversations are carried out with a large group of people, many of whom we might not even know. Therefore, while social media interactions might have entertainment value, they do not contribute to the psychological well-being of an individual.

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If a person displays more severe symptoms, he needs to seek professional help. However, most of these people fail to receive help because their family members are unable to identify the symptoms. And even when the severity of symptoms is noticed, the taboos associated with seeking psychological help stop them from acknowledging that they need assistance. This is where social conversations on mental health are crucial.

Many organisations have already been providing counselling and employee engagement services to their employees. However, given the growing incidents of psychological problems, they might have to take more resolute steps.

During an economic slump, mental health becomes a low priority issue for organisations. However, it should be pointed out that since the government has made it mandatory for all organisations to provide health insurance benefits to their employees, these preventive and proactive measures could save organisations a lot of money otherwise spent in paying health insurance claims. It will also ensure that the workforce remains productive.

It is possible to turn the threat caused by the COVID-19 pandemic into an opportunity, and for this to happen, serious measures to maintain psychological wellbeing need to be taken at the individual, societal and organisational levels.

HC

About the Author

Dr. Anuradha M. V. is presently working as Associate Professor in the OB & HR area at IIM- Visakhapatnam. She has obtained her FPM from XLRI, Jamshedpur and completed her bachelor's and master's degree in psychology from University of Delhi. Her research has been published in various national, international journals. She has also written for reputed outlets that includes the Human Capital. Her research interests lie in the domain of identity, self and various aspects of meaning of work and well being.

Life & Work: After The Pandemic

If lessons from past pandemics hold, we can expect incremental changes at work to be permanent. Major changes are likely to be short lived!

BY **GAUTAM BRAHMA**

There is no getting away from the new coronavirus viz. COVID-19. News media and the business press are obsessed with the infection spread, mortality, economic impact, vaccine development, human distress, and the choice of testing and treatment. A parallel industry has come into being offering products, services, and advice for reopening offices, commercial establishments and factories. Another niche area that is booming is the one relating to forecasting the future of work after the virus has done its damage.

For a pandemic that is barely three months old, the consolidation of opinion around its impact in the coming years is indeed impressive. A lot of commentators have come to a general agreement on how the virus will change the world of work. Here is a rough summary.

- People will work from home in larger numbers. This will ease pressure on mass transport and the road infrastructure.
- IT security solutions will evolve to support remote work while protecting organisational IP. Office space requirements will come down and this will impact the realty sector.
- Telemedicine and online education will boom and electronic payments will finally displace cash. E-commerce will grow by leaps and bounds along with the logistics industry involved in order fulfilment.
- The Entertainment and sports sectors will be transformed as people switch to participating from home.
- Manufacturing will see a surge in automation as companies reduce headcount to meet social distancing requirements.
- Contact tracing apps installed to manage the pandemic will stay on and privacy will get redefined for everyone.

All this is fascinating, but is probably not the way the future will pan out. To be sure, work from home will be more acceptable than before, but that's about it. No less a person than Satya Nadella, who heads Microsoft, visualises an early return to normal work in offices, which meets the human need of eye-to-eye contact and unplanned agenda-less interaction, which builds mutual trust and enables rich insights into each other's work. The current work from home experience appears satisfying to many because it builds on high-trust relationships forged over years in the normal work environment with facetoface interaction. If this prolongs, people will gradually be interacting with new hires and others whom they have never met at all. That may not be such a productive interaction. Also, the office provides a uniform environment which is a great equaliser. Not everybody is comfortable showing off their living quarters. Many do not even have a private 'office' corner with anything like appropriate elbow room, ergonomic seating, and reasonable quiet.

> **"The current work from home experience appears satisfying to many because it builds on high-trust relationships forged over years in the normal work environment with face-to-face interaction."**

Some people have been praising the opportunities that work from home will provide women who have to drop out of work to shoulder domestic responsibilities. This has a germ of truth, but it is also true that working women look forward to going to office because that is when they are not on call for domestic chores, and can focus on work and interaction with peers. Indeed, the continuous blend of office and home chores can become oppressive for both men and women employees. Anecdotal evidence suggests that people working from home are always on call and are putting in longer hours at work than before.

> "The continuous blend of office and home chores can become oppressive for employees. Anecdotal evidence suggests that people working from home are always on call and are putting in longer hours at work than before."

The rosy predictions of the rise of telemedicine and online education are again somewhat excessive. Schools that cater to the poorer sections of society are struggling to provide education to kids at home. Most children do not have a smartphone or an equivalent device. Even if someone in the family has such a device, it cannot be spared exclusively for the child. And in any case, the data plan being used is unlikely to support the bandwidth required for a Zoom-call. The digital divide is extensive, and if schools remain shut for long, it will translate into an educational divide, thereby deepening social inequality. No society wants that. One can therefore visualise an early opening of physical schools worldwide. This is a good thing because schools also provide an indirect preparation for getting along with people and for unstructured play, which is so essential for the development of young minds.

It is a given fact that social distancing is harder to enforce in the manufacturing sector, and work from home is virtually not possible except for a few functions in a factory. So, evaluation of automation in large concerns is a real possibility. However, the majority of employment in India comes from micro and small enterprises who neither have the cash for any serious upgrade of plant and machinery nor the headroom in workforce strength to enforce roster-based partial attendance. They are likely to take reasonable precautions for hygiene, PPE and health checks and continue doing work as before.

When the Spanish Flu hit the world in 1918-19 and killed around 5 crore people in eighteen months, there was a lot of talk about how it will change the world forever. Nothing that drastic happened and before long people were thronging theatres and trains and doing whatever they were doing earlier. Flu still kills tens of thousands of people every year, but it is hardly a topic for much discussion. Those who can get themselves vaccinated, do so and continue their normal work life. Others practice essential hygiene and isolate themselves when ill. The virus mutates over time and the vaccine is tweaked to cater to that. Much the same is expected to happen with COVID19. And talks of its long-term impact on even discretionary activities like cinemagoing and tourism are probably exaggerated too. August-end booking for cruise ships are looking healthy, and in South Korea, there are reports of people driving two hours to see a movie in a drive-in theatre when they can just as easily stream it at home. We are social creatures and value experiences that we undergo in groups. Any restrictions on that are likely to be short-lived.

This is not to say that nothing will change. Personal protection gear like masks, and hygiene practices like increased distancing in public places, and frequent hand cleaning, will continue. And managements will be more open to people being allowed or even encouraged to work from home. Since e-learning has become more acceptable, it will extend to areas currently untouched. A new set of related skills will become valued. Anything more than that looks unlikely. Of course, all this could change with the next breakthrough discovery about the virus. One month ago, it was estimated that 7000 research articles had been published on the virus, and that the number was doubling every two weeks. With so much human brainpower unleashed on this virus, it is anybody's guess what is likely to be discovered. However, if lessons from past pandemics hold, we can expect incremental changes at work to be permanent. Major changes are likely to be short lived! **HC**

About the Author

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

COVID-19: Time For Payback

As self-reliant warriors of the new era, it is time to realise the infinite potential of mankind that has been designed and engineered by The Supreme Power to combat the challenges with technology and wisdom.

BY **ABHIROOP BANERJII**

Mankind evolved on Earth and learnt of ways to survive, grow, and developed to the higher dimensions of livelihood into the modern world. Over time, we failed to acknowledge the quantum capacity of the Supreme Power that governs every life force and ensures the balance of love, compassion, and energy to sustain the true existence of every living being. Humans may have assumed that our gigantic inventions on all forms of matter and energies have indeed provided us with a comfortable, luxurious, and technology-driven world of existence. The fact, however, is that it has occurred only due to the numerous sacrifices that Mother Earth has made to fulfil the greedy desires of the occupants of this heavenly planet.

With the passage of time, human arrogance also grew, and using one's powerful imagination, we fought fierce battles amongst each other using advanced techniques and technologies. Again, Mother Nature, through her resources, sheltered us and tended to our wounds. And yet, neither did we acknowledge her deeds nor the mistakes that were deliberately done to Earth; by way of polluting her with deadly chemicals, gases, and fumes, and suffocating her with plastic and industrial wastes, devastating mountains to build dams, cutting down trees to make roads over the mountains, and so

on. There were so many human deeds that were done in abundance owing to our greed, ignoring the grave consequences of ecological imbalance and extinction of several species.

Every individual is responsible for the enormous greed displayed by us. It is time that we understood that we need to calm the ego of human excellence and to religiously practice to remain grateful to Mother Earth. Mother Earth is the one who has been feeding us and keeping us alive so that we emerge stronger to rebuild, rejuvenate a new world of emotional and economical balance. Also, we need to remain self-reliant by way of infusing a collaborative approach of our strengths to design and develop ways to protect us from the deadly evil of our creation viz. the COVID-19. COVID-19 has jeopardised and punctured egos of the greatest and the powerful and has made us realise the ungratefulness that was shown to Mother Nature.

As Mother Earth's true children, it is our turn to regret, repent, and be remorseful of all our greedy acts and seek constant forgiveness from our heavenly father viz. The Supreme Power and Mother Nature. It is time to repay the debt that we owe to Nature by way of building a human society of unity, love, compassion, trust, gratefulness and forgiveness. Each of us needs to be self-reliant to rebuild a new

planet with springs of joy and happiness, and fountains of growth and development, making it a perfect balance for sustainability and prosperity. We need to remain humble and grateful to Mother Earth as also the Supreme Power that dwells in the infinite space.

The time is ripe to soulfully meditate within ourselves seeking wings to our creative ideas and free our minds from all the fears. It is time that we re-unite to develop strategies for rebuilding the nation and preparing it to successfully withstand all challenges. As self-reliant warriors of the new era, it is time to realise the infinite potential of mankind that has been designed and engineered by The Supreme Power to combat the challenges with technology and wisdom. 🅗🅒

About the Author

Abhiroop Banerjii is Training Specialist, Plasser India Pvt Ltd. He wields an experience of more than 15 years in Manufacturing and Corporate arenas. He is an NLP practitioner and hones a certification as an Internal Auditor for Integrated Management Systems and a certificate for Solution Focus Implementation strategy from Oxford University. Abhiroop has an MBA in Human Resources and a Diploma from ISTD (New Delhi).

Mahindra Finance Appoints Atul Joshi As Vice President – HR & Admin

Mahindra & Mahindra Financial Services Limited (Mahindra Finance) has appointed Atul Joshi as Vice President - HR & Admin. He moved to Mahindra Finance from M&M Ltd. where he served as Head HR for the Automotive Sector.

Joshi is a Line Manager turned HR professional with a total experience of over 28 years. He has been instrumental in developing the HR Strategy roadmap and driving various strategic HR initiatives like Organization Restructuring, Strategic Hiring, establishment of new business, Leadership Development and Organization Simplicity.

Philips Appoints Vishpala Reddy As HR Head For The Indian Subcontinent

Philips has appointed Vishpala Reddy as human resources head for the Indian subcontinent. Most recently, she was serving as the regional HR director for APAC with Uber.

Reddy is an alumnus of the Symbiosis Centre for Management and HRD and has more than 20 years of experience in the HR industry, of which she worked with American Express for nearly 12 years where led HR for a workforce of over 12,000 employees.

Some of the other companies she has been associated with are Uber, Aon and Cognizant Technology.

RBS India Appoints Maneesh Menda As HR Head

RBS India, the innovation and operations hub of the Royal Bank of Scotland (RBS) has announced the elevation of Maneesh Menda as Head of HR, RBS India. In this role, he will build the organisation's talent strategy and capabilities, supporting the Bank to achieve its goals.

An HR veteran and a Chartered Accountant, Menda has more two decades of rich experience where he has held several global and regional roles. Prior to joining RBS in 2015, he worked with Standard Chartered Bank and held several roles with them.

Dabur Appoints Biplab Baksi As Executive Director – HR

Dabur has roped in Biplab Baksi as Executive Director- HR. He has more than 26 years of experience in Human Resources, began his career from Tata Motors in March 1993 as a management trainee. He also worked in Bausch & Lomb, BILT and Nestle.

Baksi is BTech in electronics and communications from the Institute of Electronics and Technology (IET), Lucknow, and holds master's in business administration from XLRI, Jamshedpur.

NTPC Appoints Dilip Kumar Patel As Director – HR

National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC) has elevated ted Dilip Kumar Patel as the director, human resources.

Patel has over three decades of experience in both line functions and HR. He started his professional journey by gaining experience in mechanical maintenance and CHP operation at the Employee Development Centre in Korba, Chhattisgarh.

Patel has pursued mechanical engineering from the National Institute of Technology, Rourkela. He is a post graduate diploma in business management (HR and finance) frAom the Management Development Institute (MDI), Gurgaon.

Welspun India Appoints Rajendra Mehta As CHRO

Welspun India has named Rajendra Mehta as its new president and CHRO. In his new role, Mehta will responsble for HR function of the Company, as well as its subsidiaries, which includes, Welspun Advanced Textiles, Welspun Retails, Welspun Floorings and Welspun Global Brands.

Prior to joining Welspun, Mehta was the executive director and chief people officer at Synergy Capital. He has 25 years of experience in the HR domain. He holds a master's degree in personnel management from JDC Bytco Institute of Management Studies and Research, Nashik.