

WORKPLACE AGILITY – INNOVATION: MAKING OF A DELIGHTED CORPORATE ATHLETE.

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***Abstract:** Contemporary wisdom goes like this that, diversity amongst the intellectuals that constitute an organization, may disarm it of its productivity. But, there have been examples in the recent past when organizations sought the help of innovation to overcome recession. My papers shall portray the journey of organizations from crisis to triumph – all cause of its innovative mindset, agility in systems and ofcourse empowered employee.*

The papers burrow its content from research precedents, Survey Reports and survey in few of the organizations around Aurangabad.

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between the freedom to innovate and handling crisis. A total of 145 respondents (from the HR Sphere) were across 100 different organizations from Aurangabad were approached. The respondents for the study are employees and HR Heads from Aurangabad Industrial Belt, which includes five Industrial Sectors – Paithan MIDC, Waluj MIDC, Railway Station MIDC, Chikalthana MIDC and Jalna MIDC.

The research is a blend of the study of these five hemispheres with heavy reliance on Secondary data.

Keyword: Innovation, Crisis Management, Workforce Diversity, Demography, Agile Systems, Satisfied Human Resource.

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Introduction:

In the past not so long, used to be a tool that Mr.Adam & Mrs.Eve used for their progress. Mrs. & Mr.Adam were proficient with the usage of this tool & went to this tool often for challenges & adversities they used to face.

Mr.Adam used to refer these tools when he needed to commute & pull his cart. Mrs.Eve when she wanted to grind her spices – their kids when they had to graze their herd & irrigate their land. These tools just became as indispensable as their arms.

The tool was none other than Innovation & Creativity. This tool(s) helped them to peep in the eye of adversity and dive over all odds. These tools helped the whole human existence!

Neanderthal Man → Agricultural Workers → Industrial Work → Technology Worker → Knowledge Worker

Innovation has been an inseparable part of human development – may it be avenues like agriculture, technology, education, or today's entrepreneurship; and now even for Human Resource Development.

Every Organization finds a specific difference in the Demography that leads to a distinction called Diversity. Demography is defined as the relational and compositional demographic attributes of individuals and collectives (Tsui & Gutek 1999). So, this distinctive difference bestows an identity to all the inhabitants of the Organization – that make them think different and work different.

The seed of creativity is borne in the basic ingredient called – Diversity (Wolfson et al., 2011). Hence, many papers shall investigate the subject in relation with Innovation as a Dependent variable. There has been a growing acknowledgement in various areas that signify a multivariate approach to deal and use it to the benefit of the organization (Jackson et al., 2003; Riordan 2000).

The objective as to why organizations foster diversity is for a mutual benefit (Visagie et al., 2011).

It has now got a much needed exposure at the Corporate World – a strong People's Philosophy differentiates a corporate from its competitor. May it be for retention, Competitive strategy or even for consistent performance.

With this crucial role of innovative People Policies in mind, I delve on the following dimensions of Innovative Intellectual Capital '*delight*' Practices.

1) Creativity – A part of Intellectual Capital Management

The philosophy that *'Every Person Counts'* is the bedrock on which the whole structure of Human Resource Management stands. With this ideal substratum, the initiatives are fuelled to achieve two ends - Operational Excellence and Employee Delight.

Researchers have argued then when individuals are demographically different to their work group – they feel comparatively less engaged and motivated to work – that may drastically effect on their performance (Elfeinbeilly & O'Reilly, 2007; Jackson, Brett, Sessa, Cooper, Julin & Pyronnin, 1991; Riordan & Shore, 1997; Tsui, Egan & O'Reilly 1992). In sharp contrast to this belief is the empirical study that projects aspects of diversity are found to constitute the team's cognitive resource-base and are associated with information elaboration based process (van Knippenberg et al., 2004).

The first goal majorly reclines on the second objective of creating 'Happy' Employees.

Human Resource Management believes that once the second target is achieved, that automatically leads to Operational Excellence.

Hence, the HR fraternity is invested with R&D to discover ways to satisfy and enchant its intellectual capital.

2) Mission - Employee Woe's to 'Wow': Strategic Excellence around 'People'

Strategic Excellence is no more built around product, but around people – this realization has compelled visionary organizations to instil the mission of “Moving from 'Employee Delight' to 'Employee Enthusiasm' to 'Employee Wow'.”

This mission has fuelled organizations to discover ways that make people emotionally bonded towards their organizations – just not employees, but their kin too.

Contemporary organizations and their HR Wings are transforming themselves from a 'common-sense based management' approach to a more 'scientific-structured management' approach. With this evolved management approach, Organizations aim at excellence in performance through people - Performance is a summation of Motivation, Ability and Environment.

$$[P=f(M A E)]$$

Where, M = Motivation, A = Ability & E = Environment.

Strategic Excellence around people is a culmination of more emotionally appealing factors; which may or may not consume huge resources. Hence, the further part of this paper

presentation shall deal with how the fast-progressing companies are investing in Employee 'Wow' Feeling and completely eradicating 'Woe' from their lives.

3) Intellectual Capital Budgets – The Sacrificial Lamb in times of Crisis

When economy is in turbulence, it's actually the HR Department that can motivate workforce to hold it topsy-turvy with their productivity. The imprudent effect of cutting People Budgets can be reversed by small innovations by the HR Departments.

A pat on the back, applaud amidst mob, a call from the Vice-President on the Birthday or just a collection of beautiful books in the office; can create that entire miracle called 'Employee Engagement'.

Culture of Appreciation – which comes at no cost, can be innovated and inculcated in the fabric of Organization – this in turn shall enhance the worklife and integrity of people serving the organization.

Hence, here we can infer that the People Care Department can exist and flourish even if the People Budgets are reduced to nothing. This, entire seemingly impossible can be accomplished by a special tool called 'Innovation'. Now, in my next section, let's ponder on those organizations that have carved a niche for themselves in Best Places to Work for through Innovation.

4) HCL's World's Most Modern Idea (Fortune Mag)

Employee First initiative reclines on five pillars, namely – Empowerment, Transformation, Recognition, Support and Knowledge. Some of the initiatives under the initiative include:

- i) *Smart Service Desk* – A Query Resolution Mechanism
- ii) *i4excel* – A transparent Employee Performance Portal
- iii) *Directions* – An Open Annual Company-wide Strategic discussion forum for all HCLaites
- iv) *U&I* – A two-way dialogue mechanism between the CEO and Employee
- v) *EFC* – Employee First Councils work for common good of employees and aimed at worklife balance
- vi) *Women First Council* – Focussed at holistic Women Development
- vii) *Career Power* – Empowering employees to carve a career-path for themselves.
- viii) *O₂* – A league to appreciate consistent performers of last 2 yrs.
- ix) *Xtramiles* – A R&R Portal open for all to appreciate a fellow-employee.

- x) *MITR* – A 24×7 Expert Counselling for employees and their families.
- xi) *Genie* – A *personal assistant* in the company premise to take care of all trivial and some crucial chores.
- xii) *Weekly Polls* – An employee ballot system to vote on certain issues.

HCL's Employee First Initiative reveals how Innovation can apply to Organization Systems as well.

5) Best Places to Work-for: Innovation the Spirit-&-Soul

Best Places to Work For – A Survey carried by few esteemed corporations every year on a global platform as well as indigenous level, come-up with some startling revelations.

The organizations that bag the positions in these esteemed surveys have one thing in common – The Combination of

- a. People 'Delight' Consciousness and
- b. Innovation

With these two strings inter-twined with the whole HR structure (if not the whole organization), fostering 'Happy Employee' becomes a cake-walk.

Let's, now see few of those organizations that have bagged a position as the 'Best Place to Work for' with their innovative HRism (alphabetical order) –

- i) Eli Lilly India engages the family of employees in the Motivation Process. Eli Lilly sends the success stories of their employees to their families – this creates an aura of admiration not just at office but also at home.
- ii) Google – the IT Giant rates itself in the Indian as well as the Global Survey – this corporate motivates people by taking care of all the Five Levels of Maslow's Hierarchy. Google is also known to nest diversity in all its centres around the globe that just not binds cultures but also gives strategic excellence.
- iii) HSBC – the only Financial firm in Top 10 (India Today – Survey 2008-09) bags its status by – rendering Psychologist Support for those employees in stress, Salsa Dance Classes as Stress-busters, Open Communication through blogs etc.
- iv) i-Gate Global Solutions works with the mission "*Under Promise & deliver more*", and "*People want salary for comfort life and not for the cost of living.*" This mission fuels this organization to blend monetary benefits with many other

appreciation initiatives. i-Gate works with 5-C Concept – Compensation, Camaraderie, Career-growth, Culture and Competency.

- v) Infosys Technologies made its mark for multiple consecutive years for its excellent Learning and Development initiatives. Infy crafted itself as one of the preferred employers by giving the fairer gender the option of working from the centre near to their home during the baby gestation/pregnancy.
- vi) Marriott Hotels gives its share of innovation by – Just not treating guests as guests but also their ‘employee as guests’. This sheds a feeling of family amongst the Marriott-aites.
- vii) Microsoft India maintains optimum Human Inventory to avoid shortage of skills. Furthermore, Microsoft has frequent forums wherein Workforce can speak and be assured that they shall be heard. Excellent Communication mechanism is one way of engaging here,
- viii) Mind Tree Consulting speaks about getting a year off for their Lady employees after serving the organization for 4-5 yrs., to let her deliver her role as a Mother-Wife-Daughter-&-Sister too.

These Best Employers rated in the recent survey, have their own balance of strategizing, innovation and People Consciousness. With these mantras hand-held the organizations have been breeding grounds of People Delight.

6) Low Cost of HR Budgets

Generally, it is perceived that innovative HR Practices brings with it huge costs and resources – but to the dismay of these traditionalists, some organizations have proved the other way. Strategically healthy organizations have innovated ways to put-forth their HR Consciousness at a very meagre costs (if not at no costs).

As in the words of John Miller “*no statistically significant connection between the amount of money a company spent on innovation and its financial performance. Even with the deck stacked against them, businesspeople must figure out a way to survive ... **You have no choice but to innovate.***”²

² Global Innovation Report 2007 Booz, Allen Hamilton

Being ardent followers of John Miller, few organizations have chosen their HR Departments to be laboratories to innovate. Let's here dissect those organizations and their HR Policies:

1. GE's Victors Name to the Centre – GE's Indian Global Research Centre – Jack F. Welch's Technology Centre (JFWTC), Bangalore; that's studded with scholars and scientists have come-up with a No Cost Appreciation Programme – yet highly effective way of motivation. At JFWTC, once a team/individual registers a patent with the US Govt., for one complete year the name of the team/individual is assigned to the training centre or some important GE Premise.

General Electricals have an initiative wherein the whole assembly of GE-aitees sit together for the usual lunch with a difference. In this lunch, the winners are appreciated; their snaps of victory are displayed, followed by a great round of applause.

GE also allows its employees to select their own time to get trained. All this is at no extra cost!

2. Convergys India's Power of One – Convergys India has to their credit an initiative called 'The Power of One' – wherein the Winner Team are appreciated with cake, lots of balloons and a card that remains as a memoir for their achievement – this too at very little cost.

3. Philip's Dream Project – This allows employees to pursue their own Dream Project provided it helps Philips in some way. Organization gives the required resources and learning – employees need to invest their time.

4. Skoda's Empowered Employee – Skoda Auto, Aurangabad envisions an initiative wherein the technicians/front-line workmen shall exchange their roles with their immediate supervisors for a day. This initiative of the auto giant shall make their front-liners more humble and empowered.

5. Seminis Monsanto's Employee Engagement – Seminis Monsanto, Chittegaon Plant had conducted a three days Summer Camp for the wards of their employees – Wonder World. This summer camp aimed at wholesome development of the children – mental, physical and spiritual development. The HR Department of Seminis envisioned framing the artefacts made by the children and placing them on the walls of the office, training centres, cubicles and cabins.

Furthermore, the saplings planted by the children carried their names – this made the parents to take special care of that sprout (planted by their child).

Seminis also planned to mail few of the relics made by the tiny-tots to their homes that shall bring a surprise with a tinkling smile in the eyes of the parents.

6. Greaves Cotton's Parivaar Saptah/Family Week – This week-long programme engulfed for the Workmen: e-learning and for their spouse a programme called Safal Gruhini. This Safal Gruhini Programme had six different learning like Domestic Safety, Parenting-Teenage Communication, Women's Health, Cuisine, Diet and Nutrition; and Awareness about Legislations safeguarding Women. This week-long learning is followed with a feast.

Greaves appeals the minds of Workmen and their family by celebrating Dussehra in the company every year, organizing family visits on the day. Furthermore, each workmen and his/her family is greeted with sweets and flowers.

Greaves's this initiative have helped the corporate to establish harmonious Industrial Relations.

7. Bajaj Auto's Gharkul – This mammoth initiative of Bajaj Auto again engages the families of the employees. The unique characteristic of this event is, it is held at the door-step of the employees wherein the employee and his spouse is involved.

8. J&J's JEMS – JEMS is devoted to bring peace to Society. Under this initiative, Johnson-aites are bestowed with the opportunity to involve themselves in community service.

With many such HR tales like these in every nook and corner of Corporate Giants, we can assimilate that Innovation in HR costs very meagre. The HR Crew is impregnated with the task to innovate costly and not-so costly ways to achieve Talent Contentment

7) Innovation to Leapfrog Competition

With the current scenario when there is huge amount of downsizing and reduction in the HR Budgets, some foresighted organizations are pumping funds in their People Empowerment Centre.

Aging Population, gender differences, racial disparity and many other form of diversities lead to a beneficial affair for the Organization as a whole (Ilmakunnas & Ilmakunnas 2011).

These organizations predict that it's actually the people that shall overcome competition.

“The Greatest Responsibility of modern management is to develop human intellect in order that it may express its talent.”

-- General Robert Wood Johnson II
(Ex CEO, Johnson & Johnson)

Johnson & Johnson had established its credo since centuries and one corner-stone for this undisputed victory of the organization is its People consciousness.

Successful organizations like J&J and many others assimilate that empowering people shall invigorate their organizations strategically to win and leapfrog Competitors.

Soutwest Airlines, IBM and few other futuristic organizations invest profoundly in their people – especially in training and empowering them.

When organizations ask employees to give enhanced productivity with lesser resources, they someway force creativity and there actually get the edge – The Competitive Edge. But, to encourage perennial inflow of ideas, organizations have to create ‘Safe Workplace’ that has tolerance to failures. When the companies fuel employees to suggest ideas, there lies a fair degree of chance to fail – this is where the people have to be backed with motivation and not penalties.

Google’s tolerance to failures makes it one of the Safe Places to Work for and a reason to be one of the ‘Best Places to Work for’. This tolerance to ‘Noble Failures’ empowers employees to work-for the company and live-for the company.

Innovation in HR Practices and empowering people boosts the organization to overcome competition.

8) The Satyam Way

Satyam’s transition from the crisis-struck entity to today’s re-rising IT Solutions provider has been largely a product of its People Support System.

Planet Satyam – was one such innovation of their HR Troop. This internal webcast programme structured on the lines of You Tube, would telecast the Corporate Turnaround stories, the brighter version of crisis and all that shall fuel Satyam-aites to work better, stay with the organization and go the extra-mile to make Satyam rise. About 2000 associates from Satyam’s global workforce participated in the webcast everyday.

Satyam’s Mantra to dive-over the situation was to engage & empower their people.

The Magic Wand – Planet Satyam worked and it was actually the Satyam-aites that turned the tide.

Satyam’s Way was to Empower People and People did the rest!

9) HR Innovation in the Corporate Turnaround – Phoenix-ian Rebirth

Corporate like Cadbury, Xerox Corporation, Continental Airlines, Copa Airlines and many others were struck with turbulence.

Cadbury re-launched its new anti-fungal packing in around 60 record days; Xerox-aites turned their failed diversification project into a boon with consolidated team-work; Continental Airlines, could reach its pinnacle back from ashes due to the consolidated support of their workforce; Copa could reach as one of the best airlines with the dedicated efforts of their intellectual force.

This Voyage of turning failures into success legends was cause of the brains that innovated HR practices and executed them well.

Conclusion

Innovative Human Capital Management Practices have been the soul and spirit of every successful organization. The point my papers are trying to drive-at is that

- HR Department is no exception to innovation - HR Crew is impregnated with the task to innovate HR Practices and
- HR practices may not always be funds consuming.

My discussion with examples in many contexts have been an attempt to permeate the above two principles. HR Crew can create excellent practices that may consume very less or no funds with maximum smiles - and these smiles are the actual performance measurements of an efficient HR Team.

Father of Humanity had used Innovation as an indispensable tool and that has actually led to the progress of mankind; so shall the HR Teams should to be way-ahead of Success!

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