

# LET'S TALK TALENT

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Edition



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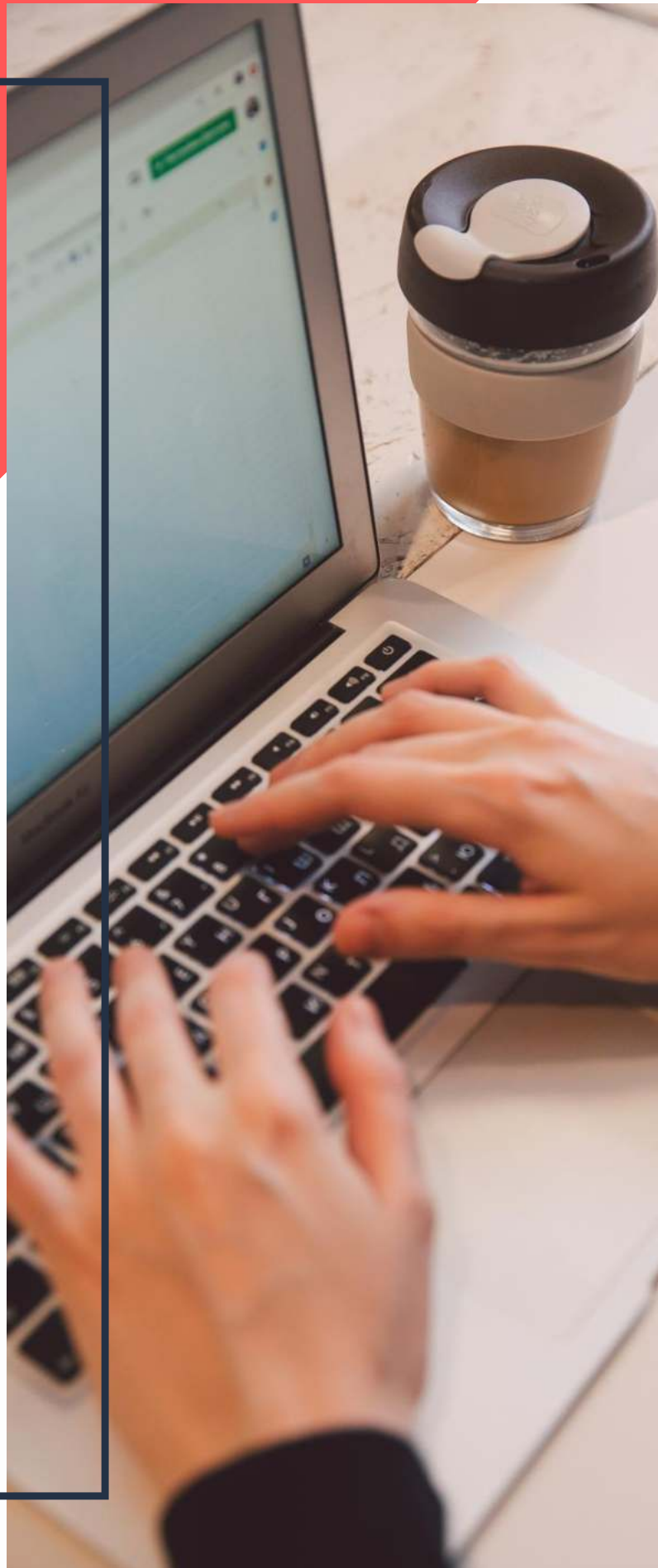
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Exclusive Interview

## ADIL MALIA

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE - THE FIRM**

**EX- GROUP PRESIDENT HR - ESSAR GROUP / DIRECTOR SOUTH WEST ASIA - COCA COLA**

***You had a distinguished career and worked with Global MNC's such as GE, M&S, and Coca-Cola and worked with large Indian origin global firms like Godrej & Essar, what are the key commonalities and leanings you see?***

Before I answer your question, let me put-up a general qualification. Each organisation is unique by itself. No two companies, even if they are Indian Companies, Indian MNCs, or Global MNCs, are the same. They may be similar in nature, character and behaviour but they are certainly not the same. However, here are the 10 commonalities I have experienced & observed in MNCs, generally:

- Passionate drive towards enterprise purpose
- Belief in process orientation
- Giving 'No Frills' performance feedbacks and pure objectivity built around it
- Agility & empowerment in decision making
- Authentic commitment to build a 'Learning Culture' and making significant investments in the development of people.
- Compliance & adherence to committed 'Value Systems'
- The scope provided for 'Innovation & Creativity'
- A serious commitment to developing employability and offering long-term career coaching to people
- Belief in partnering for CSR
- Greater reliance on Data Analytics, Business Intelligence, Metricisation & Scorecards.

***What has been your key to success?***

Firstly, there is nothing like being born with a Midas touch. There is no magic dust that can make you succeed without putting in extreme smart efforts. Success is never an outcome of one particular thing. It is an outcome of collective capabilities you bring to the table, which, when blended with other things, makes one successful in most situations. The blended alchemy of all the below mentioned 10 processes, helps the leader be a corporate alchemist - and make Gold.

These are:

- i. Infectious self-confidence that makes other people believe you and seeks to be part of your team
- ii. Sincere commitment to purpose
- iii. Ability to work very hard
- iv. Getting into the depth of situations & details
- v. A 'can-do' attitude backed by resilience
- vi. Effective communications & presentation skills
- vii. Building emotional linkages and strong inter personal skills
- viii. Focus on getting to happiness & never minding the little rubs you get on the way
- IX. Understanding business with the ability to link your knowledge of specialised field to achieving the larger business purpose.
- X. Being a Good Human Being, above everything else.

***The nature of work has changed dramatically with COVID 19. How do you think HR can effectively engage with employees virtually?***

Business through its Leadership has to continue creating value within the framework of the economic opportunity prevailing at that given point of time, using Talent, Finance & technology, as its driving resources to fulfill the needs of its customers for products or services. That is and will continue to be the over-arching business primer forever.

The old paradigm was - any which ways, shifting. We have all been talking about it. Only the triggering date was not pre-determined, we were all anyways living in VUCA times. 'COVID 19' became that Black Swan Event, which suddenly led to its 'Tipping-Point' situation and much faster than the estimated time. Much like the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back.

Meaningful use of Artificial Intelligence, Big Data Analytics, Remote Access Reach-Out options, Machine learning, use of Robotics, Humanoids and such other quality & value added tools are now easily available in the new digital technological platforms. Rather than relying on the extended 'fuddy-duddy' old world tools and techniques, HR leaders need to research and arrive at new employee insights and adopt new tools and techniques. Perceived is an acute need to design and offer a set of new Value Propositions to the employees to develop Strategic Employee Connections, Engagement, Situational Motivation, and faster and sharper communications through internal communication channels and external social media in the new situation. Only then will HR indeed succeed in the new paradigm else it will fall by the way-side.



*Success is never an outcome of one particular thing. It is an outcome of collective capabilities you bring to the table, which, when blended with other things, makes one successful in most situations.*

***With your rich experience, you would have come across many unprecedented situations that did not have plug and play solutions. Please take us through one of your unique experiences, which can be learning for all of us.***

I have handled many adversity challenges in my career. But let me recall this one purely for it's learning worthiness.

I was in a Key SW-Asia People leadership role with Coca-Cola when the controversial Pesticides issue had hit the nation for the first time. The sudden & immediate negative impact of the same on the business was disastrous. Without knowing the nature of the problem, the nation's emotional fury was unleashed on all beverage Companies. But that is the nature of adversity and its impact, whenever it strikes. Of course, through wisdom & systematic planning, the issue was subsequently handled effectively, the key lessons learnt for adversity management from this are:

- Adversity has to be managed through systematic, structured, and well thought- out planning. Adhoc solutions don't help
- Your team has to be with you supporting fully with their hearts, minds and emotions throughout the crisis. They should know the facts and should back you. Their morale is critical
- Authentic and continuous communications with all stakeholders have to be systematically planned. This has to go beyond a few formal messages from CEO and Board media releases. It is more about conversations, and this includes allowing people to hyperventilate
- Top Management should be kept fully aware, and they should have signed- up to support the fight-back plan. If not, unnecessarily, heads will get rolled as part of the knee- jerk reaction.
- Commitment, Patience, Stamina, Resilience, and Maniacal drive to recover are the 5 super leadership traits required to re-emerge from adversity impacted situations.

***You have seen HR evolve, where do you see HR heading towards in the next decade?***

A loud need is being called-out for HR to become a Reliable Business Confederator. Gone are the days of 'Touchy-Feely' unverified & uncorroborated activities which often got carried out under the disguise of being HR interventions.

I see HR becoming more sensitive to employee needs on the one hand and becoming much more contributory and business relevant on the other hand. The mundane, repetitive, informative, administrative and non-value added aspects of HR will naturally outsource to specialised agencies that will build those unique capabilities. What will continue to be managed internally by the Corporate HR departments will be those activities that are unique, critical, differentiated business value-adding and require sensitive hand-holding, trust, and specialised knowledge of its business Value Chain & Culture.



***With COVID, organisations have resorted to no increment and bonuses and some have resorted to pay cuts as well. With employee motivation down how do you think the HR leaders should approach the situation to keep motivating the employees and keep them going?***

Let me share my two analogies with you which are in the form of 'asks' from our leadership handling the current situation.

Firstly, the leader should think like a 'Surgeon' in an operating theatre. The toxic part in the body has to be surgically removed but it also has to be ensured that the same does not end up cutting so deep that it critically damages the muscles or cuts the veins and nerves in the process. Remedy could then be worse than the disease. Cost-cutting is important for business at all times, not only COVID times. But momentarily, let us agree that we need cost management much more now in the post COVID times. However, be cautioned to ensure that you do not end up cutting so deep that you mindlessly end up damaging the enterprise's basic functioning for the future.

Secondly, a leader has to be like James Bond. Remember, he loves his Martinis 'stirred not shaken'!!! Therefore, a leader in post COVID times needs to stir up his people and awaken them to the new realities and ask for them to give stretch performances. However, he needs to ensure that he does not shake them up so badly that they become depressed and unable to perform.



## Spotlight

**SREEKANTH K  
ARIMANITHAYA****GLOBAL TALENT AND ENABLEMENT  
SERVICES LEADER, EY GLOBAL DELIVERY  
SERVICES AT EY GDS****HR PRIEST AND HIS SUCCESS SUTRAS**

Sreekanth Arimanithaya, popularly known as Sreekanth, was born in a family of priests in a temple town and was destined to become a priest himself.

But rising above his family's financially-constrained situation right from his childhood days by selling fruits, crackers, and whatever else he could to the visiting devotees, he gradually made his way to becoming one of India's youngest HR leaders.

A business leader with over two decades of multi-faceted experience in Business Transformation, HR Management, Supply Chain, IT and Quality (TQM, PCMM, Six Sigma and COPC), Sreekanth has worked on key leadership roles for top multinationals like Britannia, Toyota, Phillips, General Electric and CA Technologies, to name a few. Currently, he is the Global Talent and enablement services leader for EY GDS.

Sreekanth is based at Bengaluru and plays a strategic role in the success of its global business. His prior assignments include Managing Director-India and Global Head—Workforce Management of the \$8 billion Computer Sciences Corporation (CSC). He has had experience in manufacturing, FMCG, software, ITES, and BPO sectors in a global business environment. He is known for his expertise in transforming organisations through HR and building innovative HR practices to drive excellence and growth.

Sreekanth believes that the true strength of any organisation is its manpower, and good manpower is the handiwork of a good HR boss. Sreekanth had worked under some great professors, coaches & industry leaders, and he shared his learning sutras from each of them in his journey so far with us:

- Prof Shaktidharan used to teach him Psychology was far-sighted hence understood and nurtured Sreekanth's potential.
- Prof TS Thomas taught him how to deal with one-on-one situations, group work—dealing and transforming groups/ teams using group dynamics intervention. He helped Shree to develop and master leadership competence.
- Coach Ashwatha Ramaiah identified his right talent and skill and gave him opportunity. He introduced Sree to Bharat Silks, owned by the Goenkas, who were famous silk exporters.
- Narsimha Bhat, Executive Director-HR, Namaste Export taught him the importance of family values and the real meaning of the words—audacity and authenticity.
- B Jayaram, Executive Director- HR at the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Ltd (KIOCL), had been the stepping stone of his career and success. He taught Sree to respect his seniors, connect with people, how an HR's work was related to the business, and to learn to imitate and copy people's best practices without any inhibition.

- Ueno San was a tough leader at Toyota, Japan under whom he learnt Japanese management principles and their way of thinking, TPS (Toyota Production System), and leadership behaviour.
- C Mahalingam, Head of HR, Philips Software, brought him to the world of IT, which was slowly booming in India. He was a great mentor who taught processes, discipline, and orientation.
- Praveen Chand Tatavarthi, a phenomenally humble leader & Chief Operating Officer, GE, inspired Sree with his simplicity, approachability and humility.
- Andy Goodman was the global head of HR, GE, from whom Sree learned about empowerment - empowering teams and trusting them to bring out their best.
- Andy Goodman was the global head of HR, GE, from whom Sree learned about empowerment - empowering teams and trusting them to bring out their best.
- CEO Mike Lawrie and CHRO Jo Mason, Computer Science Corporation are the reason he joined CSC, and they were fantastic leaders inspiring him with their thoughts and clear vision.

Sreekanth took his mentors' teachings and applied them in his growing journey as HR leader. Some of these practical notions helped him achieve great success in his career. These learnings are as much important for the common man as for any HR professional. Sreekanth's seven success sutras in his own words:

1. Leadership and learning are indispensable to each other. I continue to learn every day and also prepare others to learn. Just as my teachers influenced my life positively, I also try to do so by sharing my new learnings with my colleagues to make a difference in their lives and careers.
2. Be humble. Look back to your career journey and thank all those who made a difference in your life. Keep in touch and acknowledge them every time you get an opportunity.
3. Create a purpose in your life and career. Build passion around this purpose and invite others (your team and stakeholders) to be a part of this journey towards excellence.
4. Execution of your company's growth strategy is all about discipline and practice. Practice it every day.
5. Build a strong execution infrastructure and support it by having sound management systems to achieve your organization's growth targets.
6. Take people along with you because no one can do it alone. Share your vision/ goals with your team. Identify common needs and align them well. Share your success with the team.
7. We are living in an agile world. So, prepare yourself and your team for change. Focus on continuous improvement and a hunger for excellence.

Sreekanth has taken his experiences and knowledge and shared it with others wholeheartedly. He swears by sharing whatever he learns in his inspiring journey as a successful HR leader. He doesn't feel his day is complete unless he shares his learnings with his colleagues and teams. His wife inspired him to be happy and keep others happy. Celebrating success and sharing it with others is essential, but keeping it simple is the key to real happiness.

*Create a purpose in your life and career. Build passion around this purpose and invite others (your team and stakeholders) to be a part of this journey towards excellence.*





## Food for Thought

### APARAJEETA SARMAH

**DIRECTOR HR  
METLIFE GLOBAL OPERATIONS SUPPORT  
CENTER**

## TAKE A BREAK

In the last four months, more than ever, we see individuals racing from one busy moment to the next before collapsing into bed, then getting up and doing it again tomorrow. Employees all over the world are stretching to keep their jobs and families together.

Do we see exhaustion, irritability, cynicism in the team, but often we are in a hurry to move on to the next case and dole out a quick fix solution? Ever wondered whether it is possible for one to be sitting in burnout and still be hitting targets, knocking over KPIs, and even winning awards regularly?

It is also equally true that in the last few months, employees are hardly taking a break. Leave utilization across corporates are at an all-time low. So, here are some ways in which managers can step in:

- 1. Take a few minutes today and choose an upcoming date to take PTO.**
- 2. In your next team meeting, tell your team how you're taking care of yourself.**
- 3. Encourage employees to leverage work breaks for recharging and unwinding.**
- 4. Work with your team to ensure people take turns to be on leave.**

The most frequently asked question is, "There's nowhere to go, what do I do by taking leaves?"

*Remember, our careers matter: Do we want to upskill/ reskill to stay pertinent in the future?*



*Re-evaluate priorities: Are we overwhelmed with our daily routines and pursuing things that ultimately aren't meaningful? Should anything unforeseen happen, how would we restructure our finances?*

*Reconnect with the community: Connect with people who share your passion. Give time to your inner circle.*



In the last few weeks, a dear colleague was hospitalized due to COVID, a friend and his wife lost their jobs in a matter of 7 days, and a cousin decided to pack his bags to go back to his hometown. The common aspect that helped them accept and cope with the situations was their 'inner circle'- their friends and family who stood by them.

We often believe bad things only happen to others. Other people have problems. They don't plan, don't act, and aren't paying attention, which leads to issues they can't deal with. That kind of thing happens to other people. It can't happen to me – until it does!

So, take a break, tune into yourselves, and afterward, tune into your work with greater motivation and focus!!

## DEBAJYOTI MOHANTY

GENERAL MANAGER, GLOBAL HRBP  
TECHNOLOGY & TRANSFORMATION  
A.P. MOLLER - MAERSK



### THE PLATFORM ORGANISATION

Organizations around the world are designing new forms of structures in order to deal with the challenges of advances in information technology and digitization that promote increases in customization and innovation in the face of global competition and changing customer needs. Number of Technology firms are now in the midst of a revolution—they are turning themselves into Internet-based “platform company” that is made up of micro-enterprises which are run by internal entrepreneurs. Micro-enterprises promote benefits of cohesiveness, innovation, productivity, wider interoperability between organisation and it’s environment. The idea is to create an organization that is extremely responsive to customer needs and cultivates new ideas and builds quick innovative solution through the active involvement of the customer, leveraging the internal & external ecosystem.



A platform is a micro-enterprise, that moulds structures, shaping them into well-known forms, such as the hierarchy, the matrix and even the network, but in an ever-evolving manner. Platforms are not technologies but scalable collaboration agreement. Building products and services through enabled value-creation by both inside and outside entities; the platform provider of course in turn benefits from the ecosystem which emerges around its platform. Apple’s App Store is a platform for app developers. Airbnb is a platform for “sharing” of apartments. Amazon offers multiple technological platforms for other companies to build their services upon. eBay is a platform for selling one’s products...

Platform organizations increasingly see themselves as a continuum, encompassing employees, partners, collaborators and other players from the ecosystem —exploring open innovation strategies with start-ups, developers and more. The Platform organisation greatest ability is to use Technology not as something that gets in the way but use it as an enabler and driver of continuous innovation and adaptation. It enables the organisation to move with greater agility, flexibly and at a greater scale than competition.

## Hiring Returns To Retail Sector as India Continues to Unlock

With the country moving forward into the Unlock 3.0 phase, green shoots are slowly emerging in the retail sector. The field, which employs around five crore people and accounts for 10% of the GDP, has started hiring across major cities.

According to the latest data from American employment-related search engine Indeed, four out of the top five cities, including Bengaluru, have seen hiring activity in the sector during July.

While Chennai has seen the highest double-digit growth (11%) in hiring activity, Pune (7.5%) and Bengaluru (5%) have seen single-digit year-on-year growth in retail jobs in July. Kolkata also witnessed positive momentum. Among the major metros, only Mumbai saw a fall in hiring in the retail sector with a contraction of 7.7% over the same month last year.

Bengaluru holds the largest share of jobs in the retail sector nationally, with 12% of all such jobs located in the city. It is followed by Mumbai at 8% and Chennai at 6%. Kolkata and Pune stand next with 4.5% and 4% of retail jobs respectively.

"The need for steady jobs in retail continues. In the wake of the pandemic, essential services continue to drive demand and we see a movement of offline retailer jobs to the online space. However, despite the temporary slump in the sector, retail will be one of the foremost drivers of employment as we slowly move into Unlock 3.0," Sashi Kumar, Managing Director, Indeed India, told DH.

Overall, the sector has seen 22% decline in the number of postings during this period. Job searches, on the contrary, dropped by 7%. Pre-pandemic, retail job searches were growing at 7% between February 2019 and February 2020. By the end of March this year, retail remained one of the few sectors in India where business continued to operate.

"The pandemic has impacted businesses across the globe. It has given us a vital lesson of reinventing in these times," Arvind Mediratta, MD & CEO, Metro Cash & Carry India, said.

The company, which has not resorted to layoffs or pay cuts during the lockdown, is among those that have recruited in this period. It has hired a fresh batch of management trainees.

Data from Indeed reveals that the top five retail job titles clicked by job-seekers are store manager, retail sales associate, branch manager, teller and cashier. The top five titles that are being hired are branch manager, retail sales associate, store manager, teller and logistics associate.

*\*as reported by Deccan Herald*



## Food for Thought

### SANCHITA SANYAL

SENIOR MANAGER 2 - HUMAN CAPITAL  
PWC IAC



#### Importance of an Authentic Workplace Culture – The Only Truly Sustainable Competitive Advantage

It is sacrosanct to build a congenial work environment that fosters superlative performance of the employees for the ultimate success of organizations. Organizational success eludes when people are not on board because people work efficiently only when they feel good in a stress-free environment. If you take the current scenario as an example, employees are forced to work remotely with little or no supervision and their productivity is entirely influenced by intrinsic motivational factors. Thus, it is crucial to build a positive work culture that encourages teamwork, collaboration and morale which in turn increases job satisfaction ultimately reducing employee burnout and unhealthy turnover.

Everything that contributes to the emotional and relational environment of your workplace will define its culture. Let's examine three important factors.

#### *Enhance Livability*

Leaders play a pivotal role in the best interest of the employees by taking a holistic approach, considering all aspects of an employee – both professional and personal, in driving employee welfare and policy making. This would mean taking a paradigm shift from the erstwhile 'customer centric' approach to a novel 'employee centric' approach by enhancing the employee experience at every 'moment of truth'. It is a well laid fact that happy employees will eventually create happy customers.

An organization must be personified by integrating a set of core values systems within the organizational personality that guides decision making at both macro and micro levels. The values must be powerful enough to unify a highly diverse workgroup to work towards a singularity – the success of every individual and the organization. Ultimately, employees tend to be more sincere and faithful to organizations that live up to their strong value systems.

#### *Responsibility*

#### *Embrace Design Excellence*

In order to cater to the highly dynamic client requirements and to sustain the headwinds brought on by the changing market conditions, organizations must take ownership in upskilling the professionals digitally by investing in disruptive technologies and by augmenting the digital capabilities of its workforce. Remember, if you do not innovate, your competitor will.

Work culture guides employee decisions and how they interact with the others. Good culture creates an internal coherence in actions taken by a very diverse group of employees. With improved learning, health and tolerance, combined with opportunities to come together as one, culture enhances employees' quality of life and increases the overall well-being for both individuals and communities.



## SUKHPREET SWARAN SANDHU

HEAD HR  
SPINNY

### Managing the Real Change: Virtual, the New Reality Way!

The last few months have been challenging and exciting for all the organizations to manage the real change with a digital revolution that has knocked our doors with a twist. Things are not the same, workforce dynamics have started changing, and people's emotional sentiments related to organizations have got realigned. With so much going on, what holds for HR professionals is to manage talent with innovative and fresh tailor-made practices to meet the current and future trends.

In the last few months, we have seen a shift in the mindset: of customers and employees both! While many firms have done quite a lot, I must say; we have done things around keeping things basic, aligned to fundamentals. Simple and highly effective:

#### *Work from anywhere*

Being the first in our kind of business to take this decision. We have announced permanent work from home to all our corporate staff & roles wherein no customer interaction is needed. This has brought a very favourable employee experience. The decision was not easy, but we made sure that our employees get the best! And no place is better than being with your family- all safe physically and mentally.

#### *Rapid Action Force*

Well, not the force you just thought of! We have formed an internal rapid response team to provide ground support to anyone who gets stuck anywhere while on the field or working from home. This has enabled the presence of the respective HR partners highly visible despite being virtual, leading to world-class employee experience.

#### *The Human Touch*

The HR team at Spinnny has Weekly/ Fortnightly/ Monthly check-ins with employees- and more often, especially with the field teams; on-ground support extended to them. With zero compromises on employees' mental health, we have empanelled doctors for free online consultations for employees & their families ranging from COVID-19 to dealing with anxieties, nutrition & diet, etc. leading to holistic employee wellness.

#### *Unwell? Just Rest!*

Allowing anyone with mild symptoms to rest and take off from work until completely fine. The HR team is closely monitoring such cases and providing adequate support in the form of counselling their family members if need be. As a part of our benefits program, we have extended the health insurance coverage to our frontline employees' family members, ensuring they are worry-free in case of any unforeseen situations.

#### *Periodic Townhalls*

Communication and transparency are two things one needs to maintain, more so during these days. We have held Townhalls wherein employees get real-time business updates and get a platform to clarify their doubts directly with the leadership teams and the founding members.

Highly people-oriented and agile practices have been a game-changer for us. Focus on competence, skill-building, and weaving the employee's contribution to the leader objective- in even more transparent manner are some of the key aspects that we have looked upon while managing the impact of this long-lasting change.



Young Yodas

**NEHA KHANNA**

**HEAD OF TALENT ACQUISITION  
LIDO LEARNING**

## Artificial Intelligence will take away the Human from Human Resource?

One of the most talked-about and highly debated drifts in the modern organisations regarding HR Technology has been Artificial Intelligence (AI). HR is facing a radical shift manoeuvred by technology, and most researchers like to believe that AI will be the game-changer for higher productivity and efficiency in HR. It began with talent acquisition and is moving fully across various other areas like performance management to succession planning. While it is seen that AI is for the well-being of the organization and is vital for its success and long-standing health, there is also the fear and insecurity among employees that increased automation may reduce the employment rate.

The scope of AI is disputed, as the machines become increasingly capable, tasks considered as requiring "intelligence" are often removed from the definition. In any operation, AI reduces the need for manual involvement - and HR is not immune to that. AI presents an opportunity for HR to automate "repetitive, low-value add tasks" and increase the focus on more strategic work. For years, companies have been collecting data on their employees & customers to gain insights to predict future behaviour. HR teams have a lot of catching up to do in leveraging these people's analytics. Determining what data to track, analyze, manage, and protect will enable AI to play a more significant role within HR.

AI is not a magical computerized persona; it is a wide range of algorithms and machine learning tools that can rapidly ingest data, identify patterns, and optimize and predict trends. The systems can understand speech, identify photos, and use pattern matching to pick up signals about mood, honesty, and even personality. These algorithms are not "intuitive" like human beings, but they are fast, so they can analyze millions of pieces of information in seconds and quickly correlate them against patterns.

However, all these applications are new and as exciting as they seem, there are plenty of risks to worry about. The biggest is that AI cannot work without "Training data." In other words, the algorithms learn from the past. We need AI that is transparent and "tuneable" to inspect the algorithms to make sure they're doing the right things. The success of AI Driven tools will depend on the accuracy and completeness of its algorithms, the ease of use of its systems, and the ability to provide very specific solutions that solve your problems.

Another significant aspect that AI technology lacks is empathy and human interaction or the opportunity to handpick a candidate and get to know them personally during the recruitment process which simply cannot be done at this time while relying on AI technology. AI sees data whereas humans sense emotion, and this is something that will not be changing in the foreseeable future; hence it's not that easy to take "Humans" out of Human resources.

Despite these challenges and risks, the upside is enormous. As AI systems in HR get smarter, more proven, and more focused on specific problems, I believe we will see dramatic improvements in productivity, performance, and employee wellbeing. We just have to be patient, vigilant, and willing to invest.



## TEAM TALENT

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