

HR PRACTITIONER'S CAREER ADVANCEMENT: AN INDIAN PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract HRM as a function in management has undergone considerable changes and is continuing to undergo changes in the post liberalization era. This study aims to understand how a person in the middle management positions in HR, cope up to the dynamism and what they do to constantly progress in their career. Through elicitation interview, items were identified and based on the knowledge, an interview was conducted with HR professionals. The middle level managers who are operational specialists will have to move to a broader perspective to rise to strategic levels and advance their career. Identifying skill sets required by the specific industry and networking required for progression should become a personal agenda for drawing road map to achieve career advancement.

Keywords: Career Advancement, Career Planning, Middle Level HR Managers, Dynamism in HR Functions, Qualitative Research.

1. DYNAMICS IN HRM FUNCTION

Globalization has opened ways to mergers and acquisitions of companies across nations. This reflects in the managerial functions of all the domains in an organization. HRM as a function in management has undergone considerable changes and is continuing to undergo changes. This phenomenon has not failed to capture the interest of academia and lots are written tracing the dynamism in HR function in the recent past. Jo Causon (2009) points out that HR has moved on a long way from being seen as a 'hiring and firing' function within organizations. In the past decade much work has been undertaken to position HR as a strategic function whose role is central to an organizations' success. HR can play a role in communicating future plans and supporting the business, so that the function is looked as helpful in building positive future for the organization. Mohanty (2000) points out that HRM today deals with management of value, cultural diversity, leadership styles in a different country.

In 1999, Barbara, on studying the changing requirements of HR functions pointed out that the changing dynamics in corporate business scenario has made HR functions to move from a function that took care of the 'employment for the management' to a function that provided 'HR management

systems for managers' to use. In a multinational company, the HR functions are moving away from the basic functional areas of staffing, compensation, benefits and employee relations to the new model of developing organizational development skills and building a stronger understanding of the business in order to contribute as a business partner.

In late 1989 Society for Human Recourse Management (SHRM) commissioned a research study to create an overview of current and emerging competitive and organizational trends in business, to examine and characterize the evolving role of the HR functions relative to these trends and to describe the competencies instrumental to the success of top HR leaders. The study set the following objectives to question the following:

1. What pressure do organizations face today and what they do to remain competitive globally in the future?
2. Towards ensuring a unique source of competitive advantage, what is the role of the human resource function and in what manner is this role changing?
3. What behavioral characteristics and personal attributes differentiate superior HR incumbent performance from that of average performance, given the changing role expectations?

Lawson and Limbrick (1996) who undertook the study for SHRM attempted at clarifying and quantifying senior level HR competency model- the characteristics of highly effective HR leaders. Through the model they defined and described the competencies and related behavior required for superior performing HR leaders from both the chief executive office, and the HR practitioner's perspective. 23 CEOs representing organizations with annual revenues and assets of \$12 million to \$17.8 billion ranging from industries in the category of mining, manufacturing, transportation, communication, wholesale, retailing, financial services, education to name the most important ones were interviewed through telephone. The CEO's were asked to describe the organizations' issues in the next 2/3 years, the HR issues in specific in the coming years and finally the skills, personal attributes, capabilities that is expected of senior HR professional. Results revealed that CEO's expect their HR function to have in-depth knowledge of the business, focus on business issues and strategies having HR implications, supporting line operations, providing HR flexible capabilities, and enhancing the competence level of the HR staff. CEOs wanted their HR senior professionals to be visionary, proactive, innovative and aggressive in their approach. As a second phase to this study, a focus group interview was conducted with 30 high performing senior level HR professionals from six local SHRM chapters throughout the US to develop competency model for HR top professionals. Senior level HR competency model focuses on 1. Goal and action management 2. HR technical proficiency 3. Business Knowledge 4. Influence management 5. Functional and organizational leadership.

Another study on globalization and its effect on HR function was undertaken by Rosenzweig and Nohria (1994). They point out that market requires senior level HR professionals to further their competence upgrading, so that they can understand the appropriate linkages between global and country specific business strategies and the strategic human resource management practices that are most suitable in each country and regional operating environment. Senior HR professionals require insight into the forces that shape decision making on the specific human resources practices needed in their organizations various country affiliate as these practices will differ from local practices vis-à-vis parent HR practices.

While the function of HR is changing continuously, competencies of the HR managers also need to be changing all the time. Friedman (2007) reiterates that as organizations globalize, cultural sensitivity and understanding is vital for HR managers to add value. Globalization increases the mix of culture, language, perspectives as well as the number of expatriates. Barry argues that merger and acquisition is making Strategic Partner Role the centre for HR functions. Since globalization, doing business across distinct cultures, languages and legal environment has forced Human

Resources to take up the role of change agent. Since globalization forces organizations to deliver products and services in an effective, fast and cost efficient manner HR functions demands an administrative expert role too. To ensure maximization of employees' contribution to the organization and advocate for employees rights HR also plays an employee champion role.

To add perspective from the point of the most important stakeholder to an organization namely the investors Ulrich and Bank (2005) argue that HR must provide value to their organization as viewed by investors, line managers and employees and that this value results in competence advantage. To help organizations remain competitive human resource management must refine its role and organizational contributions.

Change in workplace dynamics of corporate enterprise has effected considerable changes in human resources (HR) function. Heaton and Ackah (2006) explore through their study that efforts are on way to restructure HR into 3 specialist functions of strategic partners, centers of excellence and shared services. Individuals in HR career must find ways to maximize career opportunities and crucially recognize that they must be prepared to move jobs to maintain career progression.

Out sourcing for efficiency and cost cutting has come of age in all areas of management. Human Resource outsourcing is becoming increasingly prevalent. The number of companies outsourcing HR activities continues to rise and the scope of outsourced HR activities is on the expand. "With a 40 million workforce, India is one of the largest markets in the world. The organized sector of HR servicing caters to about two per cent of the total market. However, the unorganized sector enjoys a significant market share in HR servicing in India ("HR outsourcing few takers", 2002). There are various functions under human resources that can be out sourced. Some of the processes include payroll, administration, employee benefits, hiring and firing, background interviews, exit interviews, wage review to name a few. Out sourcing noncore activities gives opportunities to get away from the routine day to day operations to more strategic roles. "The estimated value of human resource outsourcing is reportedly \$78 billion globally by McKinsey report but India has very few players to exploit the Opportunity" ("HR outsourcing few takers", 2002). Thus human resource management which was primarily concerned with functions like recruitment, staffing, wages, training is now taking a paradigm shift in terms of its functions.

1.1. Country Specific HRM Studies

Taking a look at HRM practices, Valle et al (2001) opines that HRM plays an important role and will continue to create

value in Spanish companies. Some of the indications leading to this assertion include the fact that professional HRM is enjoying a period of growth in respect of recognition of its value to the organization, which is to some extent also reflected in a substantial increase in remuneration to the senior HR executives. The great weakness in Spain is that it still needs to “come to terms” with the strategic value of human element.

HRM practices in Singapore were studied by Irena and Mark (1997). Through this study the authors established contacts with 2042 companies of which 408 companies participated in the actual study. Of the 408 participating companies, 190 were reported to have HR department. Results indicate a shift from the traditional or conscious economic strategy to the new techno human paradigm. HRM is in a state of rapid development as well as fundamental change. Strategic human resource management is a new concept, which bridges HRM and corporate strategy. Study concludes that companies in Singapore have a long way to go to the strategic HRM. Very few HR directors are involved in Business strategy, although HR practitioners are becoming to be aware of the importance of strategic HRM. Therefore, HR functions in Singapore need to shift from an administrative to a process orientation so that it can flexibly reconcile the organization paradoxes inherent in the activities of global firms.

Cerdin and Reretti (2001) while studying the trend and Emerging Values in Human Resource Management in France, say that HR function indicates that it should move towards a strategic role. A move towards people management is also perceived. Four HRM practices are particularly idiosyncratic to the French context and deserve particular consideration 1. Career management, 2. Recruitment, 3. Training and 4. Compensation. The performance of French HR function can be assessed along the 4 lines of 1. Administrative Expert, 2. Strategic Partner 3. Change agent 4. Employee Champion.

Under such dynamic situation and changing profile of the HR functions, it is interesting to study how a person in the middle management position in HR copes up to the dynamism and what they do to constantly progress in their career. This study thus sets its objectives as follows:

2. OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

1. To understand the career advancement plans of HR manager at the middle level.
2. To understand what skill sets are needed to scale to the higher echelon in HR function.
3. To understand what aids them in acquiring the competencies that will promote them from the middle level to the top-level HR careers.

3. CAREER ADVANCEMENT

Managers in the past normally followed well-established career paths. These career paths were structured in the corporate systems. Though an element of performance criteria was important, time was a very crucial element in career advancement. Even today in teaching profession an Assistant Professor need to put in 5 years of experience before becoming a Professor. Today a rigid vertical career path in management is no longer the dominant route of career advancement. An organization needs a vertical and horizontal integration of previously demarcated management functions and tasks to facilitate advancement in career. Kelly and Gennard (2000) observe that all managers now undertake a wider range of skills rather than a limited range of specialized ones. They reiterate that to advance career managers need to become generalists with a core specialism, rather than specialists. Arthur (1994) observes that traditionally career saw people in orderly employment arrangements consisting of a steady series of upward moves with increasing income, status, power and security generally within a single mainly large and stable organization. Cappelli (2000) argued that the order and predictability in the growth of individual's profession associated with the traditional career is no longer the norm. Today's careers are more internationally oriented, flexible and mobile with goals defined by individuals.

David and John (1994) point out that job security is being replaced by continuous employability, which is only possible if the skills, knowledge and experience are up to date. The new role of middle managers are more demanding and are placing renewed emphasis on keeping themselves current. Mallon (1999) explores that new thinking on career suggests that employees are less reliant on employers to ‘manage’ career and more interested in acquiring marketable skills to add to a portfolio, which will facilitate greater mobility between functions and organizations.

Spence (1973) points out that individuals make human capital investment decisions on career progression if they are convinced that their knowledge and skills acquired through the investment will be purchased by the employer. Level of education, specialized technical training and job experience are some traits expected by employers. “If work experience aids as competency building block in India professional employees expect a big investment in continuing education as a part of their employment for their career progression”. Grossman (1997)

Belden (1992) on studying how to Continue Professional Growth in the information system profession says continuing personal growth on the part of the Information System Professional is not something that one does. It is a function of how an individual's perspective is shaped. This attitude will have at least five facets.

1. Orientation: to the future is essential.
2. Optimism: to leave things in a better shape than the one in which they were found.
3. Curiosity and Diversity: It is no longer possible for an information system professional to delve on one field say material handling or costing and imagine that growth would come automatically.
4. Humor: Humor should be understood as to avoid self destruction while pursuing one's professional growth and be non -chalant at downfalls.
5. ACTIVITY: Meaningful activity would keep a person away from drifting and straying. Information Science professional's activity or process adopted for the company should significantly enhance the performance of the company.

Taking career advancement to the level of students a study conducted by F Hallam et al., (2009) evaluated the MBA programs. Numerical values were assigned to MBA programs on a scale of 1-5 (1 lowest to 5 highest) according to the extent of coverage and level of commitment regarding career management topics. A program received the lowest score of 1 if the school offers only basic career services for initial job placement. A score of 2 represents expanded career services such as offering workshops or seminars on career self assessment and long term career development. A score of 3 represents an elective course containing career management topics specifically mentioned in the MBA curriculum. If such a course is offered for all MBA students, then the school is given a score of 4. A score of 5 was reserved for programs with a required course that went beyond issues of initial job placement and added topics such as self efficacy, coping with job loss and mid -career transitions. After all mid-career transition and stagnation need not be addressed after the occurrence of the phenomena, students can be prepared to foresee it if not avoid the phase, and prepare a road map of their career advancement.

It is common wisdom that middle managers face a plateau before raising to the top managerial level. Over the course of career, few situations create as many internal struggles as those times when a plateau is reached in career progression. Max (1991) through their research brought out that 100% of CFOs consider the CMA certificate an important benchmark of achievement. This credential expands the breadth of knowledge, reinforces expertise as a professional and builds personal sense of accomplishment. 82% of executives of large companies consider a post graduate degree to be important in reaching top management positions. It is important to note that CMA certificate is a benchmark for career progression in the financial area to the top management position. It is interesting to find out what courses or programs would make the HR professional reach the top management level.

3.1. Career Advancement in HRM Field

Spence (1973) reiterates that HR Director's service radiate 'signals' of characteristics and attributes that is expected to rise to the level of a Director in a company. Individuals managers pick up these 'signals' and invest on them to acquire and develop the attributes to gain Director Status. If personal/HR managers realize that the top management appreciates and values broader business experience and functional specialization, then individual aspiring managers strive to acquire those traits through various means.

As far as HR being a profession a person who is employed today is compelled to own responsibility to his personal growth and development. This keeps them in the path of adding new skills to develop their core identity. This initiative adds value to them and to the organization they work for. On discussing how to execute an effective career advancement for learning and development managers there are conflicting views that some are of the opinion that training professionals should develop a wider role in the HR and Core business knowledge of the company working for, while others see expanding the core job as the best way to progress. The take home point is that L & D professionals can no longer afford to be solely interested in training but must be aware of wider HR and business issues.

While exploring the professional expertise of HR managers and looking at their professional advancement it can be suggested that HR developers as individuals as well as professional community are still constructing their professional history including conceptions and interpretations of their professional expertise. This is being done by work experience and interpretations of it in numerous organizational contexts involving business oriented and individual requirements.

Ackah and Heaton (2003) in their study focused on career patterns and career progression of men and women working in HRM. The study investigates whether a professional HR qualification had the same impact upon career progression for male/female. 150 male and female HRM professionals of the University of Ulster were contacted through postal questionnaire. With 35 percent response rate the findings suggest that the career of male and female managers do differ even after a PGD in HRM, with men receiving more internal promotions, while women were more likely to seek career progression in another organization and to be less successful in terms of earnings. Many of the female HR managers claimed that negative influence upon their career had been a lack of role models and a lack of self-confidence.

Career advancement is also effected by mentoring programs. The scope of mentoring is wide and it is considered an effective way to climb up the ladder from the middle management level to the top management level. Kogler Hill

and Bahniuk (1998) while studying the role of mentoring on career progression viewed mentoring from such different perspective as management, communication, education and career development. A mentor may be involved in one of four career stages apprentice, colleague, mentor and sponsor. Each stage requires different task, types of relationship and psychological adjustments.

The change of roles in HR has not only affected the progression from middle management to the top management but it has also got some bearings on the educational system and pedagogy. De Cieri et al., (2005) feel the increased demand placed upon HRM by globalization warrants increased attention to the domains. Increased internationalization has its implication on pedagogy and content for educators especially for programs like MBA specializing in Human Resource Management.

Yeung et al., (1996) conducted a study based on in-depth interviews with ten senior HR executives. A HR competency model, which is both generic and specific, were evolved. The outcome of the study highlights on the following: HR professionals require new competencies and some of the competency identified by senior HR professional are:

1. Solid Knowledge of Business
2. Capacity to facilitate and implement change.
3. Influencing Skills
4. Leadership abilities
5. Organizational effectiveness
6. Consultation/OD skills
7. Strategic/ Systematic thinking
8. Technical HR expertise
9. Communication skills
10. Possession of a fact based perspective.
11. Process management and Improvement skills.

A model is evolved where four different domains of skill sets are to be nurtured. 1. Leadership, 2. HR expertise 3. Core 4. Consultation. Each of the domain and the particular skill sets under that domain are mentioned below.

Leadership

1. Leadership Skills and capability.
2. Leadership attributes.
3. Change advocacy

Core

1. Business knowledge
2. Customer Orientation
3. Effective communication
4. Credibility and Integrity
5. Negotiation and conflict resolution.

HR expertise

1. Knowledge of Best in class HR practices.
2. Design and deliver HR services effectively.
3. Apply technology to HR.
4. Measure the effectiveness of HR practices.

Consultation

1. Influencing Skills
2. Consulting Skills.
3. Change facilitation and Implementation
4. Collaboration and Team Building.

Ulrich and Beatty (2001) mentions that HR as a profession is constantly changing and adapting. In the changing role HR professionals should coach, architect, build facilitate, lead and provide a conscience to business leaders. By doing this they obtain a strategic role and become architects of the evolving corporate. HR as Coach: Coaches' help people improve. See what works and what does not and offer special counsel and advice to enable executives to develop themselves and improve organizational performances.

Architects provide high-level blue prints. Architects help turn general and generic ideas into blueprints for organizational action. They attend management meetings with an eye on the ways in which the organization should be aligned with strategies. They continually look for the strategic agenda of the firm and try to envision.

Through this research, an attempt is made to find out how employees acquire 'marketable skills' to move from middle HR role to strategic HR role in the volatile post globalization era.

4. METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research can explore and identify key issues. Qualitative research has fewer observations and is flexible and unstructured compared with quantitative research methods Elicitation Interview method as recommended by Gubrium and Holstein (2001) was used to get tacit subjective understanding. "Elicitation interview method although structured should not be confused with structured interviews. Although both involve asking questions in a standard way, elicitation method have more of an exploratory or emergent character in their attempt to reveal tacit subjective understanding".

Researchers use elicitation interviewing technique to gain rudimentary knowledge of specific topics about which their informants have considerable expertise. When a researcher has developed sufficient understanding of the topic area and has elicited items relevant to the topic or domain, the interviewer moves to more structured approach.

Through elicitation interview, items were elicited and based on this knowledge a qualitative interview was conducted with HR professionals. 'A qualitative interview is focused on the 'qualities' of respondent's experience' Gubrium and Holstein (2001).

A qualitative interview assumes that whatever the subject matter, it can have diverse qualities or meanings in people's experience. The purpose of most qualitative interview is to derive interpretations, not facts or laws from respondents' talk. The perspective of the interviewer is taken to be that of the discipline that is the interview is conducted in order to write publish, and contribute to a body of knowledge and literature. Qualitative interview is focused on the 'qualities' of respondent's experiences.

Initially through elicitation interview, 15 middle level HR managers were contacted personally to find out what they are doing to progress from an operational middle level HR function to progress to the next role that is strategic HR role. What kind of competencies they are to develop and how they are acquiring them. After getting certain items a semi-structured interview was conducted.

In the second phase semi structured interviews were conducted with 3 top level HR managers performing strategic

role. This was done to find out how they progressed from the middle level to the strategic level. What was their path of progression and what directions they would give to the ones who want to achieve a successful career progression to the top echelon? Finally CEO's were interviewed to find out what strategic competencies their HR heads should have to prove a good lieutenant.

The interviews were audio taped relying on interview guide but allowing flexibility for respondents to introduce additional insights and thoughts. Most interviewees seemed at ease talking about themselves and were willing to share their path to progression. The interviews were conducted at coffee lounges, which gave enough room to get to a self-effective mode and narrate the actual process they underwent to reach the top echelon. Inconsistent with good interview practices, the researcher commences the interview process by providing information about how the data gathered, would be used by the researcher.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Middle/ Top Level Managers

MIDDLE LEVEL HR MANAGERS Profile of Participants in the interview					
No	Age	Sex	Tenure	Designation (Middle Level Operational Role)	Sector
1	32	F	8	HR Manager	IT
2	38	F	15	Head L &D	IT
3	35	F	12	Head Recruitments	IT
4	40	M	15	Manager HRM	Manufacturing unit
5	42	F	17	Head Training & Development	BPO
6	37	M	13	HR Manager	BPO
7	38	F	11	Manager Recruitment	Hospitality
8	32	F	9	Group Head –Training	BPO
9	35	M	12	HRD Manager	IT services
10	36	M	15	Head- Technical Training	Knowledge Processing
11	37	F	12	Human Resource Manager	Publication
12	34	F	13	Manager Organization Development	Educational Institute
13	34	F	14	Senior Manager- Training and Development	Manufacturing
14	31	F	11	Manager-HRM	Manufacturing
15	36	M	12	Senior Manager Human Resource Management.	Service
TOP LEVEL HR MANAGERS Profile of Participants in the interview					
No	Age	Sex	Tenure	Designation (Strategic HR role)	Sector
1	38	M	20	Group HR Manager	IT
2	42	F	20	VP HR	IT/BPO
3	40	M	18	GM-HR	Retail

4.1. Over view of analyzes of interviews

Sample of two respondents are given:

The first respondent was from an IT service solution firm, heading the Learning and Development function in the organization. In this organizational structure functions like human resources, finance, and administration have dual role, of enabling business and their specific function. Hence people working in enabling functions like human resources report to the specific business verticals they are assigned to; for example, health care, manufacturing or automobile and the head of their respective function namely human resources, or finance.

"I have the required certifications for content development and executive training and work experience to head the Learning and Development".

"As an organization we do not have 'Assessment Center Model' where the "effectivity" of learning function is measured in terms of "return on investment". Until my organization is driven in this direction I will not be in a position to head forward in my company to a strategic position. I am saturated."

"I am currently enabling training and development role and have 15 years experience, the organization that I am working should redefine the "training and development" function to "Organization Development", which is more holistic and then advance to "Knowledge Management".

"My direction of growth towards strategic level will be to move from enabling learning and development to enabling process for building knowledge management function, so I have to look for a company which has defined 'learning and development' from a more comprehensive level. This is the only way I can progress to a strategic role".

The second respondent had 12 years experience in hiring for IT firms. She feels she is ready to move from operational level to strategic level, but only after a specialized degree from a recognized University.

"My work experience and track record for hiring will be sufficient to take me to a strategic level. I have the best head hunting record and I have nurtured smaller service providers over the years that I can manage any influx of demand for hiring. Though hiring is one of the functions in HR, in IT firms it is the key function based on which all other HR initiatives depend". The demand for good software developers are so acute that if you have a good headhunting record, you have a job specially in Bangalore, Chennai, Delhi and Mumbai.

"The challenge is how to appeal to the employer, that I am ready for a "strategic role" though I have only done a "hiring role" and the next important aspect is how do I impress upon the employer from 'manufacturing' and 'other services

sectors like 'telecom' and 'airlines' that I can be effective in that scenario too?"

"Since my role was to headhunt, I have a good idea on compensations, especially in the IT sector, and know the general market trends. I have comprehensive knowledge of how much the competitors offer at different locations and why people move from one company to another. But the fact remain that I have no hands-on experience on performance appraisal. But some things will have to be learnt as we perform and I am confident that I will be able to handle a strategic role now".

This reflection of the respondent coincides with the study of Valkevaara (2002). This study affirms that HR professionals need to construct their professional history taking into consideration their personal work experience. This has to be done in such a way that it appeals a variety of organizational setup across different business domains.

"Movement to strategic role in my organization will not be possible, as the pyramid gets smaller at the top, but I can go ahead and look for a vacancy in other organizations. In the mean time I am also planning to do a specialized course from XLRI (Premium Institution in Jamshedpur, India) on post graduate program on Human Resource Management, which is available in satellite learning mode. The course is highly focused with special credits for Human Resource Information System, Competencies and Career Development, Operation Research for Human Resource Management, Role of Human Resources in Knowledge Management, which addresses the strategic human resources domain that I lack. Employers have high regards for the program".

A study conducted by Max (1991) in the field of finance clearly connects the importance of certification from professional institutions to progression in career. The importance of CMA certificate for CFOs is brought out through this study, where the results of the study bring out that 82 % of executives of large companies consider a post graduate degree important for reaching top managerial positions in the area of finance. Importance of higher education to scale to strategic role is beyond dispute, but the key question is which University or program is accepted by majority of the Corporate houses?

Apart from meeting middle level managers, three senior level HR managers performing strategic roles were also interviewed to get an idea as to how they planned their career progression from an operational role to a strategic role. Excerpts of one of the interviews is enumerated.

The respondent was performing a strategic HR role in the organization. He has 20 years experience in the field and his comments on what would assist a person to move from operational role to strategic role in HR is given below:

"I head the HR function for my organization and success to me is measured by internal branding, I know that things

TOPICS RAISED IN INTERVIEWS

Respondent	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
Current Role															
1	This role was assigned to me. I had no choice on my role.	X	X	X				X				I	I	I	I
2	Though this is not what I want to do, I am still doing it.				X									X	
3	I have to develop certain skill sets to be more effective in my current role.	X	X	X	X	X			X	X		X	X		X
	I am not using my full potential in my current role.		I		I			X	X		I	X		I	
4	My current role is rather ill-defined and adhoc.	X		X	X	I	I		X	X	I	I	X		
Role Assessment															
5	The assessment tool is well designed to measure the role played by us in the organization.	X		X		X	X	I	X		X	I		I	I
6	My role is not so significant in the organization.		X	X		I		I						X	
7	My role is so narrowly defined that I have no scope for performance.		X	X							X		X		I
8	My role is well defined and there is a lot of scope to grow and progress.	I		X		X					I				X
9	My role is constantly changing that it leads me nowhere.	X					X								
Career Progression															
10	My career progression is planned well and I can tread the path which is already well planned.	I	X						I		X			I	
11	There is no linear path of progression and one has to figure out with their own initiatives.		X	I	X		X	I	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
12	Career progression is left to one's own ability to add value and explore new emerging areas of growth.		X	X	I	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X
13	Between the organizations there is no standardisation in planning career progression	I				I	X				X		I		
14	To identify what the industry needs is rather difficult.	X	X				X	X		I		X	I		
15	Career progression happens based on the skill sets acquired in the previous job.	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
16	Career progression happens with reference and networking more than formal documentation.		I	X	X	X	X		X		X		X	X	I
17	There are very few certifications which are acknowledged by companies.	X	X	X		X		I		I					X

*X -denotes the topics raised by the participants *I- denotes topic taken by participants

are working well if there is transparency and employees are free to speak openly on their issues. Increasing effectivity in hiring and curbing attrition are the two main pillars that I work on. My team is to provide operational support but from time to time I check on the various aspects of HRM aligning with company's goals and vision".

"The most difficult part in strategic HR roles is to go beyond the job and get over the administrative bottlenecks. Automation makes the whole function very transaction oriented and to be effective I have to move away from operational aspects to futuristic visions". My suggestion to the younger executives who want an exposure to strategic HRM is to "get an in-depth business knowledge and a strong financial flavor" of the company. The board today wants you to be a specialist in your field and also have general insights on other aspects of business. This opinion of the respondent performing strategic role is in line with the results of the study concluded by Jocauson (2009) and Barbara (1999). In their study portraying future HR role they reiterate that HR as a role should be supporting business and building positive future for the organization. HR personnel should be contributing as business partners to the firms' executive directors.

"Now that I am performing a strategic role heading the Indian operations the next step is to look at operations across countries. Cross cultural issues are major aspects for learning and growth. I do not see career progression in the same organization as we do not have facilities across nations. As the next step is to look at operations across countries, I have to make marked progress in managing HR in a cross cultural scenario, then I can draw my road map for my future". The views of the respondent are in line with the results of the study undertaken by Nohria (1994) which also states that the HR professional should enable the linkage between global and country specific business strategies and HR practices.

The next interview was conducted with CEO of a firm outsourcing business processes to European and American clients. The company has three facilities in India employing more than 10,000 services personnel. What he expects from his HR head is as follows:

"People bring wealth to my company. Productivity means more commitment and passion to work. I want the HR people to get the right people for the right job. On the second level I want the HR person to be able to bring about a synergy between corporate vision and partner with the core business strategies, to take it to the next level of expansion and value chain". The response is in tune with the results of Friedman (2007) who suggests that Human Resources functions should be made the strategic partner for the entire business.

Analysis of Issues: When the interviews were finalized, the convergent key issues are analyzed for particular categories or groupings. This process follows the techniques

recommended by Jepsen and Rodwell (2008). 45 issues were raised during the interviews with middle level managers and 23 issues converged. The table (1.1) shows the sequence of issues arising and the converging of issues. The analysis of the theme was conducted by attempting to group the key issues under various heads, looking for similarities between issues. 3 key issues raised for the middle level HR managers and the groupings are Current Role; Role Assessment; and Career Progression.

Current Role: include choice of role, role involvement, skill sets for role performance and role definition.

Role Assessment: include tools for assessment, role significance to the organization, role definition, and role dynamism.

Career Progression: include career planning, path for progression, managing career progression, acquiring skill sets, references and networking and certification.

The themes of the key issues are distilled. Concrete decisions can be made on the next level of research. Each key issue is an area for further in-depth research.

5. CONCLUSION AND DIRECTION FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This study has explored certain aspects in the process of HR career advancement from middle level to strategic levels in the corporate hierarchy. With the ever changing corporate scenario, HR functions are also undergoing a variety of changes. The role of a HR professional in the corporate scenario is poised for a more holistic contribution towards organizational development and business goals. The middle level managers who are operational specialists will have to move to a broader perspective to rise to more strategic levels. The way to acquire these skills sets should be planned and the PERT- CPM chart should be revisited from time to time to add more nuances. Road map should be drawn and follow up should be done to keep up to the progression in career advancement from middle level to the higher level in the corporate world. Growth by serendipity, longer tenure resulting in automatic promotions, acquiring growth because of proximity to power houses though existent today cannot be foolproof methods for career advancement. Setting a conscious plan of action for career advancement and deliberating on it from time to time alone, will lead to acclaim in future growth.

Further research on the same lines can be conducted increasing the scope and geographical boundaries for the study. Since India has neighbors who can all be classified as developing nations, this study can be taken across South East Asia. Profile of varying HR functions at the middle level will emerge, which will also in a way, highlight the functions of

HR in various corporate scenarios. How HR personnel plan their career movement and spearhead forwards in varying economic conditions across South East Asia will add vibrant color to the existing knowledgebase on career advancement strategies for the middle level HR managers to the top echelon.

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