

People-Centric HRM Practices in India

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This article provides a window to human resource practices adopted by ten leading organizations in India that are instrumental in creating a positive employee experience at the workplace. The practices are described in the light of the following overarching themes: talent acquisition, talent management, leading through diversity and inclusion, high-performance culture, employee engagement, rewards and recognition and employer branding.

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Introduction

This article explores best human resource (HR) practices adopted by some leading organizations in India that are instrumental in creating a positive employee experience at the workplace. Best HR practices enable organizations to motivate their employees to achieve better business performance, thus leading to a competitive advantage (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Pfeffer, 1994). Such practices also reflect organizational commitment towards a performance-driven culture, empowering employees through learning and growth opportunities, rewarding and recognizing them, and thus creating a robust, diverse and inclusive workforce (Fottler, 2008).

Delery and Doty (1996) in their study advocated that organizations could leverage the benefit of adopted policies and practices, provided that these are internally coherent with the local environment and the organizational conditions. With markets breaking regional barriers, "India" as a brand has become a strong player on the global stage. The challenge in a highly diversified country like India is to adapt globally successful policies so that these generate similar value (Budhwar, 2009). It is interesting

to observe how Indian organizations have realized the need to shift from traditional HR practices to innovative and robust HR practices for leveraging the valuable HR (Budhwar & Bhatnagar, 2008). In this context, some HR functions have transformed from mere operations to business enablers (Dun & Bradstreet, 2017). Organizations that have adapted to these changes have experienced reduced employee attrition, high level of customer satisfaction and higher level of employee engagement.

Data Collection

This study explores distinct HR practices in top 10 leading organizations across different sectors. These companies have been mentioned in “the best places to work” rankings in recent years and have also ranked favorably in the rankings of “best employer in India” over the years (Aon Hewitt, 2016a). Based on the information collated on these companies, the HR practices are presented in the seven overarching themes of talent acquisition, talent management, leading through diversity and inclusion, high-performance culture, employee engagement, rewards and recognition and employer branding. The data collection includes secondary data such as information from the websites of the respective companies, newspaper articles, consulting surveys, published reports on best employer to work with and best place to work.

Talent Acquisition

With the increase in the technology-based recruitment processes, 50% of the

organizations in India have at least digitalized one process of the complete recruitment cycle (Hewitt, 2016b). As the present workforce majorly comprises the millennial populations, this has put emphasis on recruiters to shift to mobile platforms for better candidate experience so as to build a strong brand image. Companies are now changing their brand strategy from push-to pull-based approaches for attracting best talent. They are banking on different mechanisms that increase the recruitment efficiency by speeding the quality of hiring and lowering down the recruitment cost rather than just increasing the headcount in the workplace. The effectiveness of these two metrics is critical to business success. As the recruitment process aims to deliver the quality of hiring, it is expected from hiring managers to use different criteria to select a candidate who fits best with organizational culture, looking beyond skills and knowledge which can be developed over a period of time (Pfeffer, 1998).

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Aon Hewitt (2016b) did a survey on 160 organizations across 12 industries, which showed that 43% of the companies are using social networks to attract passive talent.

Companies in India too are using technology for hiring, for example, Whirlpool India Ltd., the home and kitchen

appliance manufacturer, fills the majority of their senior positions from their high-potential (HIPO) pool. For this millennial employees can register their career aspirations on a web-based portal, which is available for all senior managers and top leaders to see.

Godrej Consumer Products Limited (GPCL) has a unique talent acquisition program, namely, 100 Leaders Program, where they identify those 100 key employees who have the potential to become future leaders in different roles. GPCL tracks the careers of these selected employees and train them for future leadership roles.

It has also launched another program called “Godrej LOUD” (Live Out Ur Dream) for recruiting management students. This policy aims at encouraging students to live out their unfulfilled dreams by offering them the sponsorship and summer internships to work in the company. With referrals emerging as a favored source of recruitment, companies are turning to their employees as their new brand ambassadors. This helps in reducing dependency on external sources to search for talent and helps in leveraging the employer brand through their own workforce. GPCL is also using referral schemes for improving gender diversity in the workplace.

Talent Management

Organizations in India and at international level are applying the concept of “talent management” for achieving great results. This concept enables or-

ganizations to engage their senior leaders alongside HR personnel for crafting talent management strategies. Talent management refers to the systematic and dynamic process to identify, develop, engage, retain and deploy those individuals possessing high potential to create exceptional values for an organization (Lewis & Heckman, 2006). Leading organizations implement talent management practices, such as Whirlpool India who believes in its employees’ overall development. For that, it has designed a robust framework “talent pool” for developing an individual’s potential, retention and succession planning. It is an extensive process of evaluating individual performance based on a nine-box matrix tool by their managers.

An extensive succession planning is mapped to train and develop the individuals before moving them to a new role.

Every individual is assessed using a leadership profile sheet comprising different leadership attributes and is then placed in one of the boxes on the nine-box system based on their potential. This talent pool plays a critical role in doing succession planning as it tracks the employee’s current position and helps in developing his career, that is, by how much time one will be ready to move to another box. An extensive succession planning is mapped to train and develop the individuals before moving them to a new role. For instance, boxes 1, 2 and 3 are reserved for individuals who are seen as game changers and thus are given

preference for a special retention plan and are successively assigned higher responsibilities, international projects and robust pay packages. In addition, another initiative is to foster younger talent management system that lets the subordinates provide honest rating and feedback of their managers concerning their behavior and performance. This measure enables junior and younger employees take an active part in the company's performance management system.

Likewise, GPCL is famous for considering its workforce as a real capital. It aims to develop their employees and create such an environment for them where distinguished talent is appreciated and rewarded. To do this, it has a team of external experts for evaluating their workforce talent. It has a program named "Performance Linked Variable Remuneration" (PLVR) that monitors regularly to retain talent by assessing and identifying employees as future leaders. Similarly, it has another practice, namely, "Godrej Fellows Program," under which 12 to 15 people who are less than 30 years of age are handpicked and have unconventional ideas to share for improving organizational growth. For them, the organization provides sponsorship, learning opportunities and mentorship under senior people to work on those ideas and be a change maker to help in the progression of the company.

Similarly, Mahindra & Mahindra Ltd. has designed an innovative policy for managing its talent pool. It has launched a "Young Mahindra Program," where the emphasis is on Gen X and Y employees,

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as that is what comprises 50%–60% of their total workforce. This forum is like a governing council for youngsters to brainstorm their ideas on company issues by suggesting possible solutions. These recommendations are then shared with the senior management to take due cognizance of it. On similar lines, it has another program "Rise i4 Ideation" for the shop floor people, where the teams and workmen are empowered to share their ideas for improving operations on five factors: PQDSM (Productivity, Quality, Delivery, Safety and Moral). For this, every week two hours are reserved for brainstorming and discussing possible ways to improve productivity, quality, lowering cost and increasing safety so as to have a sustainable process. The best ideas are then appreciated and are recognized by way of their names getting displayed on the shop floor area. Moreover, to encourage them, the top management also rewards them in the form of cash or in kind.

Leading through Diversity & Inclusion Practices

Across industries, efforts have been made to improve workforce diversity so as to make smoother entry of minorities into the workforce. For instance, with a view to promote gender diversity, Indian

Companies Act 2013 has made it mandatory for all the listed firms to appoint at least one woman on the board of directors. Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) issued these guidelines under the corporate governance norms, failing to which companies would face regulatory action.

On similar lines, Indian IT sector is explicitly setting goals to create a culture of inclusivity to reduce the gap in the gender ratio of their workforce. Infosys plans on increasing the women workforce up to 25% in senior leadership roles by 2020. Multinationals operating in India such as Microsoft, Intel and PwC are coming up with strategies such as investing in diversity talent development for fostering an inclusive environment at the workplace. For instance, Google has done an exceptional job of recruiting and managing people who have critical knowledge skills. The process of hiring is done using innovative technology tools to enable smoother and stronger functioning of HR roles. Others such as IBM India hire minority recruiting/people with disabilities under the banner “IBM’s Project Able.” It introduced various E-learning programs such as Basic Blue, One Voice and Coaching Simulator to guide and mentor employees for various managerial challenges.

Likewise, Tata Steel, global steel suppliers and manufacturers, have launched different HR practices for embracing gender diversity at the strategic level, tactical level and operational level. The organization is promoting a range of HRM policies starting from aligning its

recruitment campaign, training and development in the form of induction, mentoring and sensitizing employees towards diversity initiatives, thereby connecting diversity initiatives with the performance appraisal process so as to ensure right employee behavior in the workplace. Employee Induction Programs such as “HELLO” (Helping employees launch and learn in the organization) and NEST (Nurturing engagement with satisfaction and trust) foster the philosophy of respecting individual uniqueness.

Tata Steel HR practices have a history of progressive people policies. For instance, it follows a practice “Sunhare Vawishyaki Yojana”—when an employee retires, then their children are given first priority and are offered a job based on their credentials. Moreover, if one spouse is working in Tata Steel, then a job opportunity becomes available for their partners too. Because of such facilities many employees work there for a lifetime.

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Its philosophy and practices promote workforce diversity and emphasis on employees for its success. The organization’s core principle is to be such an employer who promotes equal opportunity, gender-neutrality, continuous personal development, fairness, mutual trust

and career progression (Srinivasan & Ranganathan, 2014). Because of these comparable policies that are well appropriate for fostering inclusion in the workplace, Tata Steel is way ahead with its competitors in attracting and retaining the best talent. Similarly, in the FMCG category, GCPL, an equal opportunity employer, promotes diversity in the workplace on a merit-based recruitment. They introduce women-centric program named "Careers 2.0" that provides an opportunity for potential women to restart their corporate life who were on career breaks. These women work for different live projects under the guidance of project trainees and senior managers for a period ranging from 3 to 4 months. Different workshops are designed and professional trainings are arranged to prepare women for challenging roles. It offers help to women for balancing their professional and personal life, with their flexible timings approach so as to increase women's representation at different managerial levels. Moreover, their employee referral policy states that referring a woman candidate will fetch employees 1.5 times the regular referral amount. Moreover, GCPL's strong belief in inclusivity led their workforce include physically handicapped and mentally slow people.

Whirlpool India also is emphasizing on increasing women's representation to reflect on their customer base which is mainly women. Therefore, it is focusing on fostering an inclusive culture for pursuing increased productivity and competitive advantage. It launched an organization-wide campaign "Be the Change"

which ensures mass hiring of women staff in the manufacturing unit, coupled with a strategy to attract and retain women candidates. In addition, they promote multi-generation workforce in their workplace for leveraging the existing knowledge of the older group along with the new ideas of the younger group, as this helps amplify innovativeness and creativity.

On similar lines, ABB India Ltd., the largest supplier of industrial motors and drives, and power grids, made conscious efforts in creating an inclusive workplace for women. However, initially it had a low women representation as compared to their operations at global level. To resolve this issue, it challenged the traditional mindset and created opportunities for women at all levels to prosper in a male-dominated industry, which positively impacted their bottom-line profits. The company introduced three levels of intervention. At the shop floor level female trainees comprise 25% of the workforce, especially where higher dexterity is required. At the management trainee level, five all-female engineering colleges were added to the existing college database for campus placements. Similarly, at the lateral hire levels, a targeted development plan called "Inclusion Talent Program" was introduced for female managers to develop them for induction into senior

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management positions in about 3 to 5 years. ABB India conducted extensive awareness workshops to sensitize men, especially at the shop floor level.

Thus, several efforts for creating inclusive cultures have earned positive reputation for organizations in India. An inclusive organizational culture—which is a culture of openness—must be promoted where every individual is receptive to the ideas, feelings, actions and values of the other individual. On similar lines, Tata Communications Limited (TCL), a global telecommunications company, emphasizes the role of culture for enabling any strategy to take place in the workplace for improving business performance. They focus on “Project Market Place and Winning Mix” where every individual is encouraged to present their views freely and understand and experience the perspective of another without stereotyping it. This not only creates a sense of participation among a diverse workforce but also extracts the best benefits of diversity in the decision-making process. Employees take pride in their work environment, as they are experiencing no biases in the workplace. Senior leaders and supervisors in this organization ensure such fairness and play an important role in leveraging the multiplicity of talents and skills, thus creating a strong positive impact on coexistence of differences within a diverse work group. Furthermore, since the manager is a key organizational agent determining the self-esteem, learning and performing opportunities and also the rewards for subordinates, it ensures critical managerial support to employees, which is extended

beyond merely creating a sense of inclusion. Thus, organizations across industries have successfully demonstrated how embracing diversity and inclusion impact businesses.

High-Performance Culture

Another best HR practice that organizations are nowadays practicing in their workplace is high-performance culture. That includes accountability, trusting environment, rewards and growth and development opportunities. In this kind of a culture, business goals and expectations are clearly communicated to employees so that they put their best to attain them (Katzenbach & Smith, 2015). Moreover, due to process transparency, employees have a fair idea about their rewards aligned to successful completion of the task. Companies prepare their employees for future challenging roles by providing learning opportunities to each and every employee and grooming the high-potential performers for interesting careers (Henriksen, 2015).

In the same way, at Whirlpool India different initiatives function together in promoting the spirit of transparency, honesty, employee empowerment, accountability and liberty to design high-performing roles. Whirlpool India promotes a high-performance culture through its continuous learning program, challenging jobs and leadership development programs. It has an exclusive leadership program, under which skill assessment exercises are conducted to classify employees based on their performance and potential. Once the classification is over,

employees are given training to develop them for improved performance. The job characteristic of high-performing roles focuses on multitasking, job rotation, 360-degree performance review and self-managed teams where the employees are empowered to direct their own work. Its strong conviction on the abilities of their people to transform business enabled it to design another framework known as "People Excellence" which fosters a spirit of winning for delivering exceptional performance to create a competitive advantage. This framework aimed at future readiness by unleashing individual and shared talent and equipping employees with the right set of skills and capabilities required to perform current assignments as well as for future roles. They launched one more campaign "Project Harvest" for de-layering and unlocking the growth opportunities for the young and diverse workforce. Thus, Whirlpool India is making lots of efforts to create a high-performance culture.

Likewise, RMSI, an IT services company offering geographic information system (GIS) and software services globally, also focuses on creating a high-performing culture. RMSI's HR accountability towards all its stakeholders is a key differentiator of the company. Moreover, their policies with respect to career planning and career growth are much evolved. The pertinent feature that enables this company to be the most favored choice for the candidates is their great culture where employees are respected and valued. Employees are empowered to take the complete responsibility of their deliverables. Its flexible

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work arrangements encourage employees to involve in the company's decision-making process. Its strong focus is on nurturing employee skills/competency for leadership roles through extensive mentoring and coaching program for handling multi-cultural assignments efficiently. Its emphasis is on making employees more creative and intellectual stimulated by assigning them challenging tasks through on-site work opportunities. With all these practices, it showcases RMSI's great work culture that rewards individual and team accomplishments simultaneously and becomes the most favored choice for the IT professionals. Moreover, easy approachability of its senior leaders strongly empowers the employee to work together in a team for delivering clients' requirements effectively. Its different workshop arrangements on parenting and understanding child psychology all help in developing a bond with employees' family. Thus, it shows how in Indian context organizations are pushing their boundaries to connect to employees for improving individual as well as business performance.

Employee Engagement

Organizations vary in their style of engaging with their employees. For instance, Marriott Hotels India, a hotel management company, has strong employee engagement practices to a level

rarely achieved by its competitors. It considers their employees as the key to their success. Its core values is to take good care of its people whom they call as “associates,” as then they will take good care of their customers, which will make them visit the place again and again, eventually resulting in business growth. It refers to their people’s observable behaviors as Stay (employee’s strong intentions to be with the company), Say (when employee advocates the company and refers it to potential employees and customers) and Strive (employees going beyond to contribute to business success). To achieve this sort of employees’ commitment, Marriot has designed an associate engagement framework which identifies five drivers that influence employee engagement. They are: leadership excellence, personal growth, work–life quality, teamwork and total rewards. It has extensively invested in the training and development of its employees in its business to progress.

This organization practices an open-door policy, where associates can reach their senior managers for sharing their ideas and suggestions. It follows a smooth channel of communication where ideas are exchanged, traced and monitored to ensure the associates are updated about the action taken. Leaders consistently focus on growing associates by mentoring and coaching them to prepare for future roles. It offers competitive pay packages to its associates and goes beyond the industry norms to give a quality life to its associates by making a five-day working in a week for the first time in the Indian hotel industry so that they experience bet-

ter work–life balance. This company makes their employees happy by offering discount policies, international exposures, cross-department learning and incentives for high performers that, in turn, improves employee efficiency.

Rewards & Recognition

Studies have found that rewards and recognition directly impact the kinds of behavior organization expects from its employees to reinforce (Ali & Ahmed, 2009; Wilches & Jeffrey, 2014). Hence, organizations need to be careful while designing their reward/recognize policies, that is, on what areas and on what grounds it seeks to reward/recognize a person. It is also suggested that organizations must clearly define their metrics against achieving desirable outcomes and must communicate those policies in a more transparent manner for avoiding any kind of discrepancy. In this way, Mahindra & Mahindra acknowledges employee’s achievement as “Man of the Month & Man of the Year” on a monthly, quarterly and 6-monthly basis. These achievements are celebrated in a recognition platform where their families are invited to join the event. It even facilitates employee’s spouse on his or her partner achievement, thereby engaging employee’s family too to connect a strong bond. Similarly, at Whirlpool India, rewards are designed in multiple ways for acknowledging employees’ accomplishments and efficiency, for instance, in the form of Sports Reward, Employee of the Quarter, Smart Squad award and Long Service award.

Others such as American Express India, a financial company best known for its credit card business, have designed their rewards for engaging, motivating and recognizing employees based on three parameters: “appreciating employees for their work, rewarding meaningful results and celebrating loyalty.” The company acknowledges appreciation in different ways, such as by sending personalized greetings and e-buttons designed and shared by their colleagues on the company’s web portal. Moreover, an employee can also nominate other employees for “Blue Awards,” and the awardee employee can redeem a gift by choosing a gift mentioned in the gift catalogue. Moreover, loyalty is celebrated according to the tenure of service by giving a crystal award along with a complimentary message from the CEO.

Indigo, a low-cost airline company, issues “Flexi-Flying Options” which is first of its kind of initiative in the aviation industry. It is a flexible flying contract and related worker contract with pilots in eight different flying categories. This enables the pilots to choose the reward pattern as per their wish by opting for either monetary pay or more time-off. With this, the crew gets the opportunity to earn 15% more than above the standard flying rates and the convenience to choose what is best suited for them. Additionally, they offer an incentive program “Sector Pay” which helps the cabin crew to maximize their incentives by opting to fly for additional hours. This incentive concept gives them the opportunity to earn compounded incentive to a cap of 20% on the average base pay. For im-

proving employee efficiency performing different operational roles on the ground and flying crew, they practice “Efficiency and Longevity Bonus,” where they reward employees in the form of efficiency bonus for reducing their unplanned leave. This policy has helped the organization to streamline their operations with the drastic reduction in absenteeism of staff.

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Similarly, RMSI uses multiple rewards and recognition policies to ensure that teams and individuals are timely rewarded for their innovation, creativity and leadership qualities. For high performers, it has formed a fast-track growth path and is very sensitive in assessing performance. It encourages their managers to maintain transparency while assessing individuals and team performance. It has a provision of Joint Review Meetings, where during the performance evaluation they call a neutral observer, not compulsorily from HR to provide a constructive feedback to the manager and the employee. In addition to this, it also takes a performance feedback from their clients, which then is integrated in assessing the overall performance of the project teams and individuals.

Employer Branding

For employer branding, Indigo launched a campaign “IndiGo Heroes” intending to show to the world the

unique culture of organization that enables their employees to unleash the potential they possess for performing their professional as well as personal front. The organization believes that the most powerful way to do employer branding is showcasing the world about the success stories of their people from their professional and personal lives. These inspiring stories are highlighted in their magazine, company's website, Intranet "MY 6E World," social media and further exhibiting on the boards at office space. In addition to that, there is an internal platform "We are Winners" that is created for employees to share their personal accomplishments. The selected stories are then called for an exclusive high-tea session for sharing them in an event, where they are rewarded with congratulatory certificates and gift vouchers. Moreover, for better outputs during their recruitment process, all the recruiter specialists wear slogan T-shirts "Come fly with me," so that it gives an impression of an expert team looking for talented people. Thus, to create a strong brand image, Indigo introduced "6E Fly High and Family Fly Programs" where the brand ambassadors are its own employees. The program invites employee's family and friends to join Indigo for a career in flying. This scheme gives them the opportunity to nurture their dreams and careers of becoming a pilot. It offers sponsorships to top students in a way creating a brand image. All these activities of Indigo and other organizations clearly highlight that good HR practices can empower organizations in creating a competitive advantage.

Conclusion

This article explores those HR practices followed by organizations in India that are best in creating a positive employee experience in the workplace, that is, what makes employees' work enjoyable and fosters a feeling of "best place to work for" in them. These rich examples show that to leverage the benefits of a heterogeneous workforce, HR systems need to evolve to create an environment of inclusion that respects, values and uses the knowledge and experiences of diverse employees for business benefit. These best practices enable organizations to recruit and retain the best talent in the market.

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