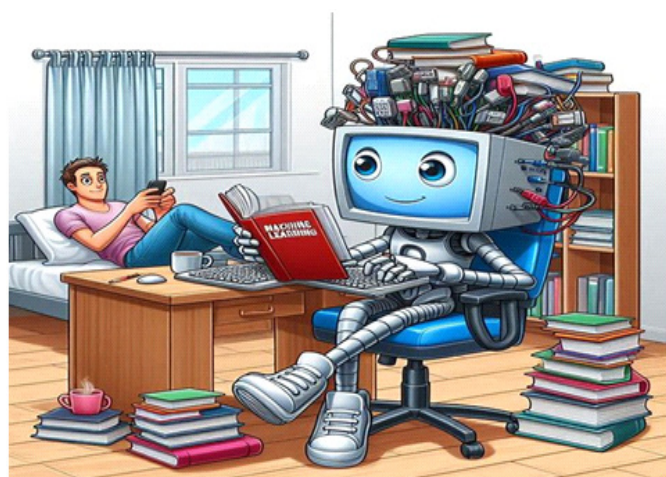




Workplace Culture of Playfulness: Creating an environment of humour and positivity

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Rashmi Govil

Director (HR) , IndianOil

Dear Readers,

It is a pleasure to connect with you through this latest edition of HR Vista, which explores the refreshing and timely theme of "Workplace Culture of Playfulness: Creating an Environment of Humour and Positivity." I extend my heartfelt appreciation to the editorial team for curating an engaging topic that resonates deeply with modern work dynamics.

The corporate world, often associated with structure and seriousness, is constantly evolving to reflect the world we operate in. Today, we recognise that a vibrant, playful workplace where fun and professionalism coexist creates an atmosphere of trust, innovation, and collaboration.

The need for such an environment has become even more pronounced recently as workplaces grapple with the complexities of hybrid work models, evolving employee expectations, and a growing focus on mental well-being. Leaders encouraging humour, creativity, and positivity can bring about transformative changes in employee morale, communication, and overall productivity.

In this edition, the editorial team has put together thought-provoking contributions that provide unique perspectives on this theme. From practical strategies to inspiring case studies, the insights shared in these pages highlight the power of playfulness as a tool for engagement, retention, and stress relief. The stories also emphasise that playfulness does not come at the cost of professionalism. Rather, it complements by creating an environment where creativity and productivity thrive in harmony.

As leaders and HR professionals, we hold the responsibility of fostering workplaces where individuals feel valued, connected, and empowered. By striking the right balance between work and play, we can nurture stronger relationships and ensure a more fulfilling work experience for everyone.

I am confident that this edition of HR Vista will inspire you to explore and embrace the principles of a playful workplace culture within your own organisations. The perspectives and ideas shared here serve as a valuable resource to help us rethink how we can make our workplaces both productive and joyful spaces.

Happy browsing

**Udit Jain****Editor-In-Chief, HR Vista***Executive Director - (HR), IndianOil***Esteemed Colleagues and Readers,**

Welcome to the 11th edition of HR Vista! As the Editor-in-Chief, I am delighted to share this edition, which explores the theme “Workplace Culture of Playfulness: Creating an Environment of Humour and Positivity.” This is a topic that resonates deeply in today’s dynamic workplaces, where balancing productivity and well-being has become more important than ever.

The concept of playfulness at work may seem unconventional to some, but its impact on employee engagement, morale, and overall performance is extensive. Creating a playful workplace is not about reducing accountability or focus—it is about cultivating an atmosphere where stress is alleviated, ideas flow freely, and individuals are energised to perform their best. It is about understanding that when people enjoy what they do, they are more creative, motivated, and engaged.

In this edition, we delve into various strategies, case studies, and stories that demonstrate how organisations redefine the workplace by embracing playfulness. Our contributors explore how leaders play a critical role in nurturing an environment where humour and positivity thrive, striking a delicate balance between fun and professionalism. We also examine the impact of such an approach on employee satisfaction, retention, and mental well-being.

As you browse through the pages of this edition, I encourage you to reflect on how your workplace culture can benefit from this philosophy. Whether it is small steps like integrating humour into daily routines or broader initiatives to promote positivity, every effort counts in creating an engaging space where people thrive both professionally and personally.

I hope the ideas and perspectives shared here will inspire you to look at your workplaces through a new lens—one where playfulness, positivity, and performance go hand in hand. Do share your valuable feedback and perspectives on this interesting topic.

Happy reading!

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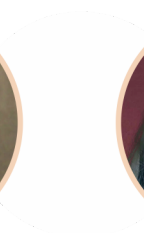


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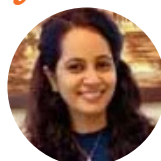


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Life is simple, and humour is a constant reminder of that simplicity!



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Mr. Chittaranjan Tripathy,
Director, National School of Drama



In this insightful conversation, we had the privilege of interviewing Mr. Chittaranjan Tripathy, Director of the prestigious National School of Drama (NSD) and an accomplished actor, director, writer and music director. A visionary leader with deep roots in creative arts, Mr. Tripathy is a passionate advocate for the transformative power of theatre and its potential to shape society.

His leadership perspectives and philosophy of life, rooted in timeless values and profound wisdom, provide inspiring insights into how we can all integrate creativity, playfulness, and balance into our personal and professional journeys.

The interview offers an opportunity to gain wisdom from one of the most respected figures in the realm of arts and leadership for anyone seeking to cultivate a more vibrant, positive, and creatively enriched workplace.

In conversation with Bhanu Prakash Semwal and Naveli Singh

As someone deeply immersed in the creative arts, how has your relationship been with humour?

I believe the world is filled with humour—humorous situations, humorous people—and it's something we often overlook. Life is inherently simple, and humour is a constant reminder of that simplicity. Human nature has this tendency to blow small things

out of proportion, turning everyday challenges into tragedies. When people start seeing themselves as victims, they miss out on the humour all around them. There's always something to be grateful for in every situation.

Unfortunately, in today's world, many people have become overly sensitive, losing their ability to appreciate humour in its various forms. Humour, however, is essential for the continuity of life. It helps us navigate the ups and downs with a lighter heart. For me, growing up, my father often spoke with sarcasm, and that shaped my own sense of humour. I learned early on that the ability to laugh at yourself is perhaps the most valuable form of humour. I use satire and self-criticism to keep myself rooted in reality, reminding me to not take myself too seriously, no matter what I've achieved.

At the end of the day, we're all just trying to make sense of the world around us. Embracing humour in the workplace, just as in daily life, fosters a culture of openness and connection. It makes challenges more bearable and builds stronger relationships, allowing people to work together with joy and creativity.

Using humour as a leader often requires vulnerability. How do you, as a leader, strike a balance between being approachable through humour and maintaining authority?

Leadership is not simply about wielding power; it's about how that power is used. For me, a true leader is one who channels power with humility and never abuses it. Leadership, at its core, is not about intimidation but about creating an environment of trust and openness.

Imagine a higher power—accessible, approachable, without gates or locks. That is how I see leadership. If someone must hesitate before speaking to me, it signals not respect but a communication gap I have inadvertently created. Hierarchies, bureaucracy, and rigid structures are remnants of a system that often prioritizes control over connection. My position does not need constant reinforcement; it is evident in how I lead. A leader who insists on their title reveals more weakness than strength. Real authority lies in respect, not fear, and respect is earned through actions, not proclamations.

Recently, a visitor from another country shared how students interacted with him freely and without fear. My response was simple: "Exactly." I do not lead through fear because fear diminishes creativity, trust, and mutual respect. Leadership, to me, is a partnership grounded in logic and reason, not dominance. When you are humble, approachable, and human, you embody the essence of what leadership truly means: inspiring others, not commanding them.

How do you encourage your team to embrace a culture of playfulness?

Transparency, to me, is the lifeblood of any organization, much like the seamless connection between the universe and its creator. When transparency flows freely, the line between formality and informality blurs, creating an environment where communication thrives effortlessly. In such a culture, even the most complex challenges can be addressed with simplicity and ease.

For instance, when an issue arises within the team, we don't let it fester. We gather and share perspectives, and more often than not, the matter is resolved in mere moments. Contrast this with dragging a simple issue across days—it only reflects a narrow mindset that obstructs progress. Leadership, after all, is about breaking barriers, not building them.

In my office, for instance, no one—students included—needs to knock or seek permission to enter my space. I try to lead by example and this small practice embodies my philosophy: power should not erect barriers but dissolve them.

My approach extends beyond open doors; it's about open interactions. Not only can my team approach me without hesitation, but I make it a point to step

into their spaces as well, ensuring a reciprocal flow of communication. Hierarchies dissolve when leaders become part of the team rather than sitting atop it.

Take this New Year, for example. Instead of expecting greetings to come to me, I visited each of my team members personally to extend my wishes. It's in these small, thoughtful gestures that a culture of playfulness and camaraderie is nurtured—a culture where connections are genuine, laughter is shared, and the weight of formality gives way to the lightness of collaboration.

How do you draw parallels between a structured professional environment and a creative space like the National School of Drama (NSD)? In your opinion, what makes theatre relevant in today's fast-paced, goal-oriented world?

In a professional setting, people often operate like the hands of a clock—precise, synchronized, and mechanical. While this efficiency is essential, it often comes at the cost of personal desires and creative freedom. When the rhythm of daily tasks, deadlines, and pressure takes over, life itself can feel distant, almost forgotten. As we progress in life, we tend to confine ourselves to predefined roles—roles that often overlook the expansive, multifaceted nature of life itself. But life is not just about roles defined by the office or society; it's about the spaces in between, the fluidity, and the stories that lie beyond structure. This is where theatre comes alive.

Theatre is a mirror of society, reflecting every emotion, every character, and every possible human experience. As outlined in the Natya Shastra, it is a form of Natya Kreedha or the "play of roles." Theatre invites us to step into countless shoes, to imagine and embody different lives, perspectives, and emotions. This act of transformation goes beyond mere performance; it's an exercise in empathy, a way of reconnecting with the deeper currents of life that we often lose touch with in our day-to-day routines. By stepping into multiple roles, theatre breaks the monotony, releasing creative energy and offering a form of stress relief. It rejuvenates the spirit, restoring the emotional connection to society that might fade under the weight of everyday demands.

Through theatre, individuals tap into a well of imagination that not only revitalizes their personal energy but also amplifies their ability to engage meaningfully with the world. The freedom to explore, play, and express within the framework of theatre has always held relevance, offering a dynamic counterbalance to the rigid structures of professional life. It's this very relevance, this vibrancy, that makes theatre timeless and essential in our world.

How can organizations draw lessons from the world of theatre to integrate elements of creativity, lightheartedness and connectedness into daily work practices?

Theatre is a dynamic platform for holistic personality development. The Natya Shastra is not merely a guide to dance or music; it is a comprehensive treatise on life itself. It's named Natya—a play—because life, in its essence, is a performance, a constant act of role-playing. Our ancestors, with their profound wisdom, must have understood this truth, which is why they conceived a text that embraced not just dance and music, but also creative writing, communication, and so much more. It brings together diverse elements—creative expression, verbal articulation, and public speaking—into one space where they can flourish in harmony.

For instance, when we engage in role-playing, we're not merely performing; we're connecting with a wide spectrum of issues, emotions, and perspectives. This connection nurtures emotional intelligence, making us more attuned to ourselves and to others. Theatre, in its depth, expands our interpersonal relationships from superficial exchanges to a profound connectedness with society itself. It's about stepping into the shoes of others and understanding their struggles, their joys, and their human experience.

Through elements like storytelling, scene-building, character exploration, and theatre games, individuals develop empathy, problem-solving skills, and creativity—all of which are vital in both personal and professional spheres.

Incorporating and implementing such practices into the workplace, say on weekends, can lead to multi-layered development, enriching individuals not only as professionals but as well-rounded human beings. In the West, there's even a practice called "theatre therapy," where individuals trained in this art form work as psychological practitioners, treating patients with the power of role-play and empathy. This practice is recognized in countries like the US and the UK, where theatre therapy practitioners are regarded as legitimate healthcare professionals, sometimes even as psychiatrists.

Natya Shastra has long alluded to this therapeutic aspect of theatre, though many are still unaware of this profound connection. If society were to embrace theatre as a regular part of life—not just as an artistic pursuit but as a tool for emotional growth and social bonding—we could witness a remarkable shift, not only in how we engage with each other but in how we transform ourselves.

How do you ensure that a culture of playfulness resonates across generational divides? How do generational differences shape the dynamics of creativity and collaboration in a professional setting?

My perspective on this is a bit different. I believe that, at their core, human needs and behaviours have remained largely unchanged across generations. Whether you're from the Silent Generation, Baby Boomers, Gen X, Millennials, or Gen Z, the fundamental desire for peace, happiness, and fulfilment—the universal longing for Sarve Bhavantu Sukhina—is timeless. This is a truth that transcends time and culture. We are fortunate to belong to a country with ancient, profound traditions where great intellectual minds have long articulated these universal truths. Our sages and philosophers have always spoken of these constants in human nature.

So, when we talk about Gen Z, Gen Alpha, or whatever the next labels may be, I think we're getting caught up in jargon. The fundamental truths of life, the core human emotions, and the drive for connection and growth—these things remain the same across time. If you look at Spielberg's E.T. and Shekhar Kapur's Masoom, the essence of both films is strikingly similar. The alien in E.T. awakens profound emotions in the human heart, much like the young boy in Masoom stirs a deep emotional response. The medium may differ, but the emotions are universal, bridging the gap between generations.

So, in a corporate setup, creativity and playfulness can be integrated across generations by focusing on these shared, timeless human experiences. We may use different tools, platforms, and technologies, but the emotional core—the universal human connection—remains the same.

You have beautifully shared some snippets of your philosophy of life. How can our readers integrate some of these transformative elements into their own personal or professional journeys?

I view life as a river—flowing, ever-moving, and unstoppable, like the sacred Ganga. The Ganga, in its early stages, is narrow and humble, but as it flows towards the plains, it widens and gains strength, becoming a mighty force revered by millions. But even as it reaches its grandeur, she does not stop flowing—her journey is continuous. When the Ganga encounters a boulder, she doesn't waste her energy fighting it. She simply takes a detour and continues her journey. Let that be our mantra: keep doing your work, stay focused, and don't let unnecessary distractions drain your energy.

Shed the heavy baggage of ego and an inflated sense of self. Embrace every moment with lightness and joy. Live by the wisdom of 'karma kar, aur phal ki chinta mat kar'. Life is a flow, and we are meant to move with it, not against it.

No achievement in life is the ultimate achievement. These are just moments in the journey, not the destination. As long as you are alive, believe in your limitless potential and the endless possibilities that lie ahead.

Remember, even in the grand narrative of the Mahabharata, when Shri Krishna himself stood on the battlefield with all his divine power, he didn't magically resolve every challenge. Arjuna had to endure the loss of his son, and Draupadi had to face humiliation in a courtroom full of people. Life brings its share of harsh realities and trials, and no one escapes them entirely.

So, flow with life. Accept its challenges and cherish its beauty. Trust in your path, and never stop believing in your strength to keep moving forward.

The Influence of Narratives: How HP Unplugged Cultivated Bonds and Enhanced Competitive Edge



By – Mr. Sudipto Basak, PRCC, HPCL
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In today's ever-evolving business realm, nurturing genuine connections with both employees and stakeholders stands as a pivotal strategy for sustaining a competitive edge. At Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Limited (HPCL), we acknowledge the profound impact of storytelling as a formidable instrument for achieving this objective. "HP

Unplugged", our pioneering platform, epitomizes the ethos by commemorating the distinctive experiences and triumphs of extraordinary individuals. This chat show-based communication platform, in a mere 4 months, has garnered more than 50,000 views and 1300 hours of watch time.

HP Unplugged: An Inspirational Platform

Envisioned with the goal of "spotlighting remarkable narratives and talents," HP Unplugged serves as a platform for diverse voices. Through a uniquely crafted chat show, a first in the industry, it showcases the boundless resilience of the human spirit. In this chat show, we interview high-achieving individuals who act as lighthouses of ingenuity, inspiration, and leadership. Here's how HP Unplugged has proven instrumental for HPCL:

Employee Engagement: The oil and gas industry often encounters distinct challenges in fostering employee engagement. Factors such as geographically dispersed workforces, intricate technical environments, and entrenched hierarchical structures can breed a sense



of detachment from the company's core values. HP Unplugged bridges this gap by featuring interviews with prominent figures within HPCL, including the C&MD, Directors, and other senior leaders. This approach nurtures a sense of connection between leadership and employees, breaking down hierarchical barriers and fostering open communication. By unveiling the human facets of our leaders, we provide employees with insights into the company's overarching vision and strategy, thereby cultivating a shared sense of purpose and belonging.



Employer Branding: The ability to attract and retain top-tier talent is paramount for any organization. However, the oil and gas sector sometimes grapples with competing against industries perceived as more progressive or innovative. By showcasing inspiring stories such as that of Mr. Pujyam Mishra, an accomplished para-athlete and a recent addition to the HPCL team, we position HPCL as an inclusive and forward-thinking employer that values diverse talent and achievements transcending conventional work experiences. This not only underscores HPCL's commitment to investing in its workforce through training and development initiatives but also celebrates individual journeys, fostering a sense of pride and loyalty among employees. Strategically disseminating HP Unplugged content through internal communication channels such as company newsletters and internal social media platforms further amplifies its message and resonance within the organization.

Industry Recognition: By featuring Shri Arup Basak, the national coach of the Indian Table Tennis team, HP Unplugged transcends internal boundaries, positioning HPCL as a thought leader within the oil and gas industry. This not only garners industry recognition but also fortifies relationships with external stakeholders. Collaborations with external figures can yield valuable partnerships and knowledge-sharing opportunities, ultimately benefiting the entire industry.

Diversity of Voices and Going Beyond Hierarchy: HP Unplugged adopts a designation-agnostic approach to featuring stories. We believe that inspiration and valuable lessons can come from individuals across all levels of the organization. This provides a more holistic perspective on the diverse experiences and contributions that make HPCL successful.

Harnessing the "Power of Networks"

The efficacy of HP Unplugged hinges on the concept of "leveraging the currency of networks." Both internal and external networks are indispensable for a company's competitive advantage. Here's how HP Unplugged facilitates this:

Internal Networking: Interviews with HPCL directors foster a sense of community and shared purpose across diverse departments and locations. Employees gain insights into various facets of the company's operations, promoting collaboration and knowledge exchange. For instance, an interview with the Director of Refineries may inspire a Marketing employee to explore new business prospects related to refined products. This cross-departmental understanding is crucial for fostering innovation and problem-solving within the organization.

External Networking: Featuring industry luminaries like Shri Arup Basak enables HPCL to connect with a broader audience beyond its immediate workforce. This strengthens ties with external stakeholders such as industry associations, government bodies, and potential business collaborators. These connections can pave the way for fresh collaborations, opportunities for knowledge exchange, and a more robust overall industry ecosystem.

Employee Advocacy: HP Unplugged content is disseminated across various social media platforms, including YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn. This encourages employees to share these stories, effectively serving as advocates for HPCL and





amplifying its reach. Employees emerge as brand ambassadors, bolstering the employer brand and attracting potential talent aligned with HPCL's values and culture. This organic reach through employee advocacy holds significant sway in today's digital landscape.

Quantifiable Outcomes and Future Endeavors

The early outcomes of HP Unplugged are promising. With nearly 20,000 views across multiple platforms, the initiative demonstrates its potential to resonate with a wide audience. However, the true impact extends beyond these initial metrics. HP Unplugged nurtures a culture of inspiration, collaboration, and pride within HPCL, fostering heightened engagement and productivity among employees. A robust employer brand not only attracts top talent but also reduces recruitment expenses while fostering a more innovative and competitive workforce. These factors ultimately translate into a sustained competitive advantage for HPCL in the marketplace.

Looking ahead, HP Unplugged is poised to further evolve. We intend to feature a broader array of stories, encompassing not only leadership but also exemplary contributions from high-performing employees across various departments. Additionally, in celebration of International Women's Day, HP Unplugged recently showcased eight episodes spotlighting women leaders, further enriching our narrative tapestry and reaffirming our commitment to diversity and inclusion.

Capturing the richness of human experience goes beyond simply featuring different job titles. HP

Unplugged strives to explore a wide range of personal and professional journeys. We look for interviewees who have overcome challenges, persevered through difficult circumstances, or achieved remarkable feats outside of their work at HPCL. These diverse perspectives not only inspire employees but also showcase the well-rounded individuals that make up the HPCL workforce.

In conclusion, HP Unplugged stands as a testament to the transformative power of storytelling in forging connections, fostering a vibrant organizational culture, and enhancing competitive advantage. As we chart our course forward, we remain steadfast in our dedication to amplifying voices, inspiring minds, and shaping a brighter future for HPCL and beyond.



Mental Health and Well-being: Prioritizing Employee Wellness in the Modern Workplace



By – Mr. Ankur Beri, Atlantis Intelligence



The rise in the importance of mental health and well-being moves up the list of organizational priorities in a fast-moving and ever-changing world of work. With the blurring of boundaries, especially in the post-pandemic scenario, more recognition emerges in employers' thinking that the well-being of people working in an organization is not only a moral duty but is equally a business imperative. A growing body of evidence shows that attention to employee well-being pays off not just in better health but also through higher productivity, less absenteeism, and a more dedicated and loyal workforce.

Work and Well-being

Work is a very vital part of our lives, even down to our personal identities, and it provides financial security and a network of connections with important others. Positive work environments, which create meaningfulness—purpose, belonging, and accomplishment—improve the mental health of workers. However, a negative work environment, together with long working hours and high levels of stress supported by a low level of support, can set up or

strengthen pathways that might lead to mental health problems such as anxiety, depression, or burnout.

Various studies have observed that depression and anxiety alone result in significant losses in global productivity. It is a call for all organizations to take the next steps in reducing these figures, which occur every year. A workplace that neglects to attend to mental well-being could put at risk not only the health of its people but also the health of the organization itself.

Workplace Risk Factors for Mental Health

The key to this is recognizing the real reasons for stress at work; any organization desiring a healthy, productive environment must be aware of these. Continuous work without resting, too much workload, the rigidity of the other factors at work, and, worse probably, the poisoned work atmosphere are some of the factors running together in a vicious cycle that creeps under the welfare of employees at work and blemishes the productivity status of the organization. These causes will lead not only to burnout but also to the depletion of morale in the overall organization.

These are issues that call for a multivariate approach. The implantation of strategies that will lead an organization to break this vicious cycle of stress and create a more sustainable and productive workplace that cares and puts first the mental health and well-being of its people.



Caring for Mental Health in the Workplace

This indicates more than just the current issues in promoting mental health at work by creating a culture of well-being that involves all employees, regardless of their mental condition at a particular time. An organization achieves that by providing an opportunity to create a balance between career objectives and personal life through regular breaks and setting clear boundaries between work and personal life. Research suggests that employees who find a good work and private life balance are 21% more productive on the job and 33% more satisfied. In addition, a very important factor in effective mental health management is access to mental health resources: mental health days, counselling services, and stress management programs. Promotion of a positive work culture is equally important; this kind of nurturing, inclusive environment can do much toward bringing down stress and improving employee engagement. According to a Gallup study, employees who feel that their employer supports them are 67% more engaged in their work. Through these practices, businesses can help develop a workplace that truly cares about its mental well-being and ultimately increases productivity and satisfaction.

The Business Case for Employee Wellness

Investing in the wellness of your staff is not just a good idea; it's good business. There is a business case to the bottom line, which relates to the financial implications of poor employee well-being, where a correlation exists with mental health issues leading to absenteeism, rising healthcare costs, and lower productivity. Companies that invest in wellness will get extraordinary returns on investments.

For example, the American Psychological Association prepared a report showing that for each dollar invested in mental health interventions, there is a fourfold return of improved health and productivity. And that's not all; companies with comprehensive wellness programs experience a 25% reduction in workdays missed due to health and experience a 40% increase in employee retention.

How to Develop Resilience and Well-being

Resilience is the power to rebound from every adversity—it is a significant quality of good mental health. At work, resilient employees are better placed to handle stressors healthily and accept change more positively. Organizational strategies to build resilience include enhancing training programs, promoting open communication in a supportive work environment, and being an appreciative workplace that values employee well-being.

Developing and promoting a culture of continuous learning and development can further instil a sense of purpose and fulfilment in their work, which indirectly works towards their mental well-being. Providing the worker with an opportunity to grow in their profession contributes to enhancing job satisfaction and raising the level of innovation and creativity within the workforce.

Conclusion: A Way Forward

The place of well-being in today's modern working environment, to both the long-term sustainability of the workforce and an organization, is very key. Employers need to stay attuned to mental health challenges their workforce faces as the nature of work continues to change. Organizational strategies must ensure they can create a cultural atmosphere within which workers will flourish, provide the necessary resources, and promote work-life balance in ways that foster individual success, team success, and contribute to increased organizational success.

In this age of increasing workloads, proactive steps toward safeguarding mental health are not just best practices but also business imperatives. Organizations that put well-being first will ultimately drive an improvement in productivity and engagement, and will, therefore, be better positioned to attract and retain top talent for long-term sustainability and success.

20% Time - Innovation through playfulness



By - **Mr. Suman Senapati, PRCC, HPCL**
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Author information

I have been working at HPCL for the past 7 years in various roles, which include Refinery operations, Technical development and Digital teams. I have been re-assigned to the PRCC department since September 2023.

Abstract

Google's "20% Time" policy, introduced in the early 2000s, allowed employees to dedicate one day per week to pursue innovative projects based on personal interests. This case study examines the policy's impact on workplace culture, creativity, and product development at Google.

The policy embodied key elements of a playful workplace culture, including the freedom to



experiment, trust in employees, embracing failure, and cross-pollination of ideas. It led to the development of several major Google products, including Gmail, Google News, and AdSense. The 20% Time policy significantly influenced Google's workplace culture, increasing job satisfaction, enhancing creativity, fostering positive competition, and promoting work-life integration. Despite challenges in implementation, especially as the company grew, the spirit of playfulness and innovation remained central to Google's culture. While not all organizations can implement a full 20% time policy, the core principles can be adapted to foster innovation and create a positive work environment. Key takeaways include creating space for creativity, encouraging personal projects, celebrating innovative ideas, and fostering a light-hearted atmosphere to boost morale and reduce stress. This case study provides insights for other organizations on how to

nurture talent, promote innovation, and create a more engaging and productive workplace culture.

In today's realm of workplace culture, few organizations can claim to have promoted a policy which has nurtured its talent as much as Google's "20% Time". This has caught the attention of the tech community and corporates alike since its inception. Big corporations fish for the best talent out there to reinforce their workforce and achieve higher highs every quarter. But employing talent is one thing, and keeping it productively innovative and innovatively productive is a different ball game altogether. Imagine being stuck in a situation when the enterprise's definitions of productive and innovative change overnight. Instead, wouldn't it be great if your employer let you dedicate an entire day every week to pursuing disruptive innovative insights based on your interest, which could be the next big thing for your company? This brazen policy has been surprisingly productive with many of Google's major products, such as Gmail, AdSense and Google News, to have been implemented through '20% time'. This case study examines how this innovative approach not only boosted creativity but also contributed to a culture of playfulness and positivity within the tech giant.

Conceptualization

The concept, introduced in the early 2000s, was based on the belief that giving employees the freedom to explore their own interests would lead to innovative



ideas and products. Similar policies have been implemented by 3M through its "Innovate or die" motto, which, in time, became the driving force for

the 15% project that emerged in post-World War II America. Times were different back then where the workforce was characterized by rigid business structure and inflexible employment opportunities. This initiative was born purely out of necessity and innovation. The war had created an existential threat to 3M due to the scarcity of natural rubber. This crisis led to scientists being given the freedom to work on developing synthetic rubber.

Playfulness in Practice

The 20% time policy embodies several key elements of a playful workplace culture:

1. **Freedom to Experiment:** By giving employees permission to work on passion projects, Google created an environment where "play" was not just allowed but encouraged.
2. **Trust in Employees:** The policy demonstrated Google's faith in its workforce, fostering a positive atmosphere of mutual respect.
3. **Embracing Failure:** Not all 20% of projects succeeded, but the culture allowed for experimentation without fear of repercussions, promoting a light-hearted approach to innovation.
4. **Cross-Pollination of Ideas:** The policy encouraged employees from different departments to collaborate, leading to unexpected and often humorous combinations of skills and perspectives.

Success Stories

Several major Google products originated from 20% time projects, including:

1. Gmail



Paul Buchheit started working on Gmail in 2001 as a 20% project. He had a simple but revolutionary idea: to create an email service with a search function as powerful as Google's web search. While competitors offered storage space not more than a few MBs, Gmail was offering a storage of 1GB. Gmail also provides a conversation view for emails. Interestingly, the initial launch date (April 1) led many to believe it was an April Fools joke. Gmail remained in beta for over five years until July 7, 2009.

2. Google News



Krishna Bharat developed Google News in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 attacks. He found it challenging to get a comprehensive view of the news from various sources and decided

to create a solution. Aggregation of news from multiple sources. Algorithmic ranking of news stories. Personalization based on user interests. Initially, Google News was available in English only, but it quickly expanded to other languages. The service faced criticism and legal challenges from news organizations concerned about copyright issues. Google News doesn't have human editors; it relies entirely on algorithms to select and rank stories.

3. AdSense



AdSense grew out of Google's AdWords program. Paul Buchheit, who was also working on Gmail, applied the idea of contextual advertising to email content. This concept was then expanded to website content. The pay-per-click

model for advertisers was introduced through this. AdSense was partly inspired by an earlier product called AdSense for Search, which allowed websites to add a Google search box and earn from search ads. The product went through several name changes before settling on AdSense. AdSense revolutionized online advertising and became a major source of revenue for Google and countless website owners.

Impact of 20% Time Projects

Google's 20% time policy had a profound impact on the company's workplace culture. Employees reported increased job satisfaction and engagement, feeling more fulfilled when given the opportunity to pursue their interests. The policy fostered enhanced creativity by creating a playground-like atmosphere where wild ideas were welcomed, leading to more innovative thinking across all projects. It also sparked positive competition, with employees playfully vying to develop the next big 20% time project, fostering a spirit of friendly rivalry. By allowing personal interests to blend with work projects, the policy helped create a more holistic and enjoyable work experience, promoting better work-life integration.

Despite its successes, the 20% time policy faced challenges. Some managers struggled to balance regular work with 20% time projects, and as Google grew, maintaining the policy became more complex. In response, Google evolved the concept into a more structured innovation time, but the spirit of playfulness and creativity remained a core part of the company's culture.

From a PSU standpoint, implementation of a full 20% time policy may be challenging. Nevertheless, the core principles associated with innovation time may be adapted, which would provide a much-needed boost to innovative thinking and help in nurturing a

positive learning atmosphere for in-house talent in various sectors across the corporation. Creating space for play, encouraging personal projects, celebrating creativity, and fostering a positive atmosphere are key takeaways.

Companies can designate times or areas for employees to engage in creative, non-work activities, allow them to pursue work-related passion projects (even if on a smaller scale), recognize and reward innovative ideas regardless of their immediate practicality, and encourage humour and light-heartedness in the workplace to reduce stress and boost morale.

Workplace Culture of Playfulness: Creating an environment of humour and positivity



By - **Saurabh Singh Sengar, HPCL**
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If asked today what kind of workplace we want to work in, most of us would, by default, utter the Fun word. Who doesn't want a workplace that is full of joy, fun, laughter, and happiness? But how many of us can say our workplaces actually have a culture of playfulness, humour and lightheartedness? And why is it that difficult to create this fun, stress-free and playful kind of workplace? Let us try to answer some of these questions and dive a little deeper into the strategies that we can use to create a space where individuals thrive both personally and professionally.

Once there lived a King.

The concept of fun, creativity and playfulness at work isn't new to the Indian subcontinent. The mention of "Vidushak" is frequent in old Sanskrit scriptures and documents and refers to a clown in the King's court, who was the voice of reason and would often put across life truths in a manner that was humorous and funny. The Vidushaks were therefore, extremely important and an integral part of the King's court. Vidushaks gave kings the feedback, and the king took it without any ill feelings or rancour. This allowed the king to revisit various policies without the emotional baggage attached to them.

It is a Child's Play

In 1996, 11-year-old Richie Stachowski, while surfing with his dad, got thinking about how cool it would be if he could talk underwater. Stachowski started researching underwater acoustics and trying out prototypes in the family pool and the public pool too. Eventually, he came up with the Water Talkie –which enables swimmers to talk with one another underwater from as far as 15 feet away. Next, Stachowski went to New Jersey and pitched his idea to Toys"R"Us. At the end of the interview, he had an order for 50,000 units.



This anecdote helps us understand two things; Big Ideas come when the mind is relaxed and stress-free. and children tend to be more creative than adults. They have more divergent thinking because of the uninhibited manner in which they operate.

We can personally also vouch for the fact that great ideas strike us when we are jogging, in the pool, looking at the sky, staring out the window, and rarely when we are hooked on the laptop screens. Winding down is essential for the brain, and having some fun during the loaded workdays helps release the creative juices and let us perform at our creative best.

Where is the Proof?

The Journal of Managerial Psychology ran a meta-analysis on positive humour in the workplace.

They found that the benefits of using humour at work include:

- A lighter mood
- Reduced stress
- Faster interpersonal bonding
- A greater sense of belonging at work
- Better perceived leader performance
- Overall workplace cohesion
- Improved mental health

- Closer relationships
- Reduced inhibitions
- More happily resolved disagreements

The “I AM OFFENDED” Generation

A BBC podcast from 2017 titled *Offence, Power and Progress* highlights the issues such as “Snowflake generation”, and over-sensitive “Woke Millennials”. It goes on to explain how we have seemingly lost the sense of humour and how we live in a world where cancel-culture has become so rampant. It might also have to do with generational traits like self-centeredness, which make it difficult for individuals to consider anything that does not align with their viewpoints or ideas.

But if we try to look at it from a different perspective, this is a time which is meddled with pandemics, global wars, remote working, loneliness and depression on an ever-increasing trajectory, with many of us feeling disconnected like never before. Nothing could make a case for humour at a time like this. The cocktail of emotions that a good laugh with a colleague can create strengthens our emotional bonds in a way that wouldn't otherwise be possible.

Taking humour more seriously

Kelsey Kates, an expert in the neuroscience of how we work, advocates that bringing a bit of playfulness to your work can help cultivate psychological safety, inclusion and belonging, and creativity in the team. Is playfulness all about cracking jokes and playing pranks? Not really. Want to try some quick fixes? Here, I have listed down some for you to try on:

1. **Sharing goes a long way:** Next time there is a serious business plan meeting or a strategy meeting, start it with an unusual prompt like asking people, “What is your favourite tech hack?” or “Which was the weirdest food they have ever tasted?”. You will see the mood lighten up immediately, and the crowd could have gathered some useful info on the side.
2. **Levity** – Adding a funny image or gif from one of your favourite sitcoms (Think Homer from Simpsons or Michael from The Office) can really lighten up the mood. However, be ensured to experiment with it during low-stake presentations.
3. **Get Musical** – Playing some music during lunch hours or a random funny song before or end of meetings goes a long way in heightening the collective energies.

There are a few more broad recommendations talked about in the book “The Humour Code”, which can be

employed depending on the organisation's culture:

- It's not whether or not you're funny, it's what kind of funny you are. Be honest and authentic.
- If you can't be “ha-ha” funny, at least be “aha!” funny. Cleverness is sometimes good enough.
- Good comedy is a conspiracy. Create an in-group.
- Don't be afraid to chuckle at yourself. It signals everything is okay.
- Laughter is disarming. Poke fun at the stuff everyone's worried about.

Tell Me More

While it is all hunky dory to preach and advise, many would venture into the cynical bylanes and question if any organization actually does it. So let's look at some examples:

Zappos

At Zappos, the online shoe and clothing retailer, core value No. 3 reads, “Create fun and a little weirdness.”

You can witness bosses wearing muscle shirts during tank top Tuesdays or creating rainbow tutus then worn around the office. There's also a 37-person choir and regularly scheduled Nerf gun wars between departments.



Southwest

Southwest Airlines is famous for its workplace culture. At the centre of their core values, they advocate ‘embrace a fun-LUVing attitude’ and ‘not take themselves too seriously’. Employees enjoy annual celebrations such as Spirit Parties, Chili Cook-offs, and the Southwest Rallies. Many passengers have reported the following safety announcement, “In the event of a loss of cabin pressure, put your mask on. If you have a child, put their mask on second. If you have more than one child, then pick the one you love the most.”

The Funny End

Let us take a moment and visualize the best meetings we have had. They are the ones that started with some witty jokes or banter, our favourite colleagues; the ones who we share inside jokes with, and our favourite bosses are the ones who know how to be funny. So why not be the ones to introduce your office to the jokes of Homer Simpson or Micheal Scott in the next strategy meeting, or be the boss, who everyone thinks knows to laugh at him/herself, or the colleague to come to if you need to laugh it out. A line worth remembering from the anthropologist Edward Hall: "If you can learn the humour of a people and really control it, you know that you are also in control of nearly everything else."

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We Aren't Paying Enough Attention to Humor in the Workplace



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Some of top top-performing pieces that she has authored include:

It's Okay to Not Be Okay

What Do We Like About WFH?

Why Do We Try to Dodge Difficult Decisions?

My Generation is Super Burned Out — But We Don't Have to Be

Why Your Brain Dwells on Unfinished Tasks

Fun fact: Humans start developing a sense of humour as early as 6 weeks old. Babies laugh, on average, 400 times a day, while people over 35, only 15. Also, adults tend to laugh less on weekdays than on weekends. Surprising, isn't it?

Humour is the most coveted element in any human interaction. According to research, laughing in the presence of others indicates that the interaction is 'safe'. Shared laughter also accelerates a feeling of closeness and trust. This is true even at work, which is serious business. Humour can lighten a conversation, spark innovation, increase engagement, and even foster fast interpersonal bonding between people. Research has shown that people who use humour in the workplace are rated as more competent and confident.

The fast-paced work world we live in has also elevated our collective stress baselines. Recent research showed that anxiety has become the top mental health issue plaguing US workers. Another survey indicated that over 45% of Indian workers experience anxiety on Sunday evenings before returning to work. Humour

can also relieve stress and boredom in the workplace and has the potential to remedy some of these problems and promote healthy work cultures.

Why, then, do we not pay much attention to humour as a tool for overall cohesion and team bonding?

Is humour all the same?

No, it isn't. The kind of humour you use at the workplace will differ from situation to situation. There are four major humour styles: Affiliative humour, self-enhancing humour, aggressive humour, and self-defeating humour.

Affiliative humour is non-hostile and disarming. Think of inside jokes within micro-teams or a no-harm-intended practical joke played on someone at lunch. Such humour facilitates and aids relationship building. Humour, which is self-enhancing, is typically used by



people as a coping mechanism for dealing with stress. The person using such humour puts themselves at the centre of the joke in order to enhance their image. Aggressive humour is used by people who want to manipulate, victimize or belittle others. Lastly, self-defeating humour is something people use to ridicule themselves as a way to become more accepted and appear more approachable. Using the right kind of humour is essential as it could either make people feel connected and belong or be alienated and ridiculed.

How We Can Build Humor into Our Everyday Work Life

Research shows that teams that laugh together are more engaged and creative. There are many ways to increase the use of humour in the workplace. Here are some you can put to use right away:

1. Open your brainstorming session with a funny video: In a study, it was found that individuals who watched a funny video clip before a task spent approximately twice as long on a tiresome task compared with people who watched neutral or positive (but not funny) videos. Brainstorming can be mentally exhausting, so this could be a good way to ramp up productivity. Remember, vetting your humour for being appropriate or indecent is critical. You don't want anyone to feel like the 'jokes on them.'



2. Use funny to grab attention: When Spanx founder and CEO Sara Blakely first approached the head buyer from Neiman Marcus, she is known to have sent a shoe along with a handwritten note to them. The note read: "Trying to get my foot in the door; have minutes to chat?" Looking to network with someone new, crack a client deal, or get a response

from someone who has been unresponsive? Try to add some affiliative humour.

3. Make lunches lighthearted: If you have a common area where people share tables over lunch, try throwing in questions that could elicit a humorous response. You could say, "What's something unusual you have noticed while driving to work recently?" Such questions encourage responses from everyone, irrespective of experience or hierarchy.
4. Make a great first impression: People who use humour in the workplace are seen as more competent and confident. Use this to your advantage when meeting with someone new. Start with a lighthearted personal story. Stories are powerful and a fun story about you could help you seem relatable, approachable, and creative.
5. Shake up your standing meetings: Are most people on camera and seeming disengaged during your regular stand-up meetings? Try making them fun. You could set up themes (ugliest holiday sweaters) or play a game (notice charades). According to International TEDx speaker Chris Littlefield, a super fun game is "Word of the Day." At the start of your meeting, pick a word of the day such as "cucumber." The rule is to slip the word into the conversation without others noticing. So, someone might say, "I really think that if we cucumber the system with a little extra investment, everything will work much faster." If you catch someone using the word...you have to scream, "Word of the day!" Now, more than ever, everyone is realizing the benefits of humour. It is one of the most effective ways to connect with people not just in social settings but also at work. The bottom line: Humour is good for everyone. We just need to be careful about what kind of humour we are using at work.

Three Quotients to Manage Talent



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The term 'talent management strategy' of an organization includes both onboarding and managing 'human' resources to effectively bring out the best of their potential both in the individual capacity and collaboratively as a team. The team responsible for onboarding these talents has to mandatorily identify the right talent for the right role, and it is equally important that the leader managing these talents creates an environment to nurture and flourish so that they upgrade their talents. While it is very easy for us to bucket the job of an HR Head as (a) attracting talent (b) retaining talent, and (c) growing talent – care should be taken to ensure that the 'talent' is not reduced to an employee number or a head count but the human aspect of the talent is recognized, appreciated and addressed. Ultimately, the talent manager is accountable for managing the talent by creating a culture in the team in such a way that the hidden potential flowers and there is an opportunity for the talent to express herself/himself by understanding the purpose of the role for which she/he has been made part of the team. Alternately, when the manager does not micromanage, and the talent understands the task at hand by having clarity on the role – the talent will have more joy in fulfilling the responsibilities.

This article focuses on looking at a talent as a human being – making the role performed by the talent more aspirational – it is imperative that the manager managing the talent or the team does not look at them as a head-count or an employee ID. Ultimately, a talent should be seen as an individual with emotions – without any bias or preconceived notion.

The approach taken at the School of Design Thinking is first 'Design The Thinking®' before 'Thinking The Design'. Design The Thinking® is a mindset that helps to focus on the person facing the problem more than the problem itself. Hence, in this context, talent is looked at from three different perspectives – capability quotient, emotional quotient and capacity quotient.

Capability quotient focuses on the knowledge that is the force of growth for the team/individual. The emotional quotient focuses on the emotions that either bind or scatter a team towards siloed working or collaborative working. Capacity quotient is all about how the environment nurtures purpose-driven intrinsic motivation over extrinsic motivation.

CAPABILITY QUOTIENT – A person acquires a skill, either in college or as part of the demand of the job. The knowledge thus acquired is largely theoretical

with minimal practical experience in application. When that person applies that skill repeatedly over some time, she/he gains depth in that skill – also called **expertise**. We generally seek expertise from a cardiologist or home décor because we need someone who understands the domain better – someone who can meet our expectations in time, cost and quality. It will not be out of place to quote Malcolm Gladwell from his book 'Outliers' wherein he says, "To become an expert, it takes 10,000 hours (or approximately 10 years) of deliberate practice". As an expert now, the individual is able to perform the job repeatedly in the shortest possible time and with high quality and precision. However, is that enough? While depth of knowledge is definitely needed, that is not enough in the long run. Beyond a point, expertise leads to comfort, stagnancy and even irrelevance of that skill. That is why it becomes imperative that the talent manager leads the talent towards a big-picture view of the world around that skill. If expertise is 20,000 feet deep, the big picture is 20,000 feet above - termed as **perspective**. If expertise is knowledge, perspective is wisdom. This wisdom tells us where to apply the knowledge, when to apply the knowledge, and even how much of the knowledge should be applied.

Perspective helps the talent to learn, unlearn and relearn newer skills depending on how the world around them is changing. It is this perspective that helps the talent to connect the dots across different domains, such as business and technology. As an expert, the talent was restricted only to one domain, but perspective helps build **ideas** across different domains. When multiple domains converge, there is **alignment** across the team, department or organization. This can be viewed as the gradual growth of talent from being an 'order taker' (as a skilled person) to being an 'agenda setter' (when the talent builds ideas through perspective).

The talent manager needs to understand that each talent has his or her own journey of moving from skill to perspective. It is the primary responsibility of the talent manager to help a skilled talent to graduate to perspective by providing the necessary environment.

EMOTIONAL QUOTIENT – The journey of talent across various stages in the 'capability' growth becomes more complicated when the talent is part of a team. While working together, their emotional aspects come into play. These emotions are termed frictional forces; the reason is that emotions are like frictions – too much is bad, and its absence is equally bad.

Doubt – The talent may have doubts regarding either the role, the job at hand or even where the project is heading. The question here is – Is there an avenue for the talent to ask questions? Does the culture allow talent to question the status quo? Are only questions

repeatedly asked with no action being taken post-clarification? Alternatively, there could also be a scenario where the talent is not seeking clarity but is happy with ambiguity and jumps into action.

- **Conflict** – This emotion arises in three different possibilities – a difference of opinion, a difference of perspective or a difference of expectation. How these differences are resolved or sorted is the moot aspect here. It is recommended to have a dialogue among the parties involved. Dialogue is all about 'what' is right rather than 'who' is right. The behaviour of the talent needs to be observed. Is the talent overly assertive/aggressive from her/his point of view or just succumbing to someone else's point of view?
- **Anger** – Doubt and conflict, when not addressed in a timely and effective manner can lead to anger – a state of frustration leading to stress. This is actually a state of helplessness. A talent can react either by displaying anger or by swallowing anger.
- **Fear** – This emotion can arise due to multiple reasons. It could stem from the fear of going wrong, fear of failure, fear of commitment, fear of being judged or funnily enough, the fear of the unknown. Even when the culture does not allow clarification of doubts, fear could creep in. However, the talent manager should be aware of the fear that prevents the talent from either taking action or throwing caution to the wind and working for the thrill.
- **Ego** – One of the most dangerous of emotions, particularly when the talent is an expert in any domain. Ego leads to an 'I know it all' attitude, which could further lead to the assumption that others do not know anything at all. While self-pride is important, one's attitude should be that of humility – there is more to learn.

While the talent manager needs to ensure that all the above emotions are under check for the talents, she/he should be cognizant of these emotions within herself/himself. It will be in the best interest of the team to ensure that these emotions are managed and channelled well and that they do not take any extreme direction either way.

CAPACITY QUOTIENT – The capacity quotient acts as a catalyst for the blossoming of the capability quotient and emotional quotient. The culture of the team should be such that it promotes the capacity of every individual talent to grow. There are three catalysts or capacity levers:

- **Vulnerability** – Is the talent always operating within the confines of her / his comfort zone? The

talent would always restrict herself/himself within a comfort zone if the organization does not allow mistakes or failure as part of the learning process. When the organization says, 'First Time Right', fresh thinking stops, and the talent refuses to create newer comfort zones.

- **Appreciation** – There should be a culture of appreciating the effort that has been put in by the talent irrespective of the outcome. The positive reinforcement coming from other talents improves trust within the team, and there is renewed energy and vigour by the talent to forcibly put themselves in an uncomfortable zone. Care should be taken that during the process of appreciation, the GST framework is followed. The appreciation should be Genuine, Specific and Timely.
- **Limiting Belief** –The elements in the emotional quotient can bring down self-confidence thus, drastically reducing the capacity of the talent. Limiting beliefs can be infectious too. It is imperative for the talent manager to ensure that the team does not spiral down into disbelief and demotivation.

Thus, these thirteen musical notes – 5 of the Capability Quotient – Skill, Expertise, Perspective, Idea and Alignment, 5 of the Emotional Quotient – Doubt, Conflict, Anger, Fear and Ego and 3 of Capacity Quotient – Vulnerability, Appreciation and Limiting Beliefs –are present in every talent and when these are managed well, the team tends to outperform itself. The talent tends to move from incremental growth to exponential growth. These 13 musical notes, when balanced, provide an environment to collaborate and co-create.

School of Design Thinking is committed to creating awareness about Design Thinking as a 'Human Centred – Future Focused' approach to society at large. It strives to bring the culture of design thinking to all aspects of life by focusing on preparing the design mind. A design mindset helps solve complex challenges as well as create meaningful and immersive experiences. For more information, visit www.d-thinking.com

Positivity: Why you should make a New Year's Resolution



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With a blink, 46 weeks of 2024 have just flown by. We witnessed 10 months of tumultuous change that have been watershed years for India and across the world. Governments have come and gone. Nature has washed away huge swathes of land. Businesses have launched successful IPOs, and some have gone bankrupt. The cycle of life continues.

Humanity keeps charging on. We are a resilient species. Positivity propels us further because the evidence for optimism is overwhelming. People who can use optimistic thinking have better health, financial, social, psychological, and spiritual outcomes.

You might ask what is the secret?

The story about humanity at large is never about those big bang investments and projects. The success of India is about these microstories, which make up our social and economic fabric and really make the difference in our lives.

How does it really start?

The process of making that difference? Thomas Carlye was asked, how do I make the world a better place? To which the witty man replied, "Take care of yourself, and we will have one less rascal to worry about".

Try this on yet another Monday morning.

Think about your life in the future. Imagine that everything has gone as well as it possibly could. You have worked hard and succeeded at accomplishing all your life goals. Think of this as the realisation of your life dreams. Now, write about what you imagined.

Even if you are half my age, then chances are you have witnessed close to an average of 30 cycles of resolutions, and even if you heard an average of 10 resolutions every year, you have heard 300 of them, and most of them have failed, and therefore your cynicism of not believing in New Year Resolutions perhaps seems justified.

Let's explore the effectiveness of making a New Year's resolution.

The *Fresh Start Effect* is a fascinating psychological

concept explored by Dr Katy Milkman, a behavioural scientist at the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania.

This concept centres on the idea that people are more likely to initiate positive changes following a "temporal landmark"—a point in time that feels like a fresh beginning.

These landmarks can be dates like the start of a new week, month, or year as well as personal milestones, such as a birthday, a new job, or moving to a new city.

Essentially, the Fresh Start Effect harnesses our inclination to view certain moments as opportunities to leave past mistakes behind and turn a new leaf.

The Science Behind the Fresh Start Effect

Dr. Milkman's research suggests that fresh starts work because they create a psychological distance between our current self and our past, potentially flawed self. These moments allow us to redefine our identity and motivation, which is why resolutions made on New Year's Day tend to be taken more seriously, at least initially, than goals set on random days.

Examples of the Fresh Start Effect in Action

1. **New Year's Resolutions:** One of the most common examples is the spike in goal-setting and health-oriented habits around New Year's. Gym memberships, diet plans, and wellness routines see a huge increase in sign-ups during January. The "new year, new me", mentality demonstrates how people feel that the beginning of the year marks a clean slate, motivating them to pursue their goals with renewed energy.
2. **Birthdays and Decade Milestones:** Significant birthdays, like turning 30, 40, or 50, often spark a reassessment of one's life direction. People might start setting bigger goals or make a decision to adopt healthier habits as they reach these milestone birthdays. A study found that individuals are more likely to run their first marathon during a year when their age ends in a "9"—29, 39, or 49—showing a tendency to start fresh as they approach a new decade.
3. **Beginning of the School Year or Job Change:** Teachers often notice that students start the school year with improved motivation and dedication compared to how they ended the previous year. Similarly, professionals starting a new job or receiving a promotion may see it as an opportunity to redefine themselves as more organized, proactive, or ambitious. This sense of novelty and self-reinvention contributes to enhanced engagement.

4. **Monday Motivation:** Studies have shown that people are more likely to set fitness goals or pursue wellness plans at the start of the week, treating Monday as a "Mini New Year." This inclination to start on a Monday provides a fresh-start effect weekly, allowing individuals to reset their goals or restart efforts that might have lagged.

Leveraging the Fresh Start Effect

Understanding the Fresh Start Effect can be powerful for personal growth and change. Instead of waiting for the next big event, people can create "fresh starts" more frequently. Setting micro-resolutions at the start of each month or making slight shifts in routine with each new season can help sustain motivation over time.

By recognizing and utilizing these psychological landmarks, we can better harness the natural inclination for self-improvement that comes with each fresh start, making positive changes stick with lasting effects.

Let's see some more facts. Research indicates that just telling someone you will vote increases the actual chances of walking to the polling booth.

Professor Norcross tested if New Year resolvers who made a public declaration of their goals actually stuck to them, as compared to the non-resolvers. He found that, six months later, 4% of non-resolvers had stuck to their goal. On the other hand, 46% of the resolvers had stuck to their goal. A 10-fold difference.

That is not all. Resolvers who were confident about their ability to meet their goals were significantly more likely to achieve their goals. So, confident New Year resolvers not only outscored the non-resolvers but also the non-confident resolvers.

Does it sound vaguely familiar? We have a phrase for this. It is called, wait for it, self-fulfilling prophecies. Guess what, it is not a Rhondaesque, Chopraesque or Robinesque theory. This is science at work.

What kind of goals work?

Firstly, they have to be your own goals. If your friends have been forcing you to lose weight, chances are this resolution will not work. Secondly, losing weight to look good or feel healthy will work better than wanting to look good to not feel ugly. Your goal has to be positive and because you want it, really badly.

Then you may ask how.

Again, research shows that just thinking about it helps. Taking action helps even more. David Myers, in his Social Psychology textbook, has huge evidence which proves that simply doing something changes the way we feel about it. Once you go for that first

walk on January 2 and come back home sweaty and with bones aching, the feeling that losing weight is totally worth it will take root. Sitting at home is not going to build anything.

Give yourself a little milestone. You will walk one kilometre or you will lose just a quarter of a kilo in the first week. You feel good when you achieve the first small milestone. You will soon be caught in an upward spiral.

Therefore, on this Monday morning, wish you a very positive day and week ahead and wish you a very happy New Year 2025.

Seriously, What's so Funny?



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Author information

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Abstract:

Humour can play a key role in creating a positive and productive workplace. This article looks at how humour can boost team morale, creativity, and employee well-being. Drawing on both classical views and modern research, the article highlights how humour helps ease stress, strengthen relationships, and make work more enjoyable. However, it's important to balance humour with professionalism to avoid crossing into disrespect or insensitivity. When used well, humour fosters trust and collaboration, leading to a more engaged, happy, and productive workplace.

Seriously, What's so Funny?

One of the best memories of childhood days for most of us would be eagerly turning to the "Laughter: The Best Medicine," "All in a Day's Work," and "Humour in Uniform" pages in the Reader's Digest. Staying true to its historic vision: 'to bring out the good in people and families everywhere', the Reader's Digest has been a treasure trove of laughter and light-hearted entertainment for more than 100 years.

The delightful mix of anecdotes and wit has stood the test of time, bringing readers a refreshing dose of humour, making them a beloved feature of the magazine for generations. Their longevity is a testament to the timeless value of humour, reminding us that, no matter how much the world around us changes, a well-timed laugh is always in style. These stories, shared for decades, prove that humour is not only universal but essential - both in life and work.

I instantly recalled the Reader's Digest when I read about the theme for the HR Vista i.e., "Workplace Culture of Playfulness: Creating an environment of humour and positivity". Though "workplace humour" might initially sound like an oxymoron, it's far from contradictory. In fact, humour in the workplace can

boost productivity, lift morale, and strengthen team dynamics. The notion that work must always be serious and devoid of humour is an outdated one.

But what exactly is Humour?

Simply put, humour is a form of communication in which the stimulus produces amusement. Humour comes in



various forms, including slapstick (physical comedy), deadpan (straight-faced delivery), satire (mocking human flaws), insult (jokes cracked at the expense of others), surreal (bizarre situations), wordplay (puns and clever language), self-deprecating (putting yourself down to evoke laughter), and dark humour (taboo topics).

Classical Greek philosophers had diverse views on humour. Plato saw laughter as potentially harmful, associating it with malice and a lack of self-control. He believed humour could undermine moral judgment. Aristotle, on the other hand, recognized the value of wit and saw humour as a social tool, though he acknowledged its potential for hostility. Socrates used humour in dialogues to provoke critical thinking and moral reflection, often employing irony to challenge his interlocutors. Others like Cicero, a Roman philosopher, viewed humour more favourably, seeing it as a gift from the gods and a powerful rhetorical tool. Sigmund Freud viewed humour as a release of repressed thoughts and desires, allowing socially



unacceptable ideas to be expressed in a socially acceptable way.

Humour in the workplace

The positive view of humour, especially in the workplace, began to evolve significantly in the late 20th century. Researchers like Dr. Peter McGraw and Dr. Rod Martin explored humour's psychological benefits, while organizations started recognizing its role in enhancing creativity and employee satisfaction. The trend gained momentum with books like "The Levity Effect" by Adrian Gostick and Scott Christopher, which highlighted humour's impact on workplace culture and productivity. By "Levity" the authors meant "a sense of lightness." It's less about being 'funny' and more about being able to have fun and see the humorous side of everyday situations—especially difficult situations. This shift marked a departure from traditional views that often saw humour as unprofessional or distracting. Some examples of levity include: whether new employees are made to feel welcome, whether there are a lot of celebrations for special events, friends at work who make you laugh, or having colleagues who are good to work with.

The Harvard Business Review article, 'Leading with Humour' asserts that the workplace needs laughter. Quoting research from institutions such as Wharton, MIT, and London Business School, the article says that every laugh or chuckle comes with a range of business advantages. Laughter reduces stress and boredom, enhances engagement and well-being, and drives not only creativity and teamwork but also sharper analysis and increased productivity.

Balancing professionalism with fun in the workplace

It is now well accepted that incorporating humour into the workplace can uplift the team's morale, add an element of fun to tasks, ease tensions during challenging times, and foster trust among colleagues.

A witty remark or a light joke can also make leaders appear more approachable and relatable.

Research shows that humour or laughter triggers the production of feel-good chemicals in our bodies, inhibits the release of stress hormones, helps lower inflammation, and improves blood flow, while at the cerebral level, relieves boredom and stress and



encourages creativity, collaboration, innovation and higher productivity.

While laughter may be the best medicine, like any medication, it is most effective when used appropriately.

Aristotle placed a person's response to humour on a continuum of amusement. At the upper end of the amusement continuum, Aristotle identified a person who is a 'buffoon,' and at the lower end of the continuum he identified a person who is 'boorish.' The ideal, Aristotle suggested, is to find a balance between buffoonery and boorishness - an ideal middle state - which he described as the 'Golden Mean'.

Being funny for no reason, crossing the line of professionalism, hurting others, making insensitive jokes, dark humour, jokes on sex, religion, physical or mental attributes of others, and out-of-context jokes are to be totally avoided at the workplace and even in any social or close-knit gatherings.

It, therefore, follows that using humour at the workplace is a tightrope balancing act, but one that can be learnt and practised to minimise stress and strengthen camaraderie at the workplace.

Starting meetings with humour or a simple heartfelt smile can ease tensions, make people feel comfortable, and create a more relaxed, productive atmosphere compared to a stern approach. As a business leader, authentic humour through personal anecdotes fosters trust, reduces fear, and enhances group dynamics during company meetings or events. Anthropologist

Edward Hall powerfully summed up the impact of humour on leadership impact when he said, "If you can learn the humour of a people and really control it, you know that you are also in control of nearly everything else."

To sum up, a workplace culture of playfulness, infused with humour and positivity, boosts morale, creativity, and team bonding. It reduces stress, encourages open communication, and fosters collaboration. By embracing light-hearted moments, leaders create a more engaging, supportive environment where employees feel valued, energized, and motivated to contribute their best work. While fostering playfulness, it's crucial to avoid humour that crosses the line into disrespect, insensitivity, or unprofessionalism to maintain a positive and inclusive environment.

So, when was the last time you had a good laugh at work? If it was today, you are indeed living a good life...and if you can't recall...it's time to wake up and infuse your workdays with laughter, because a 'Joyful You' will make a thriving workplace!

Happy Souls at Work: Playfulness Well-being Productivity



By - Arpit Gupta, IOCL
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Abstract:

In today's high-pressure work environment, creating a culture of playfulness is more than just a perk—it's a pathway to enhanced creativity, productivity, and well-being. This article explores the science behind humour and its impact on the brain, revealing how playful atmospheres light up the frontal cortex, shifting employees from high-stress beta states to the more creative alpha and theta states. Drawing on insights from the Hawthorne experiments, the Harvard Study of Adult Development, and the world's Blue Zones, it highlights how informal, positive environments lead to stronger relationships and better mental health. Furthermore, the article offers practical suggestions for integrating playfulness into the office, from jigsaw puzzles to laughter yoga, fostering collaboration and reducing stress. By embracing a culture of humour and connection, workplaces can unlock not only higher productivity but also a collective sense of joy and fulfilment, ultimately contributing to long-term success.

The modern workplace often demands our full attention, driving us to operate in a focused, goal-oriented mode that keeps us in a constant "beta" state of mind. This state, while essential for productivity, can sometimes limit our creativity and diminish the joy we find in our work. But here's where playfulness comes

in! Research shows that when we introduce humour and light-heartedness into our environment, the brain's frontal cortex – responsible for higher cognitive functions – begins to light up. This shift brings us out of the beta state and into more relaxed alpha or even theta states, which are known to encourage creativity, problem-solving, and even daydreaming.

In essence, when we laugh or engage in playful activities, we're doing more than just having fun – we're creating an atmosphere where creativity thrives.

Playfulness Boosts Productivity: The Hawthorne Effect

Consider the famous Hawthorne experiments of the 1920s and 1930s, which famously showed how creating an informal and relaxed atmosphere improved



productivity among workers. The experiments revealed that when employees felt comfortable and supported in a more playful environment, their output increased significantly. It's the power of human connection and laughter that fosters not just efficiency but a sense of belonging.

The Harvard Study of Adult Development: The Power of Relationships

This groundbreaking research, which began in 1938, has tracked the lives of 268 Harvard students over several decades, seeking the key to long-term happiness and health. The findings? Close relationships, not fame or fortune, are what keep people happy and healthy. This insight underlines



the importance of fostering strong interpersonal connections at work. Humour and playfulness are vital tools in building these relationships, creating bonds that not only boost morale but also help us navigate stressful situations with ease.

The World's Blue Zones: Play and Longevity

Around the globe, communities known as "Blue Zones" boast the highest concentrations of centenarians – people who live to be 100 years old or more. In these places, like Sardinia in Italy or Okinawa in Japan, laughter, community, and social interaction are woven into daily life. These examples teach us that a life filled with humour and connection doesn't just make us happier – it can make us live longer.

Bhutan's Gross National Happiness: The Pursuit of Well-being

Bhutan, a small Himalayan kingdom, measures its success not through GDP but through Gross National Happiness (GNH). This model emphasises emotional well-being, including factors like psychological health and community vitality, many of which are tied to playful, positive environments. Bhutan's approach offers a broader view of success – one that could inspire our own workplace cultures to prioritise happiness alongside performance.

The Science Behind Playfulness: Endorphins and Cortisol

When we engage in playful activities, our bodies release endorphins – the "feel-good" chemicals that reduce stress and elevate our mood. Simultaneously, levels of cortisol, the stress hormone, decrease. This balance helps create a more relaxed yet energised state of mind. It's a win-win for both our personal well-being and our productivity at work. A playful culture reduces burnout and increases job satisfaction, helping us stay sharp and motivated.

Bertrand Russell on Escaping Self-Absorption

Philosopher Bertrand Russell once said, "The world is vast, and our own powers are limited. If all our happiness is bound up entirely in our personal circumstances, it is difficult not to demand of life more than it has to give. And to demand too much is the surest way of getting even less than is possible."

Russell's words resonate deeply with the idea of fostering a playful workplace. By embracing humour, we shift our focus from personal worries to a broader, shared experience. Engaging with our colleagues through playful activities not only alleviates stress but also helps us cultivate a mindset that is open, curious, and ready to approach challenges with renewed energy. When we step outside of ourselves, even

momentarily, we return to our tasks with greater calm, focus, and resilience.

Suggested Playful Activities for the Office

Incorporating playfulness into the workplace isn't about creating distractions but rather about fostering a sense of connection and creativity. When we laugh and engage in lighthearted activities, we unlock parts of our brain that help us think more freely and connect with others more naturally. So, how can we bring this playful spirit into our offices in a way that enhances productivity and well-being?

Here are a few suggestions:

- **Jigsaw Puzzle Room:** Imagine a shared space in the office where employees can gather around a large jigsaw puzzle during breaks. This type of activity allows for casual interactions, sparks collaboration, and provides a mental break from the day's tasks. As individuals work together to solve the puzzle, they build relationships and engage in creative problem-solving without even realising it.
- **BAFA BAFA Simulation:** This team-building exercise is perfect for fostering cultural awareness and improving communication. The game divides participants into groups, each representing a different culture with its own unique rules. Employees must then interact and solve problems together, learning how to navigate differences in a playful yet insightful way. Not only does this build teamwork, but it also encourages a spirit of collaboration and understanding.



In the fast-paced, result-oriented world of work, it's easy to lose sight of the benefits that a playful, humorous environment can bring. However, as the research shows – from the Hawthorne experiments to the Harvard study to the wisdom of Blue Zone communities – a workplace filled with humour and positivity fosters deeper connections, enhances creativity, and boosts overall productivity. The science is clear: when we laugh together, we grow together.

By embracing a workplace culture of playfulness, we're not only reducing stress and improving employee well-being, but we're also building a foundation for long-term success. So, let's light up our frontal lobes, spark some laughter, and create a workplace where joy, creativity, and collaboration flourish.

The Joy of Work: Building a Culture Where Playfulness Meets Performance



By - Mr. Mousom Some, RHQ, IOCL
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In 2013, Zappos, the well-known online shoe retailer, was featured in *Delivering Happiness* by Tony Hsieh, its CEO at the time. The book narrates how Zappos embraced a workplace culture that valued humour, positivity, and a sense of playfulness. Known for its vibrant and energetic environment, Zappos encourages employees to be themselves and have fun at work. One standout example from the book was the company's "Parade Around the Office," where employees dressed in costumes paraded through the office to celebrate milestones. This simple yet impactful act not only boosted morale but also strengthened bonds between employees. It became a reminder that even in the high-pressure world of retail, maintaining an environment of joy could lead to success.

Zappos' story reveals a powerful truth: a culture of playfulness can transform workplaces into spaces where creativity, productivity, and engagement thrive. By integrating lighthearted activities and a positive attitude into daily work, Zappos didn't just create a fun workplace; it built a foundation for unparalleled customer service and employee loyalty. This example sets the stage for exploring why cultivating a playful culture is more than just a trend—it's a strategic advantage.

The Power of Workplace Culture in Fostering Positivity

Workplace culture serves as the invisible architecture that holds an organization together. It influences how employees interact, how they perceive their work, and how they contribute to collective goals.

A culture infused with playfulness and humour creates a space where people feel comfortable, valued, and free to express themselves. This environment, in turn, becomes a fertile ground for positive vibes, where people are encouraged to connect beyond their job titles and roles.

When organizations nurture a culture of humour and positivity, they unlock a critical asset—engagement. Employees who feel they can laugh, share a joke, and experience moments of light-heartedness are

more likely to build genuine relationships with their peers. This sense of camaraderie translates into trust and collaboration, strengthening the organization's foundation.

The Role of Attitude: The Heart of Playful Work Culture



The workplace culture of playfulness is not solely a top-down approach; it requires the active participation and mindset of each individual. The attitude of every employee matters profoundly in building and sustaining such a culture.

When employees approach their tasks with a positive and open mindset, it invites creativity and spontaneity, transforming mundane tasks into enjoyable and collaborative efforts.

A culture of playfulness encourages people to view challenges as opportunities for growth rather than obstacles. Humour becomes a tool to break down barriers, and laughter becomes the language of resilience. It's the attitude that empowers employees to take ownership, to see beyond hierarchies, and to be part of an environment that thrives on optimism and inclusivity.

Intergenerational Contributions: Young and Experienced Employees

A workplace culture of playfulness benefits greatly from the diverse contributions of both young and seasoned employees. Young employees often bring fresh ideas, energy, and enthusiasm to the table. They

are typically more open to new concepts and less inhibited by traditional norms, making them natural drivers of a playful culture. Their willingness to engage in creative activities, team-building games, and social events can inspire their peers and establish a lively atmosphere.

On the other hand, experienced employees play a critical role in guiding and shaping this culture through their wisdom and insights. Their ability to share stories, mentor younger colleagues, and show that professionalism does not have to mean seriousness helps bridge generational gaps. They set the tone for a culture where laughter and learning coexist. When these two generations collaborate, it creates a dynamic synergy where ideas and experiences blend, reinforcing the playful spirit of the organization.

Boosting Productivity Through Playfulness

It may sound counterintuitive, but playfulness has a significant impact on productivity. Research consistently shows that workplaces fostering a positive, lighthearted environment see higher engagement levels, reduced absenteeism, and increased innovation. When employees feel safe to express themselves and have fun, they are more likely to approach their work with enthusiasm and creativity.

Playful cultures allow for breaks that re-energize employees, reducing stress and preventing burnout. Humour becomes a stress-relief mechanism, making challenging situations easier to navigate. This resilience directly contributes to productivity, as employees remain engaged, motivated, and capable of maintaining high performance.

Consider the Oil & Gas industry, known for its rigorous, safety-critical environments. At first glance, it may seem difficult to incorporate playfulness here. However, examples from global leaders show otherwise. Companies like Shell and BP have integrated playful team-building exercises into their training programs, combining learning with fun to boost team morale and improve safety awareness. In IndianOil, team-building activities, social events, and humour workshops are organized to build camaraderie among employees, which fosters a positive work environment even in the most challenging operations.

Google's famous "20% time" policy

Across industries, organizations have started embracing the idea of playfulness as a productivity driver. Tech giants like Google and Microsoft have long been advocates of playful workplaces, featuring creative spaces, casual dress codes, and flexible work environments that encourage employees to experiment and innovate. Google's famous "20% time" policy—where employees can dedicate a portion

of their work time to personal projects—has led to several groundbreaking products and services. This is a prime example of how giving employees the freedom to explore their interests can create an atmosphere of playfulness that yields tangible business outcomes.

ExxonMobil's 'Wellness Wednesdays'



In the Oil & Gas sector, safety and efficiency are critical; however, companies like ExxonMobil and Chevron have realized the power of fostering a supportive and fun work culture. For example, ExxonMobil's 'Wellness Wednesdays' initiative allows employees to participate in stress-relief activities such as yoga and fun challenges that encourage a playful spirit. These activities not only promote well-being but also create opportunities for team members to interact in informal settings, strengthening their professional bonds.

"Fun Friday"

Even in traditionally conservative industries like finance, organizations are adopting playful strategies. Take Deloitte, for instance. They implemented a "Fun Friday" initiative where employees engage in various activities like role-playing games, quizzes, and creative sessions, all designed to infuse energy into the workweek and boost team spirit.

How to Create a Playful Workplace Culture: Strategies for Leaders

The success of a playful culture lies heavily in leadership. Leaders must model the behaviours they wish to see, actively participating in and encouraging playful initiatives. Creating safe spaces where employees feel comfortable taking risks and engaging in creative activities is essential. Leaders can implement the following strategies:

- **Encourage Informal Interactions:** Organize social events, team lunches, or casual get-togethers

where employees can interact beyond their work roles. This promotes camaraderie and the free flow of ideas.

- **Create Play Zones:** Designate areas within the office where employees can unwind, such as game rooms, lounge spaces, or even brainstorming corners filled with fun materials like whiteboards and colourful markers.
- **Recognize Humor as a Skill:** Develop workshops or sessions where humour is seen as a valuable tool for communication and stress management. Train employees to use humour in ways that uplift and connect people rather than undermine or offend.
- **Introduce Light-Hearted Competitions:** Friendly competitions, such as trivia contests or fitness challenges, can motivate employees while building a sense of belonging.
- **Balance Playfulness with Professionalism:** While fun is important, ensuring that it aligns with the organization's values and professionalism is crucial. Leaders must set boundaries and ensure that humour does not compromise the respect and safety of others.

Conclusion: A Culture Worth Building

The journey to creating a playful workplace culture begins with the belief that work can and should be enjoyable. By focusing on the attitudes of employees, bridging generational gaps, and implementing strategies that promote humour and positivity, organizations can transform their environments into spaces where people not only work but thrive.

The result? A workplace that not only achieves its productivity targets but also becomes a hub of creativity, collaboration, and well-being—an environment where people look forward to coming every day, knowing that they are valued, supported, and, most importantly, allowed to have fun.

This is a culture worth building—a culture where humour, positivity, and productivity go hand in hand.

Synergy of a Playful Team



By - Ms. Shruti Bajaj, IOCL
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Abstract

Synergy of a Playful Team is a narrative in the form of a story representing how playfulness can enhance learning and growth, create camaraderie, and improve performance at the workplace. The story is about a playful training and learning technique introduced for making a technical session not only engaging but also effective and impactful. If you have been fond of "Dumb Charades", you'd enjoy reading this piece and reimagining a new version of your favourite childhood game! And to make it even better, how this game could enhance the performance of workers of a plant is something that might leave you intrigued!

Synergy of a Playful Team

It was twilight, and the 5 PM siren at the plant had already sounded. However, there was less congestion at the exit gate as the workers still seemed to be inside the plant. Barring one or two, none of the other workers were seen near the exit gate or punching out. Slowly, it started getting darker, and still, there wasn't any sign of people leaving the plant even after the completion of the day's operations.

The Security Guard finally checked on the officers in the administrative block (with a fear of having missed making their exit-entry if some of them might have left). To his surprise, he encountered a sight he could have never imagined. All workers and officers of the plant were together seated in the conference room and were laughing out loud repeatedly. His curiosity made him stay out of the hall while trying to overhear what was going on (thinking, what's wrong with them?)

He saw an officer do some actions, trying to explain something through his actions to a few other officers (who appeared to be on his team), while other officers and workers continued to laugh and giggle over the actions and the reactions! It appeared they were up to some school game of guessing the name of a movie from the actions of a team member. But then his eyes spotted a standee and a banner there that said, "Refresher Session on Plant Facilities and Safety Equipment" It was subtitled "**Game On!**"

By the time the Security Guard could figure out what

was going on, the location-in-charge noticed him through the glass door and invited him in to join the ongoing game. He was perplexed about what he was supposed to do. Explaining the rules of the game, the Safety Officer whispered something in his ear and asked him to explain it with his actions without uttering a word. The Security Guard seemed to be petrified of the entire scenario and was still trying to understand what exactly was going on! The safety officer shook him by his arm and asked him to enact what he was told to. He lifted his arm and acted as if he was trying to wear something over his shoulders and then acting to hold something with his hand and putting it over his mouth, and everybody else yelled in sync, "SCABA" (Self Contained Air Breathing Apparatus) and clapped for the guard. It made him feel relaxed and proud as if he had given his best shot to the Director's Cut!

He understood the relevance of the title and the subtitle on the standee! It was just that he had never seen this session happening without a PowerPoint



presentation or a physical equipment demonstration from the safety officer or an outside faculty. He thanked the location-in-charge for inviting him in and asked for his permission to go back to his duty post.

The next day was the day of the Emergency Response Drill, which is a periodic firefighting drill in the presence of district authorities and mutual aid members. Everything was planned as per convention-equipment checked, emergency exits ready, district authorities informed, and scenario prepared but the

only thing that appeared a bit different was the energy and confidence of the officers and workmen, who appeared to be on a different level than they used to be on such days. The only communication within the hazardous area was the VHF Handset, which wasn't available to all the team members of the three teams involved in the fire fighting, assisting, and rescuing. But it was amazing to see what happened! The three team leaders were positioned around the site at places of highest visibility and were seen making some actions representing equipment, direction, or an act without yelling or looking for a VHF set to communicate to their team members located more than 50-100 metres away. Everything was brought to the site very promptly- the foam cans, the hoses, the branch pipes, the safety trolley, the fire extinguishers, the stretcher& the SCABA! The monitors and sprinklers all operated seamlessly, and the support from the mutual aid members was organized in a jiff on just certain movements and actions from the team leaders.

The only voice heard around the site was of the Site incident controller giving instructions to the team members and the security guards for controlling traffic movement. Apart from that, the only sound was of the air, the sprinklers, the ambulance, and the fire brigade.

The drill closed with the instructions of the incident controller, and everyone headed to the briefing point. All visitors, including the esteemed district authorities and the mutual aid members were murmuring and discussing amongst themselves what they just witnessed while walking towards the assembly point.

The Safety officer very courteously greeted everyone and began the briefing by saying, *"Congratulations on overcoming the observation on communication between team members that was given by our visitors in our last drill, you all acted and guessed well"*. The dignitaries present looked at each other, and the senior most of them came forward to say, *"While your teams were swift and clear on whatever was to be done, we still don't understand how acting and enacting improved your communication while this was the biggest flaw in the last drill when you all were struggling to obtain a VHF set to say what you needed at the site. I'm sure you might have rehearsed it before actual delivery (with a giggle and a sarcastic smile)."*

The Location in charge entered the conversation with a humble tone and subtly mentioned, *"Sir, we just got trained on it!"* and everyone applauded! The mutual aid members started enquiring about the format of the training introduced to which all workmen, officers and the security supervisor present in the briefing happily and enthusiastically replied, **"GAME ON!"**

This was never seen before. Training sessions and their implementation on the ground were a subject of feeble importance owing to the monotony in the delivery of the subject & content. But the playfulness inspired not only participation but also implementation and demonstration on the ground, the result of "Synergy of a playful team!"

Corporate Learnings from ‘Mogambo’ - The Iconic Villain of Indian Film Mr. India



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Author information

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Abstract

This article explores leadership lessons from Mogambo, the iconic villain from the Bollywood film Mr India, to illustrate how corporate leaders can cultivate a balanced workplace culture that values efficiency alongside playfulness. Mogambo, played by the late Amrish Puri, exemplifies traits that, when viewed through a humorous lens, offer insightful takeaways for modern organizations.

The secret to success in today's fast-paced corporate world is to have a balanced workplace that emphasizes both efficiency and a positive, playful and light-hearted culture with an upbeat attitude. Employees flourish in settings where they are motivated, engaged and feel appreciated. Surprisingly, we can draw some interesting leadership lessons from Bollywood's most iconic villain, Mogambo, from the film Mr. India.

Played by Late Mr Amrish Puri, Mogambo was a larger-than-life character who ruled his empire with an iron fist and his infamous line, "Mogambo khush hua!" Although his tactics were evil, when seen humorously from a business perspective, his leadership style provides some insightful lessons for modern organizations and leaders if applied positively.

Let us dive into memorable incidents from Mogambo's reign and valuable takeaways for today's corporate leaders.

Incident 1: Clear Vision and Communication

Clear communication is essential for any organization. Leaders need to make sure that employees are aware of the company's overall goal as well as their specific responsibilities in reaching it. A clear vision helps to keep everyone on the same page, minimize miscommunications and facilitate more efficient work completion.



The character Mogambo never left his team guessing. He always clearly articulated his grand ambition to rule India and laid out detailed plans to achieve this. Although his goal was evil, his ability to communicate a clear, ambitious vision ensured that his subordinates understood their roles in his grand plan. His team knew exactly what was expected from them, with no room for confusion.

Mogambo's clarity in communication is a reminder that ambiguity can lead to misalignment; therefore, leaders must articulate their goals clearly and frequently.

Incident 2: Celebrating Success

Celebrating success is crucial to building a motivated team. Whether reaching a major milestone or completing a tough project, acknowledging accomplishments boosts morale and fosters a sense of belongingness to the people involved in it.

Mogambo thought victory should be celebrated. His associates throw extravagant parties in his lair to celebrate him after each operation. In one memorable scene, he even invited Miss Hawa Hawaii (played by

Late Ms Sridevi) to put up an elaborate show for his guests and business partners. Even though it was all a part of his evil scheme, the spirit of these celebrations is like a crucial business procedure: recognizing and applauding achievement.

These celebrations are more than just an opportunity to have fun; they are an opportunity to honour accomplishments and hard work while providing employees with a chance to unwind and feel valued.

Incident 3: Building Employee Loyalty - "Hail Mogambo!"

Loyalty comes from trust and a shared vision. Leaders who are transparent, fair, and consistently communicate their goals earn loyalty from their employees.

Mogambo's soldiers were fiercely loyal to him, often chanting, "Hail Mogambo!" in unison. This loyalty was built on more than fear; his team was aligned with his grand vision and believed in his leadership. They trusted him that he could lead them to victory.

In a corporate world, when employees feel that they are part of something bigger and have a clear sense of purpose, they will go an extra mile for the organization.

Incident 4: No Micromanagement

Micromanagement can stifle creativity and prevent employees from owning their work. Leaders should trust their teams and delegate to manage day-to-day tasks, freeing themselves to focus on more important strategic decision-making.

Mogambo was aware of the delegation process. He entrusted Daga and Teja - two of his reliable lieutenants to handle the daily operations of his empire. Whereas he was focusing more on overall strategy and the big picture. He did not micromanage and trusted his team. His delegation style was a lesson in letting go of micromanagement and allowing subordinates freedom to execute their tasks.

Incident 5: Feedback - "Mogambo Khush Hua!"

One of the most famous lines in Bollywood history - "Mogambo khush hua!" Mogambo's method of providing feedback. Every time his subordinates succeeded, he acknowledged it with this phrase, showing his approval. While his intentions were dark, the way he delivered feedback was consistent and clear, highlighting the importance of recognizing good work.

Acknowledging good work with timely, genuine feedback not only boosts morale but also encourages continued high performance. Whether it's a simple "well done" or a more formal recognition like promotions or bonuses, leaders should make sure their employees

know when they're doing a good job. Consistent feedback helps to maintain good performance and helps to create a positive work environment.

Incident 6: Risk-Taking and Decision-Making

Mogambo was not afraid of taking bold risks, whether it was unleashing new technology or testing new plans to achieve its objectives. Corporate leaders often face a similar need for calculated risk-taking.

While it is important to avoid Mogambo's thoughtless decision-making and failure to visualise the future consequences, his willingness to think outside the box can inspire business leaders to embrace innovation, experiment with new strategies and lead with courage, especially in today's competitive markets.

Incident 7: Learning from Failure - Adaptability

Despite his power and planning, Mogambo ultimately failed because he underestimated Mr. India's abilities. His rigid approach did not allow for adaptability, and his failure to adjust to the situation led to his downfall.

In today's VUCA world, industry Leaders must remain open to learning from failures and be ready to adjust their strategies when required. Encouraging a culture of learning where mistakes are seen as opportunities for growth and fostering innovation for long-term sustainability. Staying adaptable ensures that the organization remains competitive and capable of navigating unforeseen challenges.

Conclusion: A Playful Take on Leadership

Mogambo may have been a villain, but there is much that corporate leaders can learn from his approach to leadership when applied ethically. Celebrating success, building loyalty, communicating clearly and trusting one's team are all timeless leadership lessons that contribute to a positive and productive workplace.

The most important takeaway is to lead with integrity and ensure that success is achieved in a manner that benefits both the organization and its people. Corporate leaders must ground these practices in terms of ethical values, integrity and genuine concern for employee well-being.

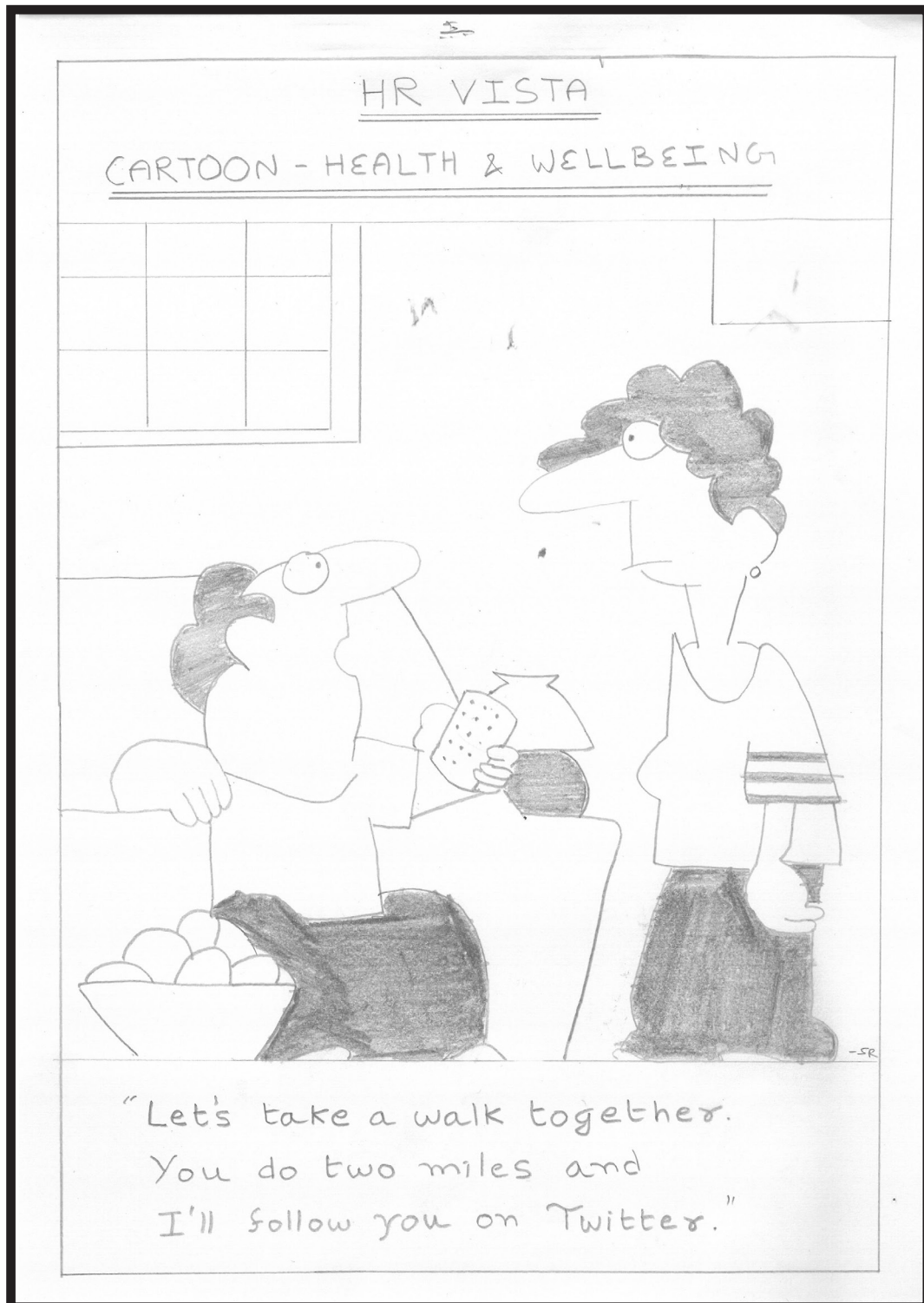
Just like Mogambo's iconic "Mogambo khush hua!" signalled his satisfaction, a great leader's true success lies in fostering a workplace where everyone can say, "We are happy here," as they feel motivated, recognized and valued.

In the end, true leadership is not just about achieving goals; it is about how those goals are achieved and the impact on those who make it possible. Through these lessons with a positive twist, leaders can create a workplace culture that balances fun and productivity, driving success while ensuring that the teams thrive.

Cartoon - Health & Wellbeing



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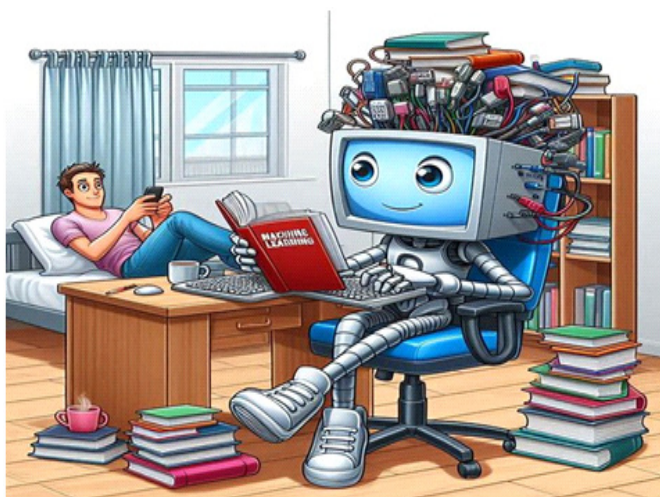
Machines Are Learning, How About You?



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I am a data enthusiast with 5 years of diverse experience across various industries. Alongside my passion for data, I am a strong advocate for Diversity and Inclusion and have a keen interest in Human Resource Development. My educational background includes an MBA in Marketing and HR from IIM Lucknow and a degree in Electronics and Electrical Engineering.



In ancient Greece, the philosopher Plato spoke of the mythical city of Atlantis, a utopia where advanced knowledge and technology coexisted harmoniously with human development. Though fictional, this story offers a timeless lesson: the greatest civilizations are those that effectively harness knowledge and innovation. Fast forward to the 21st century, we stand at the cusp of another transformative era, driven by the relentless advancement of artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML). This technological revolution is reshaping industries, altering job markets, and redefining human capabilities.

In this context, a pressing question emerges: "What about you?" As machines rapidly learn and evolve, it becomes crucial for humans to keep pace. Integrating AI and ML into everyday life and work environments is not just about automating tasks; it is about augmenting human potential and redefining what it means to learn and work in the modern world.

The capabilities of AI and ML have grown exponentially, driven by vast amounts of data, powerful computational

resources, and sophisticated algorithms. These intelligent systems are not only performing routine tasks but are also driving innovation and solving complex problems previously thought to be the exclusive domain of human intellect. From natural language processing to predictive analytics, machines are mastering skills at an unprecedented pace.

However, this rapid technological advancement presents a dual challenge: while machines are becoming smarter, there is an urgent need for humans to continuously upgrade their skills. The World Economic Forum predicts that by 2025, 50% of all employees will need reskilling due to the adoption of new technologies. This underscores the necessity for lifelong learning and the development of a mindset geared towards continuous improvement.

In this article, we explore the evolving landscape of AI and ML, the necessity for human adaptation, and the importance of lifelong learning. We will delve into strategies for maintaining relevance in an AI-driven world, the symbiotic relationship between human and machine learning, and how leveraging AI can enhance human educational experiences. As we stand on the brink of this new era, it is imperative to ask ourselves: Are we keeping up? The rise of intelligent machines calls for a parallel evolution in human learning and skill acquisition, ensuring that we, too, continue to grow and thrive in this rapidly changing world.

Understanding the Rise of Intelligent Machines

The rise of intelligent machines, driven by advancements in artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning, has been nothing short of revolutionary. Over the past decade, AI has transitioned from a niche area of research to a mainstream technology with profound implications across various sectors. According to the **Artificial Intelligence Index Report 2024** by Stanford University, AI systems have achieved remarkable progress, often surpassing human performance in tasks such as reading comprehension, image classification, and complex problem-solving. This report highlights the rapid pace of AI development, noting that benchmarks for assessing AI capabilities are becoming obsolete much faster than before. Furthermore, a study published in **Nature** emphasizes

the exponential growth in AI and robotics research.

The number of AI-related papers in high-quality journals has tripled over the past decade, reflecting the increasing importance and application of AI technologies. This surge in research is not limited to a single country; leading nations like the United States, China, and the United Kingdom are at the forefront of AI innovation. Top consulting firms have also documented the significant impact of AI on businesses. According to a report by **Deloitte**, the global AI market is projected to grow from \$300 billion in 2024 to \$1.3 trillion by 2032, driven by a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of over 40%. This growth is fueled by AI's potential to revolutionize industries, such as healthcare, finance, and manufacturing through enhanced efficiency, predictive analytics, and automation.

Capgemini also highlights the increasing demand for AI services, noting that their AI-focused offerings have seen substantial growth. In the first quarter of 2024 alone, Capgemini reported revenues of \$5.9 billion from AI-related services, underscoring the technology's critical role in digital transformation.

The Workforce Revolution: Navigating the AI Era

The rise of intelligent machines is transforming the global workforce, presenting both remarkable benefits and significant challenges. As AI, ML and automation become more prevalent, their impact on jobs, skill development, and organizational dynamics is profound and multifaceted.

One of the most pressing concerns is the potential for job displacement. According to a report by **McKinsey & Company**, up to 800 million jobs could be lost to automation by 2030. This shift could lead to significant economic and social upheaval, particularly for workers in roles most susceptible to automation. However, AI & ML also creates new job opportunities, particularly in areas requiring advanced technical skills. For instance, there is a growing demand for AI specialists, data scientists, and cybersecurity experts. Moreover, AI can enhance job satisfaction by taking over mundane and hazardous tasks, allowing human workers to focus on more complex and creative activities.

AI & ML is not just about replacing jobs; it's also about creating new ones. The **World Economic Forum** predicts that AI could create 97 million new jobs by 2025. These roles will likely be in fields, such as AI development, data analysis, and cybersecurity. Additionally, AI can help businesses innovate and create new products and services, leading to further job creation. For example, AI-driven insights can lead to the development of innovative solutions, efficient products, and customer service enhancements.

AI is revolutionizing learning and development (L&D) within organizations. Traditional L&D methods often fall short of keeping pace with rapidly evolving skill requirements. AI, however, offers personalized learning pathways, continuously updated materials and highly realistic training simulations. For example, AI-powered platforms can identify skill gaps and tailor training programs to individual needs, ensuring that employees stay relevant in a fast-changing industry. In the oil and gas sector, AI-driven training programs are particularly beneficial. They can simulate real-world scenarios, providing hands-on experience without the associated risks. This approach not only enhances learning outcomes but also improves safety and operational efficiency.

AI's integration into the workforce is transforming organizational dynamics. Companies are leveraging AI & ML to optimize operations, reduce costs, and enhance safety. For instance, AI algorithms can monitor equipment and alert maintenance teams to potential issues before they escalate, reducing the risk of accidents and downtime. Additionally, AI can analyze vast amounts of data to provide insights that support informed decision-making, such as identifying optimal drilling locations. However, the adoption of AI & ML also presents challenges. There are concerns about data security and privacy, particularly given the sensitive nature of information in many industries. Organizations must invest in robust cybersecurity measures to protect their data and maintain trust with stakeholders.

Embracing the Future: The Urgent Call for Adaptation

As we are witnessing the dawn of a new age defined by intelligent machines, the need for adaptation has never been more critical. The rapid advancements in AI and automation are reshaping industries and redefining the skills required to thrive in the modern workforce. To navigate this transformative landscape, individuals and organizations must embrace continuous learning and proactive adaptation.

Lifelong Learning, A Necessity, Not a Choice: In a world where technology evolves at an unprecedented pace, the concept of lifelong learning is no longer optional. According to the World Economic Forum, 50% of all employees will need reskilling by 2025 as the adoption of technology increases. This shift underscores the importance of developing a mindset geared towards continuous improvement and adaptability. Workers must be willing to acquire new skills and knowledge to stay relevant in their fields. Online courses, professional certifications, and on-

the-job training are becoming essential tools for career advancement.

Bridging the Skills Gap: The rise of AI& ML has highlighted a significant skills gap in the workforce. A report by PwC indicates that 79% of CEOs are concerned about the availability of key skills. To bridge this gap, educational institutions and businesses must collaborate to create robust training programs that align with industry needs. This includes integrating AI and data science into curricula and offering hands-on experience with cutting-edge technologies. By fostering a culture of innovation and learning, organizations can ensure their workforce is equipped to handle the challenges and opportunities presented by AI.

Human-AI Collaboration: The New Paradigm: The future of work lies in the collaboration between humans and AI. Rather than viewing AI& ML as a threat, we should see it as an enabler that can augment human capabilities. For instance, AI can handle repetitive and data-intensive tasks, freeing up human workers to focus on strategic and creative endeavours. This symbiotic relationship can lead to increased productivity and innovation. According to a study by Accenture, companies that successfully integrate AI& ML into their operations could see a 38% increase in profitability by 2035.

Ethical Considerations and Responsible AI: As we integrate AI& ML into various aspects of our lives, it is crucial to address the ethical implications. Ensuring that these systems are transparent, fair, and accountable is paramount. Organizations must adopt ethical guidelines and frameworks to govern the development and deployment of AI technologies. This includes addressing biases in AI algorithms, protecting user privacy, and ensuring that AI is used for the greater good. By prioritizing ethical considerations, we can build trust in AI and harness its potential responsibly.

Final Thoughts

The transformative potential of AI & ML is undeniable. It promises to enhance operational efficiencies, drive innovation, and open new avenues for growth. However, the key to leveraging them effectively lies in our ability to adapt and evolve. This involves fostering a culture of continuous learning, investing in workforce development, and implementing ethical frameworks to ensure responsible AI usage.

From a human resources perspective, the onus is on organizations to support their workforce through this transition. By providing robust reskilling and upskilling programs, promoting human-AI collaboration, and ensuring inclusive practices, organizations can not only safeguard jobs but also create a more dynamic

and resilient workforce.

The critical takeaway is that AI & ML should be viewed as an augmentation tool rather than a replacement. The synergy between human ingenuity and machine intelligence holds the promise of unprecedented advancements. Yet, this synergy can only be realized if we approach AI integration with foresight, responsibility, and a commitment to ethical practices.

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Talent Development and Succession Planning for Organizational Sustainability



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Abstract

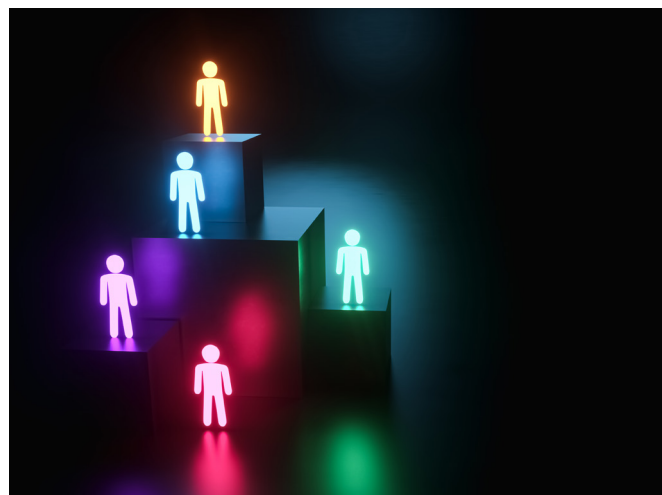
Though the role of Human Resources in Talent Management is well established, there is still a need to identify and develop the best practices for successful Succession Planning through Talent Management practices in line with organizational sustainability. Future generations need to be identified, developed and retained within the organization to hold the key and critical leadership roles. Finding solutions to current industry issues related to Succession Planning for organizational sustainability in the changing socio-economic environmental condition by way of in-depth study on best Talent Management practices is the need of the hour.

Introduction

Sustainability is defined as continual growth without compromising the needs of future generations. In the organizational context, it is the survival of an organization in the Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous (VUCA) environmental condition, maintaining sustainable growth. To achieve sustainability, an organization has to have a succession plan. This succession plan includes developing and positioning present and future leaders who take critical leadership roles as and when required. The right person is to be identified and placed in the key leadership and critical roles at the right time.

In the current economic environment, Indian Public Sector Units (PSUs) are in a quandary state while positioning the top leaders. Many a time, two or more roles with additional responsibilities are held by a single person or the position is kept vacant for a long period for want of the right person for the role. An ad hoc arrangement is made to keep the functions moving for the time being. This has a major impact on organizational growth and sustainability. There are basically two ways to fill these positions – either by developing people within the organization from the identified talent pool or by recruiting them from outside. The latter has pros and cons related to availability, cost involvement, acceptability, impact on loyalty and culture of the organization,

etc. Identifying the in-house talent through various Talent Management Processes and developing them for critical leadership roles is preferable and well-accepted by the team. This is a win-win situation, where the organization finds the right person for the leadership role, and the deserving employee gets job satisfaction with their career growth.



There are several studies and research work done earlier in different sectors and different areas, both internationally and within the country, which elaborate on the relationship between Talent Management Practices and Succession Planning. The importance of successful Succession Planning over organizational sustainability and Organizational development is also discussed at various forums. Yet, there is a need to develop and implement the best Talent Management Practices for successful Succession Planning to achieve organizational sustainability. The prevailing Talent Management Practices in Indian PSUs need to be critically analyzed and studied in detail to develop and align with organizational goalkeeping given organizational sustainability.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to identify the significance of Succession Planning on Organizational Sustainability and to explore the best Succession Planning methods in the current scenario. Organizations need to grow continually without compromising the needs of the

future generation to achieve sustainability in the Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous (VUCA) environmental condition. They have to be ready with their future leaders, especially for key leadership positions, to face emerging situations. Succession planning is a challenge for Indian Public sector units (PSUs). Various Management Practices are adopted to identify and develop future leaders within an organization. Studies in the past have established the relationship between Succession Planning and Talent Management. More or less, every organization enforces a Performance Management System (PMS) as the basis for Succession Planning. There is still a need to identify the gap and develop an improved system to identify talent and develop and retain them for the future. There is a need to find answers to these questions- what are the Talent Management practices that support Succession Planning? What is the significance of PMS over Talent Management? What is the relevance of integrating these two and how does it contribute to achieving organizational sustainability?

Methodology

The study is done with a method using a mixed approach of Qualitative and Quantitative analysis of data collected from various Indian PSUs of different sectors. Prevailing management practices in Indian PSUs related to Succession Planning and Talent Management Practices were reviewed through a study of Policies/guidelines, Procedures and Reports related to Human Resource Development (HRD). Feedback on the perception of employees was collected through interactions with key stakeholders, including Functional Managers, Human Resource Managers and leaders at Middle, Senior and Top Management levels from various PSUs. The inputs collected were analyzed using thematic analysis to connect Talent Management, Succession Planning and Organizational Sustainability.

Data Specification

The data is collected from a sample of 10 from Middle, Senior & Top Management bands and HR Managers based on the above methodology from Indian PSUs under different Sectors (Steel, Coal, Mining, Avionics, Oil and Power) – SAIL, Coal India Limited, NMDC, BEL, HAL, BPCL, HPCL, ONGC, OIL, BHEL, NTPC, Power Grid Corporation of India Ltd.

Prediction and Results

This study would provide insight into the importance of Talent Management and Succession Planning and explore its best practices with improved methodology to achieve organizational sustainability. It would elaborate on the impact of several Talent Management practices on Succession Planning and would

also recommend the best practices for continual organizational growth. The study would thus provide a big picture by integrating Talent Management, Succession Planning and Organizational Sustainability.

The study suggests an inclusive approach to Talent Management for successful Succession Planning. It recommends identifying and developing an in-house talent pool for critical and key leadership roles withholding trust and loyalty among employees, thus achieving organizational sustainability.

Literature Review & Discussions

Talent management is a strategy, which runs through the identification, utilization, development and retention of Talent in an organization. It requires careful implementation, regular checks, and continual improvement.



[Source: Parthana Ghosh, Spiceworks, What is Talent Management? Definition, Strategy, Process and Models, 2022]

The 6 principles of a global talent management strategy:

In 2012, researchers from the MIT Sloan Management Review detailed six key principles that make up an effective global talent management strategy. While the world of work has changed considerably, with more people than ever working remotely, these six principles of global talent management still hold true:

Alignment with strategy: Talent management should be in line with the organizational strategy.

Internal consistency: The strategy should lead to internal consistency of organizational performance.

Cultural embeddedness: Organizational culture should embed its employees' values and culture.

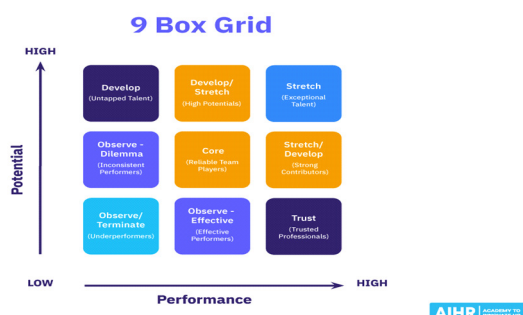
Management involvement: Talent Management must involve the management (apart from the HR team)

Balance of global and local needs: The organisation both needs to be taken care of.

Employer branding through differentiation: Employer branding is most attractive for the best talent to join.

A 9-box grid model is widely adopted by most of the Indian PSUs, which explains the Succession Planning methodology for identifying and developing the in-

house Talent for Key Leadership positions.(Erik van Vulpen, n.d.)



The decision is taken about identifying Talent Pool and Talent Management strategies in the process of Succession Planning involving three major steps, i.e., evaluating performance, evaluating potential, and then bringing these two dimensions together. (Erik van Vulpen, n.d.)

Performance goals are more or less kept SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, and Relevant) by every PSU and the ratings on performance against KRA/KPI are very objective. However, the identification and measurement of Potential is a subjective matter. The perception is vague and varies from person to person. However, Erik van Vulpen has explained the guidelines for rating the potential of an employee on the following basis:

Low potential: The employee is working at full potential and is not expected to improve, either because they are at maximum capacity or because of a lack of motivation.

Moderate potential: The employee has the potential to further develop within their current role. This can be in terms of performance but also in terms of expertise.

High potential: The employee performs well beyond the expectations of their current position and responsibilities. They are likely ready to take on roles and responsibilities with more complexity. (Erik van Vulpen, n.d.)

The interpretation of the above is subjective in nature, depending on working conditions, the line managers, organizational policy, market conditions and many other factors. The true potential is not identified without adopting a strategic tool like Competency Mapping, 360-degree feedback or Assessment Centers. There is a big gap in final ratings and ratings against performance, which keeps on increasing with higher management bands in the hierarchy. Filling this gap is a challenge to achieve successful Succession Planning.

Once the Talent is identified, there is a need to develop them for the present and future needs. Different Talent

Development practices are adopted for developing the in-house talent viz. exposure to different functions for a better understanding of interdepartmental dealings, geographical orientation for exposure to various challenges and exposure to various developmental programs (both functional and behavioural).

Last but not least is to retain the developed talent by keeping them motivated to avoid a career plateau situation. Experienced employees need to be engaged and given responsibilities according to their competence and potential.

Conceptual Framework

Observations and discussion

The following points emerged with the interactions at various levels:

- The employees who have been rated consistently high in their Performance Appraisals are provided the opportunity for the Key and Top Leadership roles.
- In most of the Indian PSUs, promotion policies are not made available to every employee. However, these policies are available with HRD for a specific management grade.
- Indian PSUs follow the path of selecting and developing people for key leadership roles from the available talent pool based on seniority in grades and their ratings through the Performance Management System.
- The seniority of employees is considered for various opportunities primarily from the date of joining of an employee in a specific grade rather than their joining the organization.
- Competency Mapping exercise is not done in most of the Indian PSUs. The frequency of such exercise is too low (once in 10 years or so) if at all done.
- The results of Competency Mapping are not shared with the Functional Heads or the Authority for deciding the final rating. It is with HRD only, and only the scores are disclosed to the concerned employee.
- The current year's Appraisal Rating of an employee is affected significantly by the previous year's ratings as it is almost impossible to improve the current year's ratings if an employee is rated low in the past due to some unfavorable condition.
- The ratings in the past also impacted Bell Curve, which is still existing in most of the Indian PSUs.
- The information about ratings on Competence,

Values and Potential is vague amongst the people working in the field. There is no plan or action to improve on these parameters.

- Most of the Indian PSUs did not implement the 360-degree feed-back technique. Even if it is done, the results are not disclosed or discussed with the concerned employees.
- Talent Development Programs are designed in such a way that the people with high PMS ratings get maximum and best exposure in flagship Management Development Programs such as senior management programs, advanced management programs, and sponsored/paid Management programs from the best Management Schools.
- Foreign training and exposure are taken as rewards and recognition rather than development opportunities.
- A variety of experiences (geographical as well inter-departmental) attracts no positive impact on a career, rather it is having a negative effect due to time and energy spent for tuning with a new set of people in line with Appraisal Ratings.
- Once developed within the organization, it is difficult to retain the best Talent due to limitations in Compensation and Benefits by Indian PSUs. People at the Senior and Top Management level leave PSUs and join competing companies for their own benefits in their career growth and other opportunities. Sometimes, it is also due to the pressure of the changing political environment.
- The selection for the Top leadership roles is influenced by lobbying and political influence to a large extent in most of the Indian PSUs irrespective of their exposure to the subject field.
- The core value of an organization is affected by the top leadership. If a person from outside is placed on the Top (for example: Head of HR or Chairperson), it has a significant impact on the Core Value of an organization thus impacting the organizational culture.
- There is a significant impact on loyalty and Organizational Culture when a Top Leader from outside an organization is placed and retained for a significant period.
- Organizational Performance and Sustainability are also affected by the positioning of Top leaders in the organization.

Recommendations

- It is better to develop in-house talent than recruit them from outside to avoid deviation in

organizational core values and culture, which has a long-term impact on organizational sustainability.

- Talent Management practices need to be inclusive of Talent Identification, Talent Development, and Talent Retention with the help of various tools in addition to Performance Management System/ Appraisal Ratings, Competency& Potential Mapping, 360-degree feedback, Assessment Centers, a variety of exposures to different roles and responsibilities.
- Performance Management System needs to be aligned with organizational goals rather than the Appraiser's demand for continual improvement.
- 360-degree feedback evaluation should be shared and discussed with employees by the functional heads/authority for final Appraisal Ratings.
- The frequency of Competency Mapping is to be increased (once in every Performance Appraisal Year)
- The Score on Competency Mapping should be shared with the Departmental Heads also for further development. Currently, it is disclosed to employees and kept with HRD only.
- Exposure to versatile roles and responsibilities and variety of experience should be given proper weightage during identifying and developing talent pool for Top Leadership roles.
- Bell Curve categorizes employees into different segments, which is de-motivating for employees' professional growth and in turn organizational performance. Recommended to be removed.
- The subjectivity of Rating on Competence, Values and Potential needs to be minimized, which is having an increasing effect on Talent management and development at the Middle, Senior and Top Management levels.
- Distribution Ratio of Performance Ratings based on KRAs/KPIs and Competence, Values and Potential needs to be reviewed.
- The cumulative effect of grades should be reviewed and minimized while identifying Talent for critical and key leadership roles.

Conclusion

While exploring the best practices for Succession Planning to achieve organizational sustainability, there is a need to take a holistic approach rather than just picking the best performers for the Talent Pool. Talent Management Practices, Succession Planning and Organizational Sustainability cannot be dealt with separately. Organizational sustainability can be achieved

by continual growth in organizational performance without compromising employees' professional/career growth within the organization. Talent Management is an ongoing process, which starts from beginning to end and it continues even when employees leave the organization.

Limitations and Future Studies

This study is done with limited PSUs under various sectors in India. There is a scope for further study with International PSUs and Private Sector Organizations and Government Organizations too. The geographical area can also be extended for further studies.

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An Ideal Workplace – Happy & Fun!



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ग़म और खुशी में फ़र्क़ न महसूस हो जहाँ,
मैं दिल को उस मक़ाम पे लाता चला गया

Beautiful prose world-renowned Ludhyanvi ji! When he penned this thought way back in the 1960s, he would have never thought, much later in the 21st century, this would become the mantra of Corporations for fuelling global economies. HR practitioners across corporate corridors are strategizing to create balanced workplaces for their workforce who feel engaged and aligned with the company's goals. Today, companies are spending billions to enhance employee productivity and adopting strategic engagement frameworks to ensure their human capital is at its best. As you tune in to the numerous benchmarks and practices around the industries, the key principles for having a productive employee are outlined as under:



- **Purpose-Driven Culture:** Connecting employees' work to a larger, meaningful mission encourages them to invest more of themselves in their tasks.
- **Employee Engagement:** Fostering a workplace environment that makes employees feel valued, involved, and motivated. Companies focus on increasing engagement through recognition, career development, and providing a sense of purpose.
- **Work-Life Balance:** Promoting flexibility in work hours, remote work options, and wellness programs helps in reducing burnout and increasing productivity.
- **Empowerment:** Giving employees more control over their work fosters creativity and ownership. This can be through project-based work, goal setting, and minimizing micromanagement.
- **Diversity & Inclusion:** Creating a diverse and

inclusive workplace where everyone feels represented, understood, and respected contributes to higher innovation and creativity.

- **Learning & Development:** Upskilling and reskilling employees through regular training programs ensures they are equipped with the latest tools and techniques, while also giving them a sense of growth and future-proofing their careers.
- **Technology:** Companies invest in technology that makes employees' jobs easier, from communication tools to AI-driven solutions, to improve efficiency and reduce repetitive tasks.
- **Transparency:** Frequent, clear communication from leadership helps align employees with company goals and fosters trust, which drives higher performance.

Companies aim to maximize employee satisfaction and productivity by creating an environment that prioritizes well-being, growth, and inclusion.

WHY SO SERIOUS?

In a world so dominant with digitalization, social media, machine learning and AI, the future of workforce engagement has become more complicated. There



is what I call, the 'information detonate', a condition where we have a humongous amount of information which is extremely difficult to absorb and translate into repurposed outcomes. Out of the 5.44 billion internet users in the world, the average time spent by people on social media (only) has increased from 90 minutes in 2012 to 143 minutes in 2024. Human-to-

human engagement is declining at a rapid pace. With alternatives just a touch away, it's likely that employees also seek communication and transactions digitally rather than in person. The COVID-19 pandemic was another factor in alienating human beings and digressing them towards loneliness and individualism.

With so much disparity in the social fabric of human existence, how can companies expect today that they will get the same level of engagement and productivity from their employees deploying persistent HR mechanisms? While the basic elements do hold true, bringing in the happiness element through playfulness and humour may glue the quintessential.

EMBEDDING FUN IN THE COMPANY CULTURE

The future is uncertain; however, the need of the hour is clear. Engaging employees by raising their happiness index is the way forward. Lightening up the atmosphere can lead to a more productive and enjoyable environment. Being too serious can stifle creativity, reduce morale, and increase stress in the long term.

A fun workplace has its own set of additional benefits for the corporation as depicted by the SmartArt below:

Embedding humour and fun in company culture can enhance workplace morale, improve communication, and increase productivity. Enlisting herewith are some key strategies for incorporating the fun element at workplaces:



Walk the Talk:

- Encourage light-heartedness: Leaders can set the tone by being approachable, using humour in meetings, and celebrating small victories with fun.
- Stay authentic: Keep the humour appropriate and aligned with the company values and culture.

Create Happy Workplace:

- Fun office spaces: Add elements like creative break areas, games, or themed workspaces to make the environment more vibrant.
- Casual Fridays or theme days: Encourage employees to dress down or participate in themed activities to break the monotony.

Try Humorous Communication:

- Humorous newsletters or memos: Share light jokes, cartoons, or fun facts in internal communications.
- Playful meetings: Start meetings with a funny video, joke, or icebreaker to lighten the mood.

Team-Bonding:

- Fun events: Organize activities such as trivia, scavenger hunts, or costume days that encourage everyone to participate.
- Celebrate birthdays and milestones: Recognize personal and professional achievements with a touch of humour, like gag gifts or funny speeches.

Foster Playfulness:

- Office challenges: Introduce fun competitions, like desk decorating contests, or fitness challenges, with light-hearted rewards.



- Break-time fun: Provide board games, snooker, foosball, or ping-pong tables for employees to enjoy during breaks.

Encourage Innovation & Creativity:

- Open suggestion channels: Allow employees to propose ways to make work more fun, whether it's themed days, humour in presentations, or social events.
- Gamify tasks: Incorporate game elements (points, leaderboards) into day-to-day tasks to make work feel more playful.

Infuse Positive Attitude:

- Laugh at setbacks: Encourage resilience by finding humour in failures or challenges, reframing stressful situations in a lighter way.
- Recognize fun leaders: Identify and encourage individuals who naturally bring humour and

positivity into the office.

However, there is a caution element. Fostering a culture of humour should always be done with respect and inclusivity in mind to ensure everyone feels comfortable and valued.

NURTURING HAPPY PLANET

Nonetheless, the bottom line is, as a society, we need happy human beings because their well-being has a profound ripple effect, enhancing the overall quality of life for individuals and communities. They are crucial in building strong and peaceful communities, economic growth, civic engagement, and generational impact. Collectively, happiness promotes stability, cooperation, and progress, making societies more harmonious, prosperous, and sustainable.

Companies need happy employees because they are more productive, engaged, and loyal, which directly impacts the success of the business.



- **Positive Workplace Culture:** Happy employees contribute to a supportive, collaborative, and resilient company culture.

Investing in employee well-being translates to better business outcomes, from profitability to brand reputation.

Let's fuel playfulness and fun in life and workplaces for uplifting happy beings and in turn nurturing a happy planet.

- **Higher Productivity:** Happy employees are generally more motivated, leading to increased efficiency and better performance.
- **Better Retention:** Employee satisfaction reduces turnover, saving costs associated with recruiting and training new hires.
- **Enhanced Creativity:** A positive work environment fosters innovation and problem-solving.
- **Improved Customer Service:** Happy employees often provide better service, which can enhance customer satisfaction and loyalty.
- **Lower Absenteeism:** Satisfied employees are less likely to take unnecessary sick days, ensuring smoother operations.

The Role of Leadership in Encouraging a Playful Environment



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Leadership plays an essential role in creating environments that encourage playfulness, which can enhance creativity, collaboration, and overall satisfaction in various contexts such as the workplace, educational settings, or even within communities. Leaders are the architects of a team or organization's culture, and their role in promoting a playful environment is significant. By modelling playful behaviour, promoting a safe space for creativity, encouraging team bonding, rewarding playfulness, balancing productivity with play, and providing flexibility and autonomy, leaders can foster a culture where creativity thrives. This not only boosts morale but also contributes to higher levels of engagement, innovation, and long-term success.

Now the question is how leadership can actively cultivate and sustain such a playful environment. Following attributes by leaders to encourage such culture:

1. Modeling Playful Behavior

A leader's actions and attitudes shape the cultural norms of any group. When leaders demonstrate playfulness themselves—through humour, creative

problem-solving, or a relaxed demeanour—they signal to others that being playful is acceptable and encouraged. For example:

Humour: Leaders who can inject appropriate humour into meetings or interactions create a relaxed atmosphere. Humour breaks the tension, fosters positive emotions, and makes communication more open.

Engagement in Activities: Leaders participating in playful activities, whether it's a team-building game or a brainstorming session, set an example that others are likely to follow. This signals to the team that it's okay to take a break from strict seriousness.

By normalizing this behaviour, leaders lower the emotional barriers that often stifle creativity and open dialogue, allowing team members to feel more comfortable expressing themselves.

2. Promoting a Safe Space for Creativity

A playful environment thrives when people feel safe to take creative risks without fear of judgment or failure. Leadership is crucial in creating psychological safety—where team members feel comfortable sharing new ideas, making mistakes, and thinking outside the box.

Non-Judgmental Atmosphere: Leaders should make it clear that no idea is too “silly” or “out of bounds,” especially in brainstorming or innovation sessions. When people are unafraid of criticism or retribution, they’re more likely to experiment and innovate.

Fail-Forward Mentality: Leaders who treat failure as a learning opportunity, rather than a setback, nurture a growth mindset. Encouraging the attitude of “failing forward” helps create an environment where experimentation and playfulness are part of the learning process.

3. Encouraging Team

Bonding and Fun Playfulness is also about human connection, and leaders play a pivotal role in creating opportunities for team bonding. A strong team spirit naturally fosters a playful atmosphere. Some ways to achieve this include:

Organized Team-Building Activities: Leaders can arrange games, offsite retreats, or even playful problem-solving exercises. For example, problem-solving tasks that incorporate elements of play—such as role-playing or creative challenges—can help build camaraderie.

Celebrating Wins Playfully: Even small successes can be celebrated with a sense of fun. Leaders might throw impromptu celebrations, like themed dress days or quirky awards for achievements. These moments of play within the larger context of work can relieve stress and foster a positive, unified team dynamic.

4. Rewarding Creativity and Playfulness

Leadership plays a role in making sure playfulness is not only tolerated but rewarded. Recognizing and celebrating creative approaches is a powerful way to embed playfulness into the culture. For instance:

Acknowledging Creativity: Leaders can publicly recognize and reward creative problem-solving or innovative thinking, making it clear that these traits are valued within the organization. This could be as simple as praising someone for an out-of-the-box idea during a meeting or formal recognition programs that highlight the creative contributions of individuals or teams.

Incentivizing Fun Solutions: Incentivizing playful approaches, such as organizing friendly competitions to find the most creative solution to a problem, can engage employees. This sends a strong message that the process of having fun while working is as important as the outcome.

5. Balancing Productivity with Play

A common misconception is that playfulness and productivity are at odds. However, effective leaders

understand that these two aspects can complement each other. Playfulness can lead to higher engagement, which in turn fuels productivity.

Structured Play in the Workflow: Leaders can integrate structured moments of play into the work schedule without detracting from productivity. For example, they might schedule “innovation hours” where the team is encouraged to think freely without the usual constraints or encourage breaks for creative downtime, such as a brainstorming session while engaging in a fun activity.

Play as Stress Relief: Playful moments help reduce stress, improving mental clarity and focus, which can lead to better productivity in the long run. Leaders who understand the need for balance will encourage brief but regular playful interactions that re-energize the team, such as informal chats, games, or creative exercises.

6. Providing Flexibility and Autonomy

Leaders who trust their team members to take ownership of their work allow them the freedom to infuse playfulness into how they approach their tasks. Autonomy fosters creativity, which is closely tied to play.

Empowerment and Innovation: When leaders give individuals the freedom to choose their methods and approaches, they encourage a sense of ownership that often leads to more playful, creative solutions. For instance, leaders might allow flexible work hours or varied approaches to project management, which can lead to employees experimenting with new ways of working.

Encouraging Personalization of Workspaces: Allowing employees to personalize their workspaces (whether physical or digital) can encourage a more playful atmosphere. A workspace that reflects an individual’s personality can lead to higher engagement and a sense of ownership over their environment.

Let us understand “The Role of Leadership in Encouraging a Playful Environment” through examples of Indian forward-thinking organizations and leaders:

1. Modeling Playful Behavior:

Ritesh Agarwal, Founder & CEO of OYO Rooms: Ritesh Agarwal, the young founder of OYO Rooms, is known for his approachable and playful leadership style. As a leader, Agarwal is often seen engaging with employees in informal settings, sharing light moments during work, and encouraging creativity and openness in communication. He creates an environment where employees feel comfortable expressing their ideas and having fun while working on innovative projects.

Takeaway: By modelling a playful attitude, Agarwal helps his team stay motivated and creative, encouraging a culture where employees can think freely and explore new ideas.



2. Promoting a Safe Space for Creativity:

Tata Consultancy Services (TCS): TCS promotes creativity and innovation by creating a safe environment where employees can explore new ideas and develop solutions without the fear of failure. TCS has several innovation labs, such as the "Research and Innovation Labs," where employees are encouraged to experiment and think creatively in a playful setting. The leadership encourages a culture of "fail fast, learn faster," which allows employees to take risks and innovate freely.

Outcome: This safe space for creativity has led to numerous successful innovations and patents in the fields of AI, blockchain, and IoT. It has positioned TCS as one of the leaders in the global IT space.

Takeaway: Leadership at TCS fosters a culture of playful experimentation, where employees are encouraged to think creatively and explore innovative solutions.

3. Encouraging Team Bonding and Fun:

Swiggy: Swiggy, India's leading food delivery platform, encourages team bonding and fun through various initiatives. For instance, Swiggy organizes annual team-building events like "Swiggy Fun Day" and playful internal competitions. These activities are not only designed to improve team collaboration but also to promote a sense of fun in the workplace. The leadership emphasizes the importance of balance between work and play, which has become integral to their organizational culture.

Outcome: These playful initiatives have helped strengthen team dynamics, build trust among employees, and improve overall productivity, resulting in better service delivery for customers.

Takeaway: Encouraging team bonding through playful activities can help improve collaboration and build

a sense of camaraderie, which translates to better performance and creativity.

4. Rewarding Creativity and Playfulness:

Infosys's Innovation Culture: Infosys has long emphasized innovation as a key driver of its success, and the company's leadership has created various platforms to reward creativity and playfulness. One example is the Infosys Prize, which recognizes outstanding contributions by researchers and professionals in various fields. Within the organization, Infosys also rewards employees who come up with creative solutions to problems through its internal innovation challenges.

Outcome: By rewarding creativity and encouraging a playful approach to problem-solving, Infosys has built a culture of innovation that consistently delivers cutting-edge solutions to its clients.

Takeaway: Rewarding creativity and playful thinking through formal programs helps create a culture where innovation is valued and fostered.

5. Balancing Productivity with Play:

Zoho Corporation, an Indian multinational technology company, is renowned for its playful and productive work culture. Zoho's leadership, under Sridhar Vembu, promotes a culture where work-life balance is prioritized, and employees are given the flexibility to work in their own creative and playful ways. Zoho's campus, designed to be a playful space, includes open areas for employees to engage in sports, relaxation, and brainstorming sessions. The leadership encourages employees to take breaks, engage in informal discussions, and have fun while working.

Playful Environment: Employees are encouraged to explore innovative solutions, and many of Zoho's products have emerged from informal discussions and playful brainstorming sessions.

Outcome: This blend of play and productivity has led to the creation of more than 50 successful software products, making Zoho a global leader in SaaS. The company has also achieved high levels of employee retention and satisfaction, attributed to its playful and balanced work environment.

Takeaway: Zoho demonstrates that creating a playful and flexible environment can lead to both innovation and high productivity.

6. Providing Flexibility and Autonomy:

Flipkart, one of India's largest e-commerce platforms, has fostered a playful and autonomous culture, driven by its leadership. The company encourages employees to take ownership of their projects and work in ways that best suit their strengths. Flipkart's leadership

allows teams to set their own workflows, brainstorm playfully, and find creative solutions.

Autonomy and Play: Employees at Flipkart have the flexibility to approach problems in their own way, leading to innovative solutions like Flipkart's "Big Billion Day" sales event. Flipkart's "Myntra Hackathon" is another example where employees are encouraged to think out of the box and come up with playful yet practical solutions to real-world challenges.

Outcome: This approach has resulted in highly engaged employees and innovative solutions that have contributed to Flipkart's success in a highly competitive e-commerce landscape.

Takeaway: Providing autonomy and encouraging playful problem-solving can lead to innovative solutions and higher engagement in fast-paced industries like e-commerce.

Case Study: Mahindra & Mahindra – Leveraging Playfulness for Innovation

Mahindra & Mahindra (M&M), a multinational conglomerate, exemplifies how playful leadership can lead to groundbreaking innovation, particularly in the field of electric vehicles.

M&M is known for its pioneering leadership in various industries, including automotive, agriculture, and aerospace. With the leadership of Anand Mahindra, the company began exploring the electric vehicle (EV) market. The leadership team fostered a playful environment that allowed employees to experiment with new technologies and think creatively about the future of transportation.

Leadership Strategy:

Innovation through Play: Leadership at M&M adopted a playful approach by encouraging employees to think beyond the conventional and explore futuristic ideas. Anand Mahindra himself participated in internal brainstorming sessions, where ideas were treated with openness and curiosity. Employees were encouraged to treat challenges as games, pushing them to think creatively.

Rewarding Innovation: Mahindra launched the "Rise for Good" initiative, rewarding employees who contributed to innovative solutions, especially in the EV space. Internal competitions and playful idea-generation sessions were organized to incentivize employees to think boldly and playfully.

Outcome: This playful approach led to the creation of Mahindra Electric, a pioneer in the Indian EV market. The company's playful, innovative culture resulted in the development of EVs such as the Mahindra eVerito and e2o, placing M&M as a leader in India's green

transportation revolution.

Takeaway: Mahindra & Mahindra's playful leadership approach empowered employees to think creatively and experiment with new ideas, resulting in groundbreaking innovations that helped the company stay ahead of the curve in a rapidly evolving industry.

Conclusion

Leadership has successfully encouraged playful environments that drive innovation, foster collaboration, and improve employee satisfaction. The above Examples and case studies show that playfulness, when strategically embraced by leadership, can transform an organization, leading to creativity, high productivity, and long-term success.

Injecting Joy into Work: The Benefits of a Playful Office Culture



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Abstract

This article explores the integration of playfulness into office culture and its impact on employee engagement and well-being. It presents strategies for fostering a playful work environment, such as designating "Fun Fridays," incorporating humour into communication and organizing team-building activities. The examination includes successful case studies from organizations like Google, Zappos, and Red Bull, which highlight the benefits of a playful culture in enhancing creativity, morale, and retention.

Additionally, the article discusses the importance of balancing professionalism with fun by setting clear guidelines and encouraging feedback. Leadership plays a crucial role in establishing a playful environment by modelling behaviours and recognizing employees who contribute to this culture. Furthermore, the article emphasizes playfulness as an effective tool for stress relief and mental well-being, promoting initiatives like mindfulness breaks and wellness programs. Ultimately, the article advocates for a workplace where humour and creativity thrive, leading to a more engaged, satisfied, and productive workforce.

Fulness Office Culture

1. Strategies for Integrating Humor and Playfulness into Daily Work Practices

- **Designate "Fun Fridays":** Reserve one day a week where employees can engage in light-hearted activities, such as games, trivia, or themed dress days.
- **Incorporate Humor into Communication:** Encourage the use of funny memes or light-hearted jokes in internal communications. For example, a "joke of the day" in emails or newsletters can set a positive tone.

- **Creative Break Spaces:** Create designated areas with toys, games, or art supplies where employees can take short breaks for playful activities to recharge their minds.
- **Team-Building Activities:** Organize regular team-building events that include playful elements, such as scavenger hunts or improv workshops, to foster camaraderie and light-heartedness.

2. Case Studies of Organizations that Successfully Promote a Playful Culture

Google: Known for its playful work environment, Google incorporates playful design in its offices with game zones, nap pods, and colourful workspaces, resulting in high employee satisfaction and creativity.

Zappos: The online retailer has a strong emphasis on fun in its culture, using playful elements such as quirky dress codes and spontaneous fun days to keep morale high and employees engaged.

Red Bull: Encouraging extreme sports and adventure activities, Red Bull fosters a culture of playfulness that aligns with its brand, making employees feel more connected to their work.

3. The Impact of Playfulness on Employee Engagement and Retention

- **Boosting Morale:** A playful work culture can significantly enhance employee morale, leading to higher productivity and job satisfaction.
- **Encouraging Creativity:** Playfulness stimulates creativity and innovation, as employees feel more relaxed and open to sharing ideas without fear of judgment.

4. Balancing Professionalism with Fun in the Workplace

- **Setting Guidelines:** Establish clear guidelines on what constitutes appropriate humour and fun in the workplace to ensure that playfulness does not cross into unprofessional behaviour.
- **Flexible Work Environment:** Allow teams the freedom to customize their workspace, including

incorporating playful elements that reflect their personalities while maintaining professionalism.



- **Regular Feedback:** Obtain feedback from employees to gauge how much playfulness enhances their work environment and balances it with the seriousness required for productivity.

5. The Role of Leadership in Encouraging a Playful Environment

- **Lead by Example:** Leaders should model playfulness by participating in humorous activities and embracing a light-hearted tone, making it acceptable for employees to follow suit.
- **Recognize Contributions:** Acknowledge and reward employees who bring humour and playfulness into the workplace, reinforcing the importance of a playful culture.
- **Open Door Policy:** Encourage open communication where employees feel comfortable sharing their ideas for playful activities or providing feedback about the office culture.

6. Playfulness as a Tool for Stress Relief and Mental Well-Being at Work

Mindfulness Breaks: Incorporate short, playful activities like laughter yoga or creative brainstorming sessions as a way to break up the workday, promoting mental well-being.

Employee Wellness Programs: Integrate playfulness into wellness initiatives, such as workshops that focus on the benefits of laughter and teamwork as a way to reduce stress.

Celebrating Successes: Celebrate project completions or milestones with playful gatherings, such as themed parties or fun outings, to foster a sense of community and reduce stress.

***“Work Hard, Play Harder: A Winning Formula,
Let's Play Our Way to Success”***

Get To Know About Nomophobia



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Abstract

This short note will explain the negative effect of the excessive use of the mobile phone. It will create some awareness of new mental health issues and tips to manage the problems.



Generally, people know about phobia, which is fear of something; everyone faces this emotional state at least once in their lifetime. But the question comes, what is nomophobia? It is a psychological condition when people have a fear of being detached from their mobile phone and its connectivity.

Development in science has been very fast for the last two decades in every field, particularly communication. Messages were sent through letters in earlier ages, which transformed them to telegram, telephone, and eventually wireless cell phones. In this line of Invention, smartphones were unbelievable. The smartphone's arrival replaced radio, watches, television, and even computers; mobile phones have become a significant part of modern life. Not only is it used as a tool to

communicate, but it also acts as a social network tool, personal organizer, online shopping tool, calendar, alarm clock, and mobile bank. Now, we can access every corner of the world through smartphones in our hands. Since the arrival of smartphones, we have been bound by wires of the technological web, like spider webs. All this technology was discovered for human support. But it creates new health issues not only physical (neck pain, shoulder pain) but also mental as well. People get anxious or even panic when they can't find their smartphone. Sometimes, they get irritated with no cellular service in an isolated place. If so, they might have some of the symptoms of nomophobia.

The term NOMOPHOBIA is nothing but NO MOBILE PHONE PHOBIA. It is used to describe a psychological condition when people have a fear of being without mobile phone connectivity.

The term "NOMOPHOBIA" originated from the United Kingdom (UK) Post Office in 2008 during a study that commissioned YouGov, a UK-based research organization. According to Shambare et al. (2012), cell phones are "possibly the biggest non-drug addiction of the 21st century." Today's college students are spending more than 9 hours per day on their mobile phones, which leads to addiction.

It is an example of "a paradox of technology" having both the property of freeing and enslaving. Freeing from the real world and enslaving to the virtual world. It has been observed among students that low-grade point average (GPA) and increased anxiety levels are correlated with frequent cell phone usage. The decrease in GPA among students may be due to distraction from the overuse of mobile phones during class. Pressure for continually being connected to social (virtual) networks may increase anxiety as it leaves no time for relieving daily stress during solitude, which is an essential component of our well-being. As per the study, 61% of people check their smartphones after waking up in the morning as their first job.

Signs and symptoms

The inability to turn off your phone. Constantly checking your phone for missed messages, emails, or calls. Charging your battery even when your phone is almost fully charged. Taking your phone with

you everywhere you go, even into the bathroom. Repeatedly checking to make sure that you have your phone. Fear of being without Wi-Fi or being able to connect to a cellular data network. Worrying about negative things happening and not being able to call for help. Stress over being disconnected from one's online presence or identity. Skipping activities or planned events to spend time on the mobile. Anxiety, Respiratory alterations, Trembling, Perspiration, Agitation, Disorientation, Tachycardia.

How to Manage

We must stay in the real world more than the virtual world. We must re-establish human-human interactions and face-to-face connections. So, we need to limit our use of mobile phones rather than banning them because we cannot escape the force of technological advancement.

Parents should motivate their children to participate in outdoor games and religious festivals. It will give them more chances for face-to-face interaction.

Parents must have awareness regarding such psychological problems as NOMOPHOBIA.

School authorities should appoint counsellors and health team personnel to educate and deal with such incidents.

In most of the schools and colleges, mobile phone restrictions should be strictly enforced.

Encourage social activities Youngsters' energy needs to be channelled creatively. Mechanisms may be devised to engage them in physical activities, outings, social interaction, etc.

Therapy (Coping with Nomophobia)

If you have symptoms of nomophobia or if you feel like your mobile phone use is causing problems in your life, talk to a mental health professional- they may help. While there is no specific treatment for nomophobia, your therapist may recommend exposure therapy, cognitive-behavioural therapy, or both to address your symptoms. In some instances, your doctor may also prescribe some type of medication to address symptoms of anxiety or depression that you might be experiencing.

Behavioral Therapy for Phobias

If you think you have nomophobia or feel that you are spending too much time on your phone, there are things that you can do to better manage your device use. Set boundaries. Establish rules for your personal device use. This might mean avoiding your mobile device at certain times of the day, such as during meals or at bedtime.

Find a balance. It can be easy to use your phone to avoid face-to-face contact with other people. Focus on getting some personal interaction with others every day.

Take short breaks. It can be tough to break the mobile phone habit, but starting small can make the transition easier. Start by doing small things, such as leaving your phone in another room during meals or when you are engaged in another activity.

Find other ways to occupy your time. If you find that you are using your phone excessively out of boredom, try looking for other activities to distract you from your device. Try reading a book, going for a walk, playing sports, or engaging in a hobby that you enjoy.

Treatment Medications

While there is no FDA-approved medication for the treatment of nomophobia, your GP doctor or psychiatrist may prescribe anti-anxiety medications or antidepressants to address some of your symptoms.

Conclusion

Nomophobia is a growing problem, along with other fears and behavioural addictions tied to technology use. Given how dependent many people are on their mobile phones for work, school, news, entertainment, and social connectedness, it can be an incredibly difficult problem to overcome. Stopping cell phone use entirely is not realistic, but learning how to set limits and boundaries on how much you allow your time to use a phone can help your life to be smooth. Taking an occasional break from your phone, engaging in activities separate from it, and finding distractions to keep you busy rather than mindlessly playing on your phone are all good places to start.

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Positioning Exponential Technology – Leveraging for Effective Industrial Relations



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Abstract

This article explores the evolving relationship between Industrial Relations (IR) and Artificial Intelligence (AI) in today's workplace. While many HR professionals focus on areas like talent management and learning & development, IR continues to be crucial in maintaining stable labour relations and reducing workplace conflicts. AI offers exciting possibilities, but it also brings challenges in the context of IR, including job displacement, skill development and ethical concerns like algorithmic bias.

The role of unions is more important than ever as they work to protect workers' rights, ensure fair treatment and advocate for reskilling programs to help employees adapt to AI-driven changes. The article also discusses the broader implications of AI on industrial relations and highlights the need for balance -embracing technological advancements while prioritizing human well-being and maintaining equitable workplaces.

IR – HR with a weak PR

For many new HR practitioners, Industrial Relations (IR) has been considered a thing of the past, with many of them focusing their energies on other aspects of HR, be it Talent Management, Learning & Development, Performance Management, etc. In fact, it would not be incorrect to say that with the constant hype towards other emerging aspects of HR, IR has taken a back seat. Further, with the decrease in labour unrest cases, many have assumed that the role of IR has reduced. However, on the contrary, it is smooth IR that has led to negligible Man-days loss across various industries.

For many, IR is only handling Unions, Labour Authorities, Environment Activists, etc. But in today's competitive business age, IR is not only about boundary management, but it is much more than that.

Therefore, the relevance and significance of IR cannot be underestimated, especially considering its impact on the overall business environment.

Disruptive Technologies

Similarly, technologies like Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning, etc., have completely transformed every aspect of our businesses. For modern managers, understanding and leveraging these technologies has become one of their major KRAs, and therefore, we are witnessing numerous changes in our existing business processes because of these technological disruptions.

With AI systems getting more sophisticated in understanding human emotions, techniques like VR (Virtual Reality) and Augmented Reality (AR) will be a game changer for us. New-age HR leaders have already started leveraging these technologies in the fields of Strategy, Innovation, Decision Making and overall creating an inclusive and agile workplace.

However, it is equally important to evaluate the impact of such changes from the human aspect. Although these transformations have shaped the growth of the marketplace, yet, it is highly critical to measure their impact on the workforce.

Our Problem Statement: AI and IR – An Evolving Journey

With AI providing unique and measurable solutions to our business problems, the solution is not just mere implementation but also taking all the stakeholders

on the same page for the organization to grow organically.

The impact of AI on industrial relations and unions is a complex and evolving topic. AI technologies have the potential to transform various aspects of the workplace, including job roles, work processes and



the overall employment landscape.

In the present scenario, industrial relations are evolving rapidly due to various factors, including the changing demographics of the workforce, a shift in the mindset of union representatives and the increasing pace of work requirements. With a younger workforce entering the labour market, there is a growing demand for more flexible work arrangements, greater autonomy and a focus on work-life balance. This demographic shift is influencing union representatives to adopt new approaches to address the needs and concerns of younger workers, such as advocating for digital skills training, promoting remote work options and championing diversity and inclusion initiatives.

Moreover, the fast-paced nature of modern work environments, driven by technological advancements and globalization, requires unions to adapt quickly to meet the changing needs of workers. Union representatives are increasingly recognizing the importance of staying informed about emerging technologies, such as AI and automation and advocating for policies that ensure workers are not left behind in the face of technological change. This includes advocating for retraining and upskilling programs to help workers transition to new roles and industries.

Literature review:

The impact of AI on industrial relations has been widely explored in the literature, with various perspectives and insights offered by scholars. Brynjolfsson and McAfee (2017) discuss how AI and automation are reshaping work dynamics, leading to both opportunities and challenges for workers and organizations. They highlight the need for adaptability and innovation in navigating the 'second machine age'. Davenport and Ronanki (2018) provide insights into the practical

applications of AI in business, emphasizing its potential to transform various aspects of operations, including human resource management.

Lee and Kim (2021) delve into the specific implications of AI and machine learning in human resource management, emphasizing the revolutionary potential of these technologies in shaping work and employment relations. They highlight the importance of understanding and harnessing AI capabilities to enhance organizational performance and employee well-being. Kochan and Dyer (2020) evaluate the current practices of integrating AI into human resource management, emphasizing the importance of responsible AI implementation to ensure positive outcomes for both employees and organizations.

De Dreu and Gelfand (2008) provide insights into the sources and dynamics of workplace conflict, highlighting the importance of understanding and managing conflicts effectively in the context of AI-driven changes. Eaton and Garvis (2017) explore organizational culture through metaphorical representations, offering a nuanced understanding of how cultural dynamics may influence the adoption and impact of AI technologies within organizations.

Furthermore, scholars such as Dignum (2018) and Floridi and Cowls (2019) emphasize the ethical dimensions of AI deployment, advocating for responsible AI practices that align with ethical principles and societal values. Boudreau and Jesuthasan (2020) propose a four-step approach for applying automation to work, highlighting the importance of strategic thinking and careful planning in maximizing the benefits of AI while minimizing potential disruptions to employment relations.

Overall, the available literature underscores the complex interplay between AI technologies, organizational practices and employment relations, highlighting the need for thoughtful consideration of the ethical, social and economic implications of AI deployment in the workplace.

Common concerns of Unions:

The present scenario calls for union representatives to embrace a proactive and innovative approach to industrial relations, one that is responsive to the evolving needs of a younger, tech-savvy workforce and the challenges posed by rapid technological change. However, Unions may have several concerns related to the adoption of AI in work processes.

Changing Job Roles: AI can automate certain tasks and processes, leading to changes in job roles and skill requirements. Some jobs may be eliminated or significantly altered, while new job roles may emerge.

Workforce Monitoring: AI enables the collection

and analysis of large amounts of data on employee performance, behaviour and productivity. This can have implications for worker privacy and surveillance. Unions may be concerned about the use of AI-powered monitoring systems and advocate for worker privacy rights and protections.

Job Loss and Worker Displacement: One of the primary concerns for unions is the potential loss of jobs due to AI-driven automation. They worry that certain job roles may become redundant or significantly reduced, leading to unemployment or underemployment for workers. Unions may advocate for measures to protect workers from job loss, such as retraining programs, job security provisions, or the creation of new job opportunities.

Skills and Training: New technology adoption often requires workers to acquire new skills or upgrade their existing skill sets. Unions may be concerned about the accessibility and availability of training programs to help workers adapt to these changes. They may advocate for comprehensive skill development initiatives, ensuring that workers have access to training opportunities to enhance their employability in the AI-driven workplace.

Overtime and Working Hours: Unions may express concerns about the potential impact of AI on working hours and overtime. While AI can increase productivity and efficiency, unions may worry that employers may exploit AI technologies to demand or eliminate overtime opportunities. They may advocate for fair working hour policies, adequate rest periods and safeguards against excessive work demands.

Health: Unions may raise concerns about the physical and mental health implications of increased reliance on AI technologies. They may advocate for proper risk assessments, training on AI system usage and the inclusion of worker safety considerations in the design and deployment of AI technologies.

Fairness and Equity: Unions may be concerned about the potential biases in AI systems and the impact on worker fairness and equity. They may advocate for transparency and accountability in AI decision-making processes, especially when it comes to areas such as hiring, promotions and performance evaluations.

Collective Bargaining and Worker Representation: Unions may be concerned about the impact of AI on collective bargaining and worker representation. They may seek mechanisms to ensure that AI-related decisions and policies are subject to negotiation and collective agreements. Unions may advocate for worker representation in decision-making processes related to AI implementation to safeguard workers' interests and ensure a fair distribution of benefits.

Impact of AI on industrial relations and unions.

Collective Bargaining: As AI technologies affect the workforce, unions may negotiate for provisions related to AI implementation. This can include aspects such as training and re-skilling programs for workers affected by automation, safeguards against unfair use of AI in employment decisions and opportunities for workers to participate in decision-making processes related to AI implementation.

Skill Development and Training: AI-driven automation may require workers to acquire new skills or adapt their existing skills. Unions can play a crucial role in advocating for comprehensive training and re-skilling programs to ensure that workers can effectively adapt to changing job requirements and remain employable.

Job Creation and Displacement: While AI can lead to job displacement in certain areas, it can also create new job opportunities. Unions may focus on ensuring that workers have access to these new jobs, advocating for fair hiring practices and promoting job creation in industries affected by AI.

Ethical AI and Algorithmic Bias: AI systems are not immune to biases, and their decisions can have far-reaching consequences. Unions can advocate for ethical AI practices, transparency in algorithmic decision-making and measures to mitigate bias in AI systems to ensure fair treatment and prevent discrimination in the workplace.

For instance, a few months back, Google's AI image tool faced criticism for producing culturally insensitive images based on user inputs, highlighting the unconscious biases embedded within the algorithm by the developer. This incident and the controversial questions posed to AI models like Gemini highlight the critical importance of ethical AI and the mitigation of algorithmic bias in industrial relations. The potential bias in AI algorithms can bring challenges to Industrial Relations. AI systems, if not carefully monitored and regulated, can perpetuate and even amplify biases present in society, leading to discriminatory outcomes in the workplace.

By promoting ethical AI practices and measures to mitigate bias, unions can help safeguard against discriminatory practices, foster a more inclusive work environment and uphold the principles of fairness and equality in industrial relations. Additionally, these incidents underscore the necessity for ongoing scrutiny and regulation of AI technologies to prevent harmful outcomes and ensure that AI serves the best interests of all stakeholders in the workplace.

Worker Protection and Rights: As artificial intelligence becomes increasingly integrated into workplaces, labour laws must evolve to safeguard workers'

rights, including fair wages, working hours and safe conditions. Clear guidelines are necessary to address challenges such as remote work, digital monitoring and accountability for decisions driven by AI.

Future of Work: AI is reshaping the nature of work, and unions can play a crucial role in shaping the future of work by engaging in discussions with employers, policymakers and other stakeholders. Unions can participate in conversations regarding the regulation of AI, the impact on job quality and the equitable distribution of benefits arising from AI implementation.

Soft HR vs Industrial Relations.

The preference for soft HR practices and the increasing reliance on technology in HR management has indeed led to concerns about the lack of expert practitioners in industrial relations (IR) and the potential loss of personal touch in HR interactions.

Soft HR practices emphasize building relationships,



fostering communication and prioritizing employee well-being. While these practices are valuable for promoting a positive work environment, they may not always address the complexities of labour relations and collective bargaining that are central to IR. Consequently, there's a risk of HR professionals focusing more on individual employee needs and less on broader labour issues, potentially leading to gaps in expertise in IR matters within HR departments.

Moreover, the excessive use of technology in HR processes can further exacerbate the loss of personal touch. Automated systems and digital platforms may streamline administrative tasks but can sometimes create distance between HR professionals and employees, reducing opportunities for meaningful human interaction and personalized support.

To address these challenges, organizations need to strike a balance between soft HR practices, technological advancements and expertise in industrial relations. This may involve investing in training and development programs for HR professionals to enhance their understanding of IR principles

and labour laws. Additionally, fostering a culture that values open communication and collaboration between HR, employees, and union representatives can help maintain a personal touch in HR interactions while leveraging technology to improve efficiency and effectiveness.

Ultimately, it's essential for HR departments to recognize the importance of both soft HR practices and expert knowledge in industrial relations to effectively navigate the complexities of the modern workplace and promote positive employee relations.

Conclusion

AI holds the promise of unlocking prosperity by improving working conditions, enhancing productivity and fostering innovation. However, it is essential to recognize that the unchecked proliferation of AI in the hands of corporate interests can exacerbate economic inequality, limit workers' rights and erode democratic principles.

Labour unions play a vital role in advocating for the responsible and ethical deployment of AI to ensure that its benefits are shared equitably among all stakeholders. Additionally, HR and IR professionals are poised to play a key role in this process. By collaborating with labour unions, industry leaders, and policymakers, HR and IR professionals can help shape AI implementation strategies that prioritize the well-being of workers, promote fairness in employment practices and uphold democratic values.

Together, through concerted efforts and collaboration, we can harness the transformative potential of AI while addressing its challenges. By establishing clear regulations, ethical guidelines and mechanisms for worker empowerment, we can create a future of work that is inclusive, equitable and sustainable for all.

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Energy Transition – Story of NetZero, Human Resource and the dance of elephants



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Abstract

Net Zero has become the buzzword in today's VUCA world, with every major company announcing its Net Zero goals and trying to lead the energy transition. The Net Zero term itself is not new, with references being found as early as 1971, The term also found references in even the cartoons. The energy companies are at the forefront of this energy transition and have the onus to lead the world from polluting molecule-based energy systems towards low-carbon emission sources.

However, the path towards the energy transition is riddled with multiple problems, one of the critical ones being human resources and how to lead them through the journey of energy transition itself.

Cultivating leadership, utilizing frameworks, adopting Agile and investing in startups may be some of the methods to make the elephants dance.

1. Introduction

The term "Net Zero" first came into general parlance in 2015 during the famed Paris Agreement, wherein it became a key goal in the climate negotiations. NetZero appears to be a phenomenon which has recently gained traction, but is it?

Running Google Ngram for the term "**NetZero**" results in startling results with the earliest reference to the term as early as 1971. On diving deeper, it is observed that the usage, however, was not linked with climate net zero. It was only by the 1980s that scientists and policymakers began discussing the need to balance emissions with carbon sinks to stabilize global temperatures. This laid the groundwork for the modern understanding of Net Zero.

With the foundation built, concepts of protecting Mother Earth, saving the environment and "NetZero" started getting mingled with the thought process, folklore and even the cartoons.



Almost every 90s kid who had access to Cartoon Network has in fact, watched the first-ever NetZero show aired – "**Captain Planet**".

Even the intro song had a bit of NetZero in it:

Captain Planet, he's a hero; gonna take pollution down to zero

More often than not, the folklore and cartoons actually depict the instantly prevalent mindset of humanity in general.

As per McKinsey and Company:

Net zero is an ideal state where the amount of greenhouse gases released into the Earth's atmosphere is equal to the amount removed.

As per the United Nations:

Put simply, net zero means cutting carbon emissions to a small amount of residual emissions that can be absorbed and durably stored by nature and other carbon dioxide removal measures, leaving zero in the atmosphere.

Can the presence of carbon be this volatile for the atmosphere? Can it really change the core functioning of Mother Earth? Can the core building block of all the

life and non-life forms also become the slow poison for its own creations?

What is a blessing in moderation can be a curse in excess

Very similar is the case with the current environment and the story behind the curse of carbon.

The great minds of Earth have indeed found a high correlation between the presence of CO₂ and the impediments of Mother Earth – Enhanced Greenhouse effect, climate change, Ocean Acidification, and Disruption of the Ecosystem.

2. How bad is the situation of Mother Earth?

The most important metric to estimate the impact of excess carbon on the mother earth is the average temperature rise as compared to the pre-industrialization levels. Though there is a lot of variability associated with this unit in terms of its association and other parameters, however, it is important to note that 195 nations pledged to hold the Earth's temperature to "well below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels," and going further, aim to "limit the temperature increase to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels", thereby adopting the matrix of measuring average temperature of Earth.

Subsequent to this, there was an enhanced push towards attaining carbon neutrality and making the artificial activities Net Zero in terms of carbon emissions.

However, things are not going as planned!!

In May 2023, the WMO[1] issued a report that projected a significant likelihood (66 per cent) that the world would exceed the 1.5 degrees Celsius threshold in the next four years. This breach would likely be driven by human-induced climate change, combined with a warming El Niño — a cyclical weather phenomenon that temporarily heats up ocean regions and pushes global temperatures higher.

To hold the planet's long-term average temperature to below the 1.5-degree threshold, the world will have to reach net zero emissions by the year 2050, according to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

3. Human Resource and Net Zero:

The storyline of Captain Planet revolves around 5 crucial elements identified to save the world - "Earth!" "fire!" "wind!" "water!" and "heart!". In the storyline, 5 individuals owned one ring each giving them distinct control over one of these elements. The superhero – Captain Planet can be summoned only when each of these five individuals chooses to combine their powers to rescue Mother Earth.

While each of the elements has its own unique properties and importance in the storyline, the element of heart was the pivotal one which weaved each of the others together into a formidable being.

After the Paris 2015 accord, the entire world has come together to save mother earth, with large traditional organizations starting to transition into sustainable beings.

In the current sense, the power of the heart can be associated with the most important resource after time – the human resource.

4. Energy Generation and Carbon Emissions:

It won't be very wrong to state that almost all of the carbon emissions originate in the process of making energy. As per a recent UN Emissions Gap Report, 68% of CO₂ emissions originate from the production of energy. The importance of this number is exemplified by the fact that fuel for energy generation is being sourced primarily from Coal as well as the Oil & Gas companies.

It hence becomes increasingly important for the key energy providers of the globe – the energy fuel providers to transition themselves and more importantly, lead the entire energy transition journey for the world.

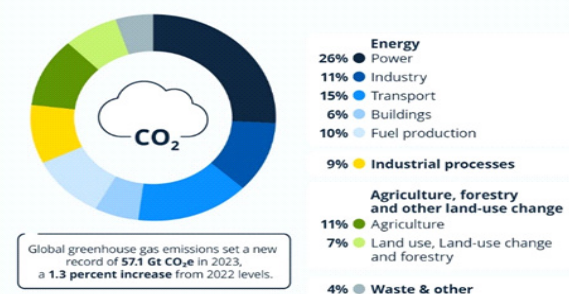
The energy transition is not just a technological challenge but a people-centric transformation as well, wherein passion and possibilities are tasked with fuelling innovation and growth.

Human resources to a company is what software is to computers. No matter how much computational prowess you have cultivated, the entire thing becomes a complete waste if you do not have the proper software to operate it.

The challenge is further amplified when one has to operate in a VUCA environment, wherein the technology is volatile, the future is uncertain, the

Where Do Emissions Come From?

Total greenhouse gas emissions in 2023, by sector*



Global greenhouse gas emissions set a new record of 57.5 Gt CO₂e in 2023, a 1.3 percent increase from 2022 levels.

* Does not sum to 100% due to rounding
Source: UN Emissions Gap Report 2024



statista

operating environment is complex, and the goals themselves are ambiguous.

The ability to handle the challenging VUCA environment is rare and as with all rare things – needed now and in large quantities!

But can the big and influential companies of the globe embrace the change? Do they even have the cultural and management bandwidth to embrace innovation?

5. Who says elephants can't dance? – the story of IBM

IBM's transformation from the verge of bankruptcy to becoming a leading force in the technology industry is a testament to the power of leadership, cultural renewal, and strategic reinvention. In the early 1990s, IBM faced significant financial difficulties, a declining market share, and an identity crisis as technology evolved faster than the company's ability to adapt. However, through bold decisions and an unwavering focus on change, IBM not only survived but redefined its role in the industry.

Leadership was central to this transformation. The company recognized that incremental change was not enough; it required a fundamental shift in direction. By focusing on customer-centric solutions and pivoting away from its reliance on hardware, IBM invested heavily in software, services, and consulting. This shift represented a move from selling standalone products to offering integrated solutions tailored to client needs.

Equally critical was the emphasis on cultural transformation. IBM shifted its internal culture from hierarchical and bureaucratic to more agile and adaptive. The company focused on collaboration, innovation, and empowering employees to think and act beyond traditional roles. This cultural renewal fostered an environment where continuous learning, upskilling, and adaptability became central to IBM's DNA, enabling the workforce to meet the demands of a rapidly changing industry landscape.

6. Why is it important for the elephants to dance?

The traditional energy source has been molecule-based, wherein the companies typically scour the belly of Mother Earth to dig up the precious molecules which then undergo mechanical and chemical changes for releasing energy.

These molecules which are used for energy generation have the presence of huge amounts of carbon – in fact coal is a form of carbon itself and crude oil contains large chains of Carbon and Hydrogen. The combustion of these molecules releases a significant amount of carbon dioxide and mind you, here we are not taking into account the significant amounts of emissions

associated with the very extraction of these molecules.

Just to give you a perspective, the emission profile of India's electricity grid stood at 713.44 gCO₂e/kWh of electricity, which is almost 1.5 times the world average of 481.46 gCO₂e/kWh. Clean and developed countries such as Norway and Sweden have much cleaner grids with emission profiles lower than 50 gCO₂e/kWh.

It is hence important for the energy suppliers of the world to undergo a significant shift in terms of their operating modalities. Such a monumental change for a company is not very easy. One can simply expense CAPEX to get the latest tech and toys, but where would they get the knowledge base and the mindset to operate them?

For organizations undergoing an energy transition, the lessons from IBM are highly relevant. The shift to sustainable energy sources and carbon-neutral operations requires not just technological upgrades but also a cultural and strategic overhaul. Success lies in a leadership that can articulate a compelling vision and foster an inclusive culture where employees are motivated and equipped to embrace change.

As with IBM, the energy sector's transformation depends on its workforce's ability to adapt and innovate. Reskilling, continuous development, and fostering new competencies are paramount. A people-centric approach to this transition, combined with leadership that prioritizes sustainability and strategic reinvention, can enable even the largest organizations to thrive in a low-carbon future. The energy transition is not just a challenge; it is an opportunity to build a more sustainable and innovative future.

Indeed, people are at the core of the energy transition



and skilled, adaptable, and innovative employees are highly important in implementing green energy initiatives.

7. How to make elephants dance?

a. Agile Leadership & Mindset: For the uninitiated, “Agile” is a methodology and mindset for managing processes and projects and was created in 2001 by 17 software developers. ‘The Agile’ in the words of my Agile professor, “Agile is a mindset”!. The Agile manifesto is the foundational document of Agile and speaks about four core fundamental values of this methodology:

- Individuals and interactions over processes and tools.
- Working software over comprehensive documentation.
- Customer collaboration over contract negotiation.
- Responding to change over following a plan.

Though agile as a management framework was created primarily for software companies, it has risen as a mindset and framework for managing projects, particularly in environments that require adaptability, collaboration, and fast iteration. In an interesting discussion, I was pleasantly surprised to find that hardcore business processes such as M&A[2] also find usage of Agile for managing complex merger projects.

Agile is like the jazz of project management—free-flowing, adaptive, and all about improvising to hit the right notes at the right time. It’s less about rigid choreography (aka detailed step-by-step plans) and more about syncing with the rhythm of change, all while keeping the audience (your stakeholders) happy.

There is a very thin line between an organization embracing an Agile mindset and getting stuck in the chaos of firefighting. People often mistake the hustle of firefighting as the continuous feedback loop of the Agile mindset. However, both concepts are poles apart and the latter has to be followed in spirit so that it does not get transformed into the former.

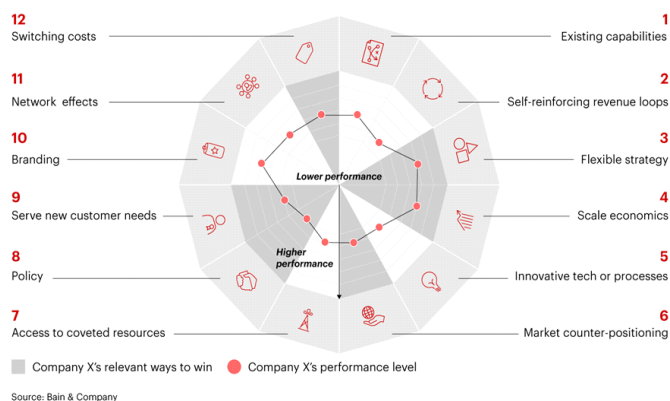
Daily Scrum is also a pivotal element of Agile, however, the teams have to be mindful that the daily scrum[3] of 15 minutes means 15 minutes only – it should not be transformed into a free-flowing heavy metal concert!

If executed religiously in its spirit, agile as a management framework makes tremendous sense for organizations undergoing energy transition.

b. Developing a Stepping-stone strategy: One of the leading management consultancy firms – Bain & Co provides insight on how the companies can win while embracing the energy transition. Their approach for

developing a stepping-stone strategy talks about an effective three-step process –

- Get Clear on what you know and what you don’t
- Identifying the most relevant way to win
- Assess performance and capabilities across key levers



The last two steps require a detailed introspection of the company to analyse internal capabilities and identify the most important ways to win.

An example of such a framework is depicted herewith:

Though the applications of the framework can be challenging given the details required for its effective application, the fruits are promising. The framework has the power to analyze the internal health of the organization and furthermore, the actors of the framework can be tailored to meet individual company’s requirements.

The importance of following frameworks, in other words, discipline is highly important when chasing the goal of energy transition. As per the Energy Transition Index – 2024, published by the World Economic Forum, the transition readiness is led by the developed countries – indicating the stricter regulations in these economies.

c. Cultivating Leadership: Strong leadership is crucial for organizations to successfully navigate the complexities of energy transition. Leaders drive a compelling vision, outlining clear goals for reducing emissions, adopting renewables, and achieving net zero. They ensure alignment between organizational objectives and the global need for sustainability.

Effective leaders also create a culture of innovation and agility, empowering teams to develop and implement cutting-edge technologies like green hydrogen, carbon capture, and renewable energy systems. By fostering adaptability and encouraging collaboration, leaders position organizations to seize new opportunities in the evolving energy landscape.

Furthermore, leadership builds resilience by equipping

teams with the skills and mindset to address challenges, such as policy shifts or market disruptions. Cultivating leadership ensures that organizations not only embrace change but actively lead it, turning the energy transition into a competitive advantage.

d. Investing into Startups: Investing in Startups is an ingenious way for the organization to accelerate their growth and specifically for the traditional energy companies to become nimble-footed. Startups allow organizations to harness innovative technologies and fresh ideas that may not flourish internally. In the space of energy transition, Startups can bring about cutting-edge solutions such as renewable energy systems, battery storage, hydrogen technologies, and carbon capture, giving organizations early access to game-changing technologies.

Additionally, partnerships with startups foster agility and experimentation, enabling companies to pilot new technologies at lower costs and risks. This approach also builds ecosystems of collaboration, leveraging the entrepreneurial mindset of startups alongside the scale and resources of established organizations.

Energy majors such as Chevron, Shell, BP, Equinor and others have dedicated Startup funding mechanisms with a fund size from \$ 200 mn to \$ 1.4 bn. These investments are done through a dedicated Startup investment company in many cases with 30 people dedicatedly working towards scouting, investing and growing these Startups. The areas of focus comprise of core value chain as well as Renewables, AI, IoT etc. Such dedicated focus demonstrates the level of importance given by the key players to Startups.

To make elephants dance, organizations must master a choreography that blends agility, strategy, leadership, and innovation. Agile leadership provides the rhythm, enabling adaptability and collaboration in a rapidly changing environment. Stepping-stone strategies, and following transition frameworks, provide a structured yet flexible roadmap to navigate the complexities of the energy transition. Strong leadership ensures that this dance is purposeful, inspiring teams to embrace sustainability and innovation as core values. Finally, partnering with startups injects the nimbleness and creativity necessary to keep the momentum alive. Together, these elements create a harmonious performance, proving that even the largest organizations can move with grace and purpose toward a net-zero future.

8. Conclusion:

In the grand ballet of sustainability, even the largest elephants must learn to pirouette. The energy transition is not just a technological leap but a cultural waltz that requires the rhythm of startups, the choreography

of agile leadership, and the unwavering beat of passionate human resources. As the world inches closer to its net-zero goals, the question is no longer whether these giants can dance, but how gracefully they can glide toward a greener tomorrow. After all, in this electrifying performance, the spotlight is on those who can innovate, collaborate, and lead the charge with a spark of creativity and a twirl of purpose. The stage is set, and the music is playing—now, let's make these elephants tango!

In the words of Captain Planet – “*The Power is Yours!!*”

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[1] World Meteorological Organization

[2] Mergers & Acquisitions

[3] Scrum is one of the many frameworks of Agile deployment

Do we work to eat Or eat to work?



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Our Corporate lives taught us from day 01 and one of the 1st things I incorporated was adding this last line to this beautiful stanza that my grandfather introduced me during my childhood:

दाने दाने पर लिखा है खानेवाले का नाम, खानेवाले है लाखों देने वाला एक राम ॥
 पर कैसे खाएँ बेचारा इंसान, जब बीच में आ जाए दफ्तर का काम ॥

For those who didn't understand, the English Translation is under:

Every grain has written on it the name who is destined to eat it. The count is endless; however the giver is Almighty. But how can the poor chap eat, when the official work has come in-between.

You might be thinking where I'm headed with this. I felt since food is such an important aspect of our daily lives, why not bring it at the centre stage in this edition of "Adventures of my official life" and take your views on this philosophical dilemma - "Do we work to eat or eat to work?"

"To begin the day in a relaxed manner is what Heart wants, but to rush every morning is my job says the Brain" – By yours truly ()

I feel this dilemma between the Heart and the Brain is identical for most of us. From chasing the alarm to the last snooze possible to getting ready in span of

few minutes, from eating breakfast in a single breath to navigate my car drive as if playing a videogame to reach office on time, it is in this fashion that my normal day commences. Summing up my daily morning routine in toto.

On my way, I surpass 3-4 fruit vendors carrying raw and green Guavas on their cycle carts and believe me, I have tried a lot but couldn't find the same quality in any of the fruit shops nearby. And thus, every morning, I felt like stopping on the way to get them and then considering my tight office schedule and the nuances of parking my vehicle on the busy roadside, I tell myself "Let's leave it for now but I'll surely come on weekend to get these guavas"

And then comes the weekend, where I try to compensate for my much-lost sleep during the whole week and thus, those delicious guavas never reach my place making it an infinite loop.

I genuinely feel that because of our work priorities, we often ignore food, however, it is our taste buds that sometimes drive not only our body clock but also professional workspace. Here's a small anecdote that beautifully captures this feeling.

Once, during a recruitment exercise in Chennai, we were going through the feedback forms submitted by the applicants who had undergone selection processes like Group Tasks/Group Discussions/Personal Interview. Majority of the feedback were either positive or some suggestions on making the whole recruitment process more user friendly. Then, I found one that absolutely caught my attention that specifically wrote about our Lunch Thali - "It is shocking to find that even though the selection process is being conducted in an office based out at Chennai, however, the lunch arranged for the candidates doesn't have Sambhar in it."

I still remember the hearty laugh that me and my colleagues had after reading this. But till date whenever I think about that feedback, it reminds me of that one candidate who went out to mention about his food preference amid a critical recruitment exercise.

Lastly, a narrative that is very close to my heart as it not only made me question the love that we all have for food but also made me compassionate while dealing

with some real tricky issues. During my first posting at Gujarat, I met many engineers who were involved in shift operations. For those who can't envision shift operations, it is primarily linked to those set-ups that work non-stop for 24 hours and thus, manning rosters are prepared to ensure continuous working in rotating shifts.

One day, Diljeet, a young engineer who has recently joined us fresh from campus, met me while having a walk in the township area. Born and raised in the Northern part of the country, it was his first stint outside north. Seeing him, I could sense there is something he wants to talk about, but I never knew that he would put me in a fix like this. I'm sure you all would also want to know this interesting conversation, and this is how our conversation went:

Diljeet – Hello sir

Me – Hi

Diljeet – Sir, I'm in operations Department

Me – Yes, I know Diljeet. How are you?

Diljeet – I'm good sir. One of my colleagues was mentioning that you are very helpful, so I wanted to speak to you.

Me – Please go-ahead Diljeet

Diljeet – Sir Actually I'm from Punjab and staying here all alone. I mean not that I'm scared. What am I saying? Sorry sir, it's an absurd issue. In fact, I should rather not ask. I will sound so stupid in front of you.

Me – Calm down Diljeet. I'm not here to judge you. Please speak whatever is bothering you.

Diljeet (in a nervous tone)– Sir Chole Bhature

Me – What? Chole Bhature? You want me to order them for you?

Diljeet – No sir. This is not what I meant. Being a Punjabi, I'm a die-hard Chole Bhature fan and always cherish them as they made me feel closer to home even when I'm so far away. Now the catch is every Saturday, the breakfast in the township mess is 'Chole Bhature', however I couldn't have them because of my duty roster as I've to perform Morning Shift on Saturday and therefore, every week, I miss this opportunity.

I was totally perplexed. I still couldn't believe that I was having this full-fledged conversation on Chole Bhature and ofcourse, I didn't know how to react to it. None the less, I politely asked Diljeet what I can do to help him. To which he replied "Sir, I spoke to Mess Manager but he said it's as per HR policy and so I got confused to whom I should contact to resolve this issue of mine"

I almost laughed hearing this. Mess Manager has

given him a tactical answer and this boy who is still on his Campus-to-Corporate journey didn't know what to do.

Although I was not dealing in that area, yet I requested the canteen team, if they could find some solution to it. And gladly, my persuasion worked and based on a survey from all the employees availing mess service, a new timetable was conveyed, and Chole Bhature were back on Diljeet's plate.

Let me leave with these words by Famous American Filmmaker George Orson Welles that always astounds me - "Ask not what you can do for your country. Ask what's for lunch"

And last weekend in the chilly December morning of Delhi, I specifically went out with this one agenda and got those raw guavas for me.

