

Skill Enhancement should be the focus

“ Being the largest English-speaking nation, our manpower already has an edge ”

It was early 2000 when India experienced a tangible transit from a manufacturing to a service dominated economy. There was a gradual shift from job hunting for individuals to mass recruitment by employers. This happened due to emergence of the IT/ITES sectors. Our manpower had an edge due to which we became a global outsourcing destination, a result of being the largest English speaking nation and the low cost of operations here. This growth was followed by increased consumerism in the country due to which the retail sector grew to new levels. In the midst of all this, other major industries like the telecom sector and aviation emerged.

When I started my career in 1991, personal communication was negligible. In today's environment though, communication is at the forefront. My CEO, who later went on to become my mentor, used to ask me, "What is your goal?" to which I would reply, "To be a CEO by the age of 35". He continued to guide me, asking me to focus less on technical and more on interpersonal skills. When I disagreed, he suggested that I look around and try to find a company headed by a technical manager. I found none. He then gave me the opportunity to groom myself via training sessions at institutions like IIM Ahmedabad and Eicher Consultancy. I accomplished my goal and actually became CEO at the age of 35. I was fortunate to learn about the importance of soft skills. With the change in perceptions, HR consultants today have the chance to contribute towards a wide range of services.

The above analysis leads us to why there is a sizeable requirement of manpower in India and, the scope of the HR consulting industry in India. Emergence of the above mentioned sectors clearly points to the huge requirement of human capital with special respect to young manpower. In some sectors like IT/ITES and finance, manpower needs to be professionally qualified while sectors like retail, telecom and aviation may absorb even the less qualified manpower.



Photo: Mukunda De

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The employment wave will create a sizeable demand of manpower, while on the other hand increasing the demands on the HR consulting industry.

However, it is important to realise the challenges ahead. The major challenge is to develop skills within our human resource, which conform to the global thought process and attitudes, and to groom the non-English speaking manpower. In the future, consulting will focus on two major issues – attrition and skill enhancement.

Attrition control and employee retention is a key issue because of limited availability of trained manpower. Organisations spend valuable money training their employees only to see them change jobs without a second thought. Most large companies peg their annual recruitment plan at around 500 to 3000 people, not only due to expansion, but also because of attrition. I have personally observed a case wherein a leading bank faced severe attrition, since employees perceived the bank solely as a 'training ground' for better pastures, with higher salaries. Work on employee loyalty can be done through growth-based compensation plans, performance-based revenues, etc. Nothing motivates an individual more than a responsibility that matches his/her strengths. Mentoring and empowerment of people develops them, bringing in a feeling of accomplishment. I was once working as the Deputy Manager (Projects) at a soap plant and my young personal assistant, a non-technical employee, was not considered productive. Once I correctly identified her strengths, she was delegated the right kind of work, after which she managed sixty percent of the project herself and was later elevated to the position of personal secretary to the Managing Director.

There is a strong need to realise the desire of the Indian workforce towards training and it should be considered an absolute priority rather than an additional burden. It is the only way to overcome the gap between supply and demand of labour. ●