



May 2015



**Thinking Aloud**

Navigating the Choppy and Calm Oceans - HR Function and Change;  
**Prof. Vijayan Pankajakshan**

**Podium**

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**The Best Place to Work: The Art and Science of Creating an Extraordinary Workplace - Dr. Ron Friedman**

**Standing Ovation**

**Gram Vikas Trust (GVT), Bharuch, Gujarat**

Dear Reader,

The people function in today's organisations has come a long way. The Human Resources (HR) role has faced a whirlwind of change, highlighted by current day research. An organisation undergoes lots of changes - from mergers and acquisitions to the adoption of global models for operations, expansions, restructuring and other internal/external developments. Amid the various changes, the 'human' aspect of the changing environment is impacted.

The last decade has been a turning point in the evolution of HR from the focus shifting from a transactional role to that of a strategic partnership one. The evolution of HR using the Ulrich model and other research shows where we have been and where we need to be headed. Outsourcing has changed the nature of many HR positions, which has led to a shift from a traditional HR role to one with more skills, deeper knowledge about the business they support and the environment that they exist in. Some of the compelling work going on in HR today includes globalization, flawless execution of all transactional work, and strategic positioning, among others. While there is no shortage of compelling work for HR professionals given today's changing business environment, two primary factors shape up opportunities for HR to demonstrate their skills: technology and talent management. To help professionals, there are a number of emerging tools which will challenge the role that HR plays.

While change is inevitable, there is no one successful model to determine the success of the HR function and young professional have to be equipped with a plethora of skill sets. There are however, several core skills that are important, some of which include, business and leadership skills, consulting and technology skills coupled with a global mind-set. Fundamental systems knowledge and a technology orientation are also important skills.



The current and the next decade will be important in the evolution of the HR function. As web-based technologies become increasingly complex, most of the HR work will be handled through a self-service delivery channel. HR issues will always exist but the key to overcoming these will be in answering how these issues will be managed. Forward thinking HR leaders have to develop capabilities and strategies to meet future challenges and to build a company's brand through its people. While evolution is inevitable in all walks of life, there is significant scope in what roles the HR function is currently playing and what roles it will indulge in in the near future. This month, ET looks at the evolution of the HR function over the last 3 decades.

In the **Thinking Aloud** section, Prof. Vijayan Pankajakshan chronologises the evolution of the HR function. Over the last three decades, amid borderless economic growth and the ever increasing utility of the internet, the HR function had to metamorphise to deal with the challenges faced by its valuable assets - people. Some of the changes in the HR realm include shifting towards employee engagement, adopting competency based approaches in performance management and development, total rewards system, among others. With the pervasiveness of technology came higher job losses amongst lower skilled employees leading to mounting challenges in Employee Relations and Industrial Relations functions. After the world economy was impacted by the economic turmoil of 2008, there was a significant pressure and strain on the HR function.

Mr. Pradeep Pande, President - HR at Alkem Laboratories, on the **Podium** this month, informs readers on how the HR function has evolved over the last few decades. The HR function has come a long way, shifting its focus from transaction orientation to transformation orientation, adding activities from potential assessments to career & succession planning. New generation organisations are doing a lot of value-add work to align people's aspirations and synergise it with the organisation's aspirations through means such as open houses, town halls, etc. Mr. Pande highlights some key concerns impacting HR professionals today and ends his views with some words of wisdom to those who would want to venture into the unique HR world.

In the **We Recommend** section, award-winning social psychologist Dr. Ron Friedman writes about the various aspects that make a workplace a happy place to work in in his book 'The Best Place to Work: The Art and Science of Creating an Extraordinary Workplace.' The author presents various practical tips through in depth examination on how to elevate worker performance through creativity. He reveals the secret of how companies such as Google and Facebook manage to attract and retain employees, while satisfying their day to day needs. While many may disagree, Friedman's study reveals that aspects such as office design, socialising, employee engagement, telecommuting, integrating work and family life tend to be important for a healthy workplace environment.

In **Standing Ovation**, we feature Gujarat based Gram Vikas Trust (GVT), which extensively works for the under-privileged women and children in the society rendering services such as education, healthcare and vocational training among other services.

In **Figures of Speech**, Vikram's HR Manager sure knows how to 'evolve' with the times!

As always, we value your opinion, so do let us know how you liked this issue. To visit our previous issues you can visit the Resources section on the website or simply [Click Here](#). You can also follow us on **Facebook**, **Twitter**, **LinkedIn & Google+** - where you can join our community to continue the dialogue with us! For smartphone and tab users, please [Click here](#) to continue reading Empowering Times.

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## Thinking Aloud

### Navigating the Choppy and Calm Oceans - HR Function and Change - Prof. Vijayan Pankajakshan

Every profession goes through various cycles of relevance, as it tries to remain valuable to its larger stakeholder system. The Human Resources Function is therefore no exception.

The last three decades have influenced the shaping of the HR function in a significant manner. This period, primarily, witnessed significant events in the world we live in. In the period 1984-1994, the world economy began its transformation from geography limited economic growth to a borderless one, changing the rules of the way economic development unfolded. The collapsing of national borders (beyond the Berlin Wall figuratively) witnessed increasing levels of connectedness. This connectedness influenced the way customers and suppliers engaged and sought value/provided value. This was aided by the growing influence of the internet and telecom.

The above larger ecosystem shift influenced the HR function in many ways. Some of the more significant ones included the increasing deployment of Outsourcing (offshoring, near shoring), speedier communication due to email and first generation mobile phones. This fuelled the consumption cycle and employees in organisations, and in turn raised their levels of aspiration and expectations from their employers. Managing these expectations shifted focus from employee satisfaction towards employee engagement, while salary and benefits based approach gave way to that of Total Rewards. In essence, the HR function had to metamorphose to effectively deal with challenges of attracting talent to the workplace, engage them towards higher levels of productivity and competitiveness and to retain top talent. The HR function also witnessed some serious focus on 'competency based' approaches, besides also influencing Business leaders and Managers to adopt the same approach to Performance Management and Development across the organisation. In this context, thought leaders like Dave Ulrich, Wayne Brockbank, Jim Collins, Charles Handy, etc. began to significantly shape HR professional standards and the architecture of People Processes in organisations.

As the world moved into the 1994-2004 decade, the pace of globalisation accelerated and the all pervasiveness of technology began affecting all our lives. Hand held devices became more powerful, the penetration of the internet deepened and the shape of economic activity began to further change and raise its own set of challenges. Many manufacturing centric business strategies gave way to looking at Global Supply Chain management and this meant that factories could be located at the best optimum place - anywhere in the world. Hence the production centres for a company started reducing while the size and scale of each supply centre grew manifold. Foxconn in China, which manufactures handsets of most mobile companies, employed more than 10 lakh people in one location!!

This had its downside impact on higher job losses amongst lower skilled employees leading to Employee Relations (ER) and Industrial Relations (IR) challenges. The nature of jobs needed in the economies of the world and in India began to change rapidly. Particularly in manufacturing, it was the period when India conceded space to China - as the latter strongly moved to become the globe's factory for making products. India chose to become more focused on IT and ITES services. This helped in job creation but the profiles of these jobs were very different from those that existed in the manufacturing centric days. Unions lost their moorings as they tried to cope with changing expectations of new blue-white hybrid collared employees. In India, the rate of union memberships started dropping

and similar trends were observed in the other countries as well.

As we move to the final decade of our journey - 2004-2014, we find that the landscape has changed even more significantly. The first half of the decade was relatively an extension of the late 90s - the party seemed to be still going strong. Post 2008, the world has had to deal with one of the longest and most severe economic slowdown. Most economies have degrown, a few are growing at low single digit numbers while a very few - China, India - are growing at higher single digit rates of economic growth. This stunted economic growth phase has resulted in slower job creation, and even the new jobs that are being created are with lower salaries and growth potential. The most important impact of all these forces has been the 'job-less economic growth' phenomenon. This has resulted in significant pressure and strain on the HR function. It has had to deal with right sizing employment - shutting down production centres, moving people around - besides attracting talent to new jobs which require very different competencies. The limited talent in the market has led to the fracturing of pay and benefits - very high value skills get paid a lot of money but supply is less - while many jobs quantitatively increase at the other end of the skill continuum, they deliver very modest pay and benefits. The ERP and e-commerce based platforms are squeezing out yesteryears' middle management roles. This has led to challenges not only for the organisation but even of the individual employee, the man on the street, the government, academia, etc. All of them are trying to visualise what will be the new normal and are preparing the building blocks for an economy that is likely to be even more interconnected, hyper-speed driven, etc.

One can conclude by observing all the above changes in the 30 year period - some more cataclysmic than others - the HR function has evolved from being a Manager of Human Resources to one of designing organisation architecture, spotting rare talent with specific competencies besides engaging and developing valuable employees. Talent architecting has become the key for the success of any business model or public service.

However, in all this frenetic pace of movement, the 'human' in Human Resources seem to be getting postponed and/or being overwhelmed by 'high tech.' History has shown that high tech has to be supplemented with high touch.

India continues to languish around the 100th position in the HDI rankings. This is a telling story that inspite of all the positives that have happened, the quality of life of the Indian citizen/employee has not changed much. This is a matter of concern and hence the next leap of the HR function should be how to narrow the gap between macro-economic well-being of the country/organisation with that of the individual employee's sense of economic and psychological well-being. It would become very important for employees not just to work for a living but living for working. Inclusiveness and sustainability would be important drivers for the HR function to leverage and shape the agenda for the current decade.

India has always faced challenges and has come out at the top - including being a colonially ruled country for over 300 years. Currently, the world is looking at our nation and its people to better understand the many dimensions of 'Indianness'. This could be the anchor for the HR function going forward.

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## Podium

### Mr. Pradeep Pande, President - HR at Alkem Laboratories



Mr. Pradeep Pande is President - HR at Alkem Laboratories. He is a Mumbai University topper in Human Resource Management and one with immense experience in his field. He has been working as a Corporate HR Head for the last 16 years.

His experience spans across 37 long years covering the entire range of Human Resource Management and people development functions, including restructuring, start-up operations and management of multi business - multi unit HR functions. He has worked in various capacities and has held various senior level positions in his career so far and has been part of some well-known companies like Hindustan Unilever, Aventis Pharma, Lupin Pharma,

Ispat Group, Roche Products, Tata Group Company-Rallis India and Binani Industries.

Mr. Pande has been honoured with awards like HR Best Practices for Lupin, HR Leadership Award for Binani, Golden Peacock National Training Award and Golden Peacock National Award for Corporate Social Responsibility for Ispat Industries. He has also been accredited as one of the Best HR Professionals of India in the book 'India's Greatest HR Professionals' published in 2006 and is listed amongst the 'Most Powerful HR professionals of India' in 2010.

**ET:** How has the HR function evolved over the last few decades? Can HR transform itself alone?

**PP:** The HR function has been an "admin" function for the past many decades, doing only transactions, which is popularly known as "HR Operations". HR professionals were also very happy spending a majority of their time in doing HR Operations. Due to strong/militant unions, handling IR was the main task. However, the good news is that the HR function has shifted its focus from transaction orientation to transformation orientation, doing more and more value adding activities such as potential assessment, competency development, linking performance to awards & rewards, career & succession planning, growing talent 'with-in', developing future leaders and so on.

In its transformational role, HR has to collaborate with other functions and make it a joint and collaborative effort to succeed. We have to involve other functional leaders - our customers - fully in our journey to bring appreciable change in the organisation.

**ET:** It is generally believed that size and age of an organisation has no bearing on the maturity of the HR function. Please comment.

**PP:** There are many organisations which are 30 - 40 years old but still their HR function is doing merely the 'admin' job and they are quite happy about it. On the other hand, there are many new generation organisations where HR is doing a lot of value add work. The maturity of the HR function depends upon what is expected from HR by the

management, the support provided and the competency level of HR leadership.

**ET: What are the best practices/HR tools that can be utilised to manage a company's biggest assets, 'people'?**

**PP:** Understanding the aspirations of people and synergising it with the organisation's aspirations is the key to making the impact. For this purpose, open houses, town halls, large & small group interactive processes, forums, engagement surveys, etc. are useful. Through these, we will also know as to what are the 'people' concerns and issues, which are very important to customise our approach and actions to develop our 'people' - the biggest asset. Secondly, the most important thing is that we must "act" on the feedback received otherwise it will amount to merely passing time and HR would lose its credibility and respect.

The HR team is an advocate for both the company and the 'people' and they have to perform a balancing act to meet both needs successfully.

**ET: What are the key challenges faced by HR professionals today?**

**PP:** Talent management (attracting, retaining & developing people) is the top challenge many HR professionals are facing. Employee engagement is also a big challenge today. There was a time when managing IR was the top priority of the HR function. With the change in the IR scenario of the country, it looks like IR is no more important today. But this is not true. In fact IR is one of the most important challenges of HR even today. HR has to manage relations at all levels not only with workmen. If we succeed in having cordial employee relations at all levels, the employee engagement score and motivation levels would definitely go up and we could avoid situations like Maruti Suzuki where the HR Manager was burnt alive.

**ET: As a veteran in the HR profession, what is your message to the new and young entrants to this unique function of an Organisation?**

**PP:** The first and foremost thing is to know the business and various business processes of the company very well. We should also know at what maturity stage the company is in before driving HR initiatives of the company.

HR professionals must have mastery over ALL aspects of HR operations and key HR processes. Building relationships, making a difference and providing quick and reliable services are equally important.

Learning is a continuous process whether we are young or old and hence we "keep learning."

With all this in mind, in his book 'Human Resource Champions', Dave Ulrich, one of the best thinkers and writers in HR today, recommends three additional roles for HR Managers: Business & Strategic Partner, Employee Advocate and Change Champion. Let us put all our efforts to meet up with this reasonable and basic expectation from HR professionals.

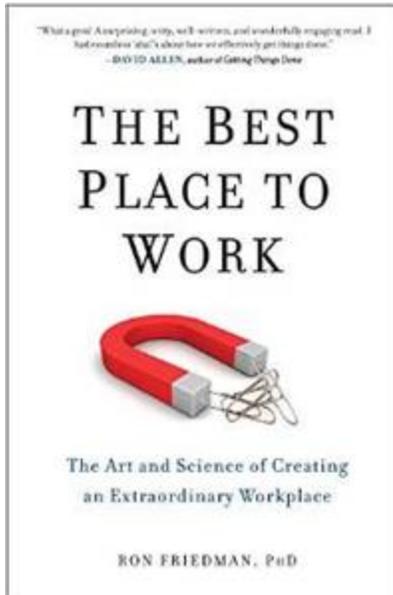
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## We Recommend

### The Best Place to Work: The Art and Science of Creating an Extraordinary Workplace - Dr. Ron Friedman



Renowned psychologist Dr. Ron Friedman in his book - The Best Place to Work: The Art and Science of Creating an Extraordinary Workplace, in a very determined manner explains what it is to build a happy workplace. Throughout the book, he presents various key points that employers and business leaders fail to understand of what really makes their employees successful at the workplace.

Amid the play of motivation, creativity, behavioural economics, neuroscience and management, Dr. Friedman puts forth down to earth and compelling insights of how one can support positivity, dynamism and productivity at the workplace. The book is divided into three main heads of discussion - how to create an extraordinary workplace environment, motivation excellence and how to attract and retain top performers.

In the emerging science of workplace excellence, he is of the opinion that failure must be rewarded so that employees can occasionally try out new approaches by taking risks. The only way to promote risk-taking is to reward the attempts and by reinforcing behaviours one wants to achieve. Dr.

Friedman analyses the importance of workplace design which helps in communication and collaborative interactions. Creative ideas should be encouraged from the bottom up rather than relying exclusively on leaders to come up with ground-breaking solutions. Routine practices can be broken and include space and time for the unconscious mind to crack problems, or by allotting time for other activities like physical exercise and even afternoon naps. Happiness boosts around small business activities will also help a company go a long way in helping their employees.

The author also suggests that people should be empowered to finding their best way of working by giving them the flexibility to design their own approach, however they see fit. From the Manager's point of view, he/she needs to manage their moods, as these eventually get reflected in the employee's reports. Dr. Friedman also shares some lessons on hiring and blind auditions. The book is also packed with real life corporate examples which drives home the various lessons the author intends to, through his book.

The overarching lessons to take away from this read include:

1. Psychological needs are at the heart of employee engagement
2. Organisations are more successful when they address the limits of the mind and body
3. Integrating work and family life improves the quality of both

At the end of each section, Dr. Friedman beautifully summarizes actionable items to managers and emerging leaders. This book is an eye opener and the secret to making your organisation a happy and welcoming place for employees.

*Dr. Ron Friedman is an award-winning social psychologist and founder of Ignite80, a management consultancy. He has served on the faculty of the University of Rochester, Nazareth College, and Hobart and William Smith Colleges. He is a regular contributor to Harvard Business Review, CNN, Forbes, Fast Company, and Psychology Today. Dr. Friedman has authored many book chapters and academic journal articles on the science of achievement, creativity, and happiness.*

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## Standing Ovation

### Gram Vikas Trust (GVT), Bharuch, Gujarat



Gujarat based Gram Vikas Trust began operations in a small way in 2001 and is a voluntary organisation for educating, maintaining health and empowering women especially from the underprivileged sections of the society. The NGO came into existence as a result of the motivation and personal initiative of its founder, Mr. Ramesh Kasondra, who hailed from a rural family and had to face hardships.

The key areas identified for interventions include child rights, education, health and hygiene, women empowerment and sustainable livelihood opportunities in Bharuch and the Narmada districts of Gujarat.

#### **Mission:**

To foster democratic & equitable living environment, where all the under-privileged, women and children have access to education, health, sustainable livelihood opportunities and essential infrastructure services irrespective of their economic and social status.

#### **Aims:**

- The right to a sustainable livelihood
- The right to basic social services
- The right to life and security
- The right to be heard social and political citizenship
- The right to an identity gender and diversity

#### **Objective/Strategy:**

GVT has defined 'Strategic Change Objectives' (SCOs) for each aim. Achieving SCOs need changes in the policies and practices of institutions, communities and individuals.

#### **Geographical Coverage:**

- 69 villages in Vagra Block of Bharuch District
- 53 villages in Bharuch Block of Bharuch District
- 27 villages in Jhagadia Block of Bharuch District
- 28 Villages in Nandod block of Narmada District

To know more about GVT, you can visit <http://www.gvtbharuch.org/>.

For its social cause, GVT deserves a Standing Ovation!

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## Empowered Learning Systems Pvt. Ltd.

101, Lords Manor, 49, Sahaney Sujan Park, Lullanagar, Pune – 411040, Maharashtra, India

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