

NAUKRI HIRING SUITE

ALL THINGS TALENT

AUG 2024

LEADERS SHAPING EMPLOYER BRANDING

LISTEN · UNDERSTAND · TRANSFORM



Dr Varadharaju Janardhanan
VP HR, Flipkart



Parmesh Shahani
Head, Godrej
DEI Lab



Rajeev Sharma
Director Talent
Acquisition, Amazon



Vijayakumar Dilli
VP, Talent and Culture,
Bounteous x Accolite



Dipsi Thakkar Kundal
Head of DEI,
Thoughtworks



Adil Nargolwala
SVP & Head Talent
Acquisition, WNS



Saurabh Deep Singhla
CHRO, upGrad



Ritu Bhatia
Global Hiring
Leader, Genpact



Jay Thakkar
Head HR & Admin,
ABHFL and ABCDL



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Vice President,
CHRO, Sony



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CHRO, Acuity
Knowledge Partners



Jayanthi Gopal
Head of People,
Mashreq Global



Mrinalini Nayak
Global Employer Brand
Manager, Lenovo



John Matthew Sebastian
DGM & Head – Talent
Acquisition, V-Guard



Mitalee Dabral
Country HR Leader,
Wayfair India TDC

From the

CBO'S Desk

Pawan Goyal

Chief Business Officer - naukri.com



Dear Readers,

In recent years, the landscape of employee expectations has undergone significant transformation. Today's workforce seeks reputable brands along with employers whose values resonate with their own. For companies, this shift necessitates a strategic approach to employer branding, effectively highlighting their unique attributes and why they matter.

In this edition of All Things Talent, we explore the role employee feedback and satisfaction play in shaping a robust employer brand. We delve into case studies from industry giants like Genpact, Flipkart, and Amazon, illustrating how these companies have leveraged employee input to enhance work-life balance initiatives and improve female retention rates.

Creating a culture where ideas flourish is essential for both employees and employers. This edition examines the elements of a thriving work culture and emphasises the need for organisations to visibly communicate their cultural values to current as well as their prospective employees. Genpact's Global Hiring Leader, Ritu Bhatia wrote an insightful piece that underscores the importance of fostering a welcoming workplace and creating an employee-first culture. While Parmesh Shahani from Godrej DEi Lab discusses the imperative of creating safe spaces for the LGBTQ+ community, highlighting Godrej's initiative to hire 5% of the workforce from the LGBTQ+ community in their Consumer Products factory in Tamil Nadu.

We also feature Mrinalini Naik, Global Employer Brand Manager for Lenovo, who shares the success of their "Meet Your Digital Self" campaign. This initiative aimed to engage Millennials and Gen Z by demonstrating how advanced AI and technology are revolutionising the

approach to tackling the global youth mental health crisis, enhancing the capabilities of mental health professionals.

This edition also offers insights into how employer branding is making a significant impact in the worlds of Global Capability Centres (GCCs) and Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs). Leaders like Jay Thakkar from Aditya Birla Housing Finance Limited and Jayanthi Gopal from Mashreq Global discuss the importance of creating a unified employee experience.

Additionally, we hear from other distinguished leaders such as Dr Varadharaju Janardhanan (VP HR, Flipkart), Rajeev Sharma (Director, Talent Acquisition, Amazon), Adil Nargolwala (SVP and Head, Talent Acquisition, WNS), Dipsi Thakkar Kundal (DEI Head, ThoughtWorks), Saurabh Deep Singhla (CHRO, upGrad), John Sebastian Matthew (Talent DGM & Head – Talent Acquisition, V-Guard), Vijayakumar Dilli (VP, Talent and Culture, Bounteous x Accolite), and Sanjay Bhatnagar (VP, CHRO, SONY), who share their perspectives on the evolving landscape of employer branding.

As the dynamics of employer branding continue to evolve, organisations must proactively adapt to sustain growth and success. This includes embracing new technologies, understanding emerging workforce trends, and constantly refining their employer brand strategies on career platforms.

Happy Reading!

Write to us



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ALL THINGS TALENT

AUG 2024

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Printed at
Printline Enterprises, Delhi

Email
team@allthingstalent.org

Creative & Layout
Swati Wadera,
Atul Chauhan,
Satender Singh,
Janhwee Kala

Published & Owned by
Info Edge (India) Ltd.
B 8, B block, Block A,
Sector - 132, Noida,
Uttar Pradesh - 201301

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This issue contains 71 pages including cover

HEARD; Not HERD

This year has brought about a fundamental shift in employer branding, driven by global challenges and evolving market dynamics. Businesses have reinvented their methods to attract and retain talent, concentrating on enhancing employee experiences, embracing digital transformation, and employing novel recruitment techniques.



Niraj Seth
EVP, Naukri

Niraj Seth is a business leader with three decades of experience, including 14 years in CXO roles. He brings a wealth of experience working with companies like Naukri, Intuit, Cleartrip, Monster, and Bharat Petroleum.

In the timeless narrative of *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee, the protagonist Atticus Finch, a man of profound wisdom and integrity, teaches his daughter Scout a lesson that resonates through generations: **"You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view...until you climb into his skin and walk around in it."** This powerful statement emphasises the essence of listening—not merely hearing words, but understanding and empathising with the speaker. This concept is not just pivotal in personal relationships but is also a cornerstone in the realm of employer branding.

As thought leaders in the ever-evolving corporate landscape, we must recognise (and attribute) that the ability to listen is an invaluable asset and unquestionably all-pervasive. **In an era where employees seek more than just paychecks, where they yearn for a sense of belonging, purpose, and respect, listening becomes the key to unlocking a thriving work culture.** It is through listening that employers can truly understand their workforce's needs, aspirations, and concerns, paving the way for a brand that resonates authentically and powerfully both within and outside the company.

Deloitte's 2024 Report concerning Millennials and Gen Z clearly states that young talent sticks to a place where they feel more valued and aligned. By embracing diverse perspectives and experiences, organisations foster an environment rich in creativity and understanding. This approach promotes inclusivity in decision-making, enhances problem-solving capabilities, and ensures that all employees feel valued for their unique contributions.

In this context, technology, too, plays a

comprehensive role in building a modern employer brand. Leveraging advanced tools for communication and collaboration can streamline processes, enhance engagement, and ensure that every voice is heard, regardless of geographic location. By integrating technology thoughtfully, employers can create a more connected and responsive culture.

For this edition of the magazine, the All Things Talent team spoke exclusively to 15 key leaders from various industries to understand how they are building culture, values, and employee satisfaction in their respective associations. Some of these leaders are championing DEI efforts in their industries, some are leading the 'happy employee cause' and some are pivotal in creating a safe working space for the workforce.

Flipkart's EVP ensured it engaged its women employees

Flipkart was one of the top-rated companies for this year's **AmbitionBox Employee Choice Awards** in the Internet/Product category. With close to 4 ratings in metrics like skill development, work-life balance, and security, brand showed the importance of maintaining a strong connection with its employees. **Flipkart's VP-HR, Dr Varadharaju Janardhanan speaks about showcasing their brand on platforms like Naukri and AmbitionBox.**

In its report for India's Best Places to Work-Retail, **Great Place to Work** highlights Flipkart's work to empower women in the workplace and how it **helped them better for their female attrition** rates. Their commitment to this cause is further strengthened by the bold and audacious program that aims to address women's attrition rates in the workforce. Every fortnight, the

stakeholders come together to review women employees' attrition data, identify challenges, and design interventions required to control/bring down female attrition.

Amazon Excelled its Employer Branding

Amazon excelled in its employer branding in the last few years. Its company culture was a much-talked-about affair on the employee review site AmbitionBox. It has been rated 4.2 by the women employees in culture and 4.1 by male employees. This rating speaks volumes about the efforts made by the product giant in its Indian workspace.

Genpact Worked on its Employees and Created an Employee-First Culture

Genpact is changing the narrative to produce happier employees and is striving to be an employee-first organisation. Its women's leadership and Pay-it-forward mentorship program have been the talk of the town. As **Ritu Bhatia, Global Hiring Leader** for Genpact mentions that in 2023, 87% of their female employees in India and 92% in the Philippines returned to work after their maternity leave. Its global workforce completed approximately 10 million training hours on Genome this year, consecutively for the fourth year.

Sony India Crossed the 90 Mark in the Employee Satisfaction Index

Consistent efforts in cultivating a culture resulted in Sony crossing the 90 mark on Employee Satisfaction Index. The **CHRO, Sanjay Bhatnagar** attributes this success to the introduction of policies like menstrual leave, hybrid work, and consistent policy efforts focused on its people.

Lenovo's Work for Humankind Captured the Gen-Z Pulse

With its Meet Your Digital Self project, Lenovo aims to address the challenges young people face when living different lives in the real world versus online. As company's **Global Employer Brand Manager, Mrinalini Nayak** points out that the experiment facilitated impactful, heartfelt conversations between the participants, their family members, and the avatars—conversations that might not have happened otherwise, in real life.

Diversity Hiring Saw a Jump of 30-35% in the Last 5 Years

While DEI continues to be one of the key discussions and decisions in the corporate world. Almost every organisation is actively pursuing various strategies to enhance women's representation in the workplace. As per this report by **NLB Services, DE&I hiring in India increased by over 25% between 2022 and 2023**, reflecting a strong commitment to diversity hiring among companies.

Godrej Leading with the Diversity Baton with its DEI Lab

While leading the Inclusivity and Diversity efforts at Godrej DEI Lab, **Parmesh Shahani** has achieved what most people have only dreamt of. It has become a safe space for the people from the community to work and showcase their talent. The company intends to have 5% more hire of its workforce from the LGBTQIA+

community for the upcoming Godrej Consumer Products factory in Tamil Nadu. It has employed 100+ LGBTQIA+ individuals across businesses at the Godrej Industries Group.

Thoughtworks is Creating its Blueprint for Reshaping the DEI Efforts

With initiatives like Interning with Pride and The Mitra Collective being led by ThoughtWorks LGBTQ+ employees, this company is changing the tech space to be more inclusive for a person from the community. This also includes covering same-sex partners in the medical coverage, offering inclusive parental policy.

The Importance of Employee Feedback

And while we speak of the importance of the culture, employee feedback holds equal importance. **In one of the polls All Things Talent did on the Naukri App, 42% of job seekers mentioned that they will always ask for feedback from current or former employees before accepting a job offer.**

Prospective employees place significant value on the experiences and opinions of those already within the company. Positive feedback can serve as a powerful endorsement, enhancing the company's reputation and attractiveness to top talent.

WNS' Open Door Policy Helping Gen Z Associate with Work

With 46% women professionals, 24%

women leaders, and 44% women board members, WNS Global boasts of its open door policy where people have a direct voice in the matters of the organisation. **SVP, Adil Nargolwala** mentions that each of their 60,000+ employees is involved in their daily decision-making and their feedback forms the bedrock of their mission.

The Naukri Impact

In today's competitive job market, attracting top talent is a significant challenge. As **Saurabh Singha, CHRO for upGrad**, notes, "Top talent is often passive rather than active job hunting. Attracting such rare talent requires effective employer branding." He highlighted how platforms like Naukri and AmbitionBox have been instrumental in acquiring great talent while showcasing their brand. This sentiment is also echoed by **Flipkart's VP of HR, Dr Varadharaju Janardhanan**, who also recognises the importance of strategic employer branding in attracting exceptional candidates.

In this latest edition of the magazine that you're holding, we delve into the transformative power of listening within the framework of employer branding. You will find conversations with hiring connoisseurs, interesting anecdotes, and special insights into the nitty-gritty of employer branding. Just as Atticus Finch's empathy and understanding left an indelible mark on Scout and the readers of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, so too can a commitment to listening leave a lasting impact on your brand.





Interview

Amazon's Winning Formula: Volunteering, Inclusivity, and Employee Development at the Core

— Akanksha Thapliyal

In the rapidly evolving world of business, Amazon stands out not just for its innovation and customer-centric approach but also for its commitment to employee development. At the heart of this commitment lies a comprehensive suite of programs designed to nurture talent, foster continuous learning, and support career growth. From leadership development initiatives to mentorship programs and specialised training, Amazon invests heavily in the growth and well-being of its employees.

Rajeev Sharma, Amazon's Director Talent Acquisition, shared insights into the company's unique approach to employee development with All Things Talent. Rajeev highlighted successful programs such as Pinnacle, Catapult, and the Amazon Mentoring Program. He also explained how these initiatives empower employees to reach their full potential and contribute significantly to Amazon's success.

Rajeev Sharma

Director Talent Acquisition, Amazon

Rajeev is an HR professional with over 22 years of experience in strategic HR leadership roles across APAC. He leads a team managing Amazon's global recruitment cycle, with expertise in crafting recruitment strategies, partnering with C-level executives, and leading diverse teams. Rajeev holds a Master's in Computer Application and certification in Transformational Leadership and Employment Law from XLRI. He has worked with Barclays, BNY Mellon, Bank of America, and is currently the Director of Talent Acquisition at Amazon, focusing on HR leadership.

Q/ How do Amazon's initiatives such as Global Month of Volunteering contribute to fostering stronger community ties within the organisation?

- Global Month of Volunteering (GMV) is a cornerstone of our community impact initiatives demonstrating our commitment to being responsible corporate citizens. Volunteering at Amazon goes beyond the periphery of a typical job and encourages employees to contribute meaningfully to causes they care about. This fosters personal growth and brings a sense of pride in being associated with a company that values social responsibility. Such activities also help promote team building that creates a ripple effect ensuring that we move towards inclusive, equitable, and sustainable workplaces and society in India. While GMV lasts

for a month, its impact transcends beyond boundaries with a long-lasting effect that instills a sense of fulfilment beyond daily life. This year, we saw a record participation of over 70K Amazon Employees including corporate employees and associates in India, an increase of 100% YoY, underlining the company's deep commitment to create impact and engage with the communities.

- The Global Month of Volunteering (GMV) launched in 2022 is an annual global event and not just restricted to India where Amazon's leaders, employees, partners, and even some customers worldwide come together to support causes that can make a difference. Every year GMV sees increased participation. It is an opportunity to help build stronger and cohesive communities, foster unity, expand social networks, and address community needs through various in-office, outside-office, and virtual volunteering activities. These experiences are instrumental in promoting personal and professional growth for employees while making a significant difference in the communities we serve. Through volunteering, employees contribute their time and skill sets to various engagement activities addressing key focus areas like women empowerment, sustainability, food security, and education.
- This year, we mobilised our volunteering network through Tiny Treats, Transform a School, Cricket match with the visually impaired to promote inclusivity, volunteering activity with people with disabilities (PwDs) at the Amazon-supported Global Resource Centre that has been instrumental in skilling

and providing dignified jobs to 6000 PwDs. Our top leadership is deeply engaged in our volunteering initiatives, setting an example that volunteering is not an activity for us but is deeply embedded in our culture. With a mission to educate, inspire, and connect, Amazon.in has created over 400 volunteering opportunities across India, partnering with more than 55 non-profit organisations who enable and guide Amazonians engage in activities in a more meaningful way.

Now, employees look forward to GMV every year.

Q/ Amazon consistently receives high ratings, beyond 4 in areas such as company culture, compensation, and work-life balance on employee feedback platforms like AmbitionBox. You've also been one of the top-rated companies for women as well. What specific practices or policies does Amazon employ that gets it consistent positive feedback from its employees?

At Amazon, we strive to build a workplace for our Amazonians that helps them invent on behalf of our customers. We believe in hiring and developing the best builders and innovators from all backgrounds. This helps ensure they are drawn to our mission, culture, and leaders. Our sixteen **Leadership Principles** (LPs) form the backbone and are the living embodiment of our culture, regardless of job role or geographic location. We are guided by the LPs every day, whether we're discussing ideas for new projects or deciding on the best way to solve a problem. It's just one of the things that makes Amazon peculiar.

We provide ways of working that align with our employees' life stages and personal priorities. Whether our employees are starting their careers, moving over from, or returning to work, we understand work is an important and necessary part of their lives. For us, what matters the most is their time, with their family, and friends. Our motto is 'working hard, making history, while having fun'. We work relentlessly to define products and programs that enable us to objectively identify top talent and ensure that we provide crucible experiences to our talent for them to be the best version of themselves. We double down on things that matter most to our employees and their communities: mental health and well-being, diversity, equity, inclusion, and upskilling.

Besides competitive compensation and benefits including health care coverage, holistic wellness support, family building etc., Amazon invests heavily in career development and training programs of its employees. We provide different offerings to cater to the needs of our diverse workforce. For example, Amazon invests in developing women professionals through leadership development programs, and mentorship programs to help them navigate their careers.

- **Pinnacle** is a leadership development program for high-performing women at Amazon aimed at building an internal pipeline of diversity leadership for the future.
- **Catapult** was launched in partnership with Harvard Business Publishing Corporate Learning.
- **Amazon Catalyst Program** enables Amazon women leaders to leverage the knowledge, experience, learnings and guidance of senior Amazon leaders via 1:1

mentoring to accelerate their growth and professional development.

- **Power of 10** is a mentorship program where women group in batches of 10 attend a session that is facilitated by senior mentors (assigned based on their expertise and interest in the selected topics). Once women graduate from this program, in the next phase of 'Power of 10', the mentees become mentors so women learn and pay it forward.
- **ParentEx** program to enhance the experience of new parents. For new or working mothers, Amazon actively promotes work-life harmony via its various inclusive policies and programs like flexible work schedules, reduced work hours, 26 weeks of maternity leave, and facilities like a mother's room in our offices.

Our commitment to equality stems across all communities of talent including focused efforts around women, LGBTQIA+, military veterans, and people with disabilities, amongst others. Amazon has created opportunities throughout its network, empowered individuals with financial independence, and helped them realise their true potential. At Amazon, we have affinity groups – Glamazon (LGBTQIA+), Warriors at Amazon (Military veterans), Women at Amazon, Women in Engineering, and Amazon People with Disabilities. These affinity groups are essentially employee resource and support group communities that have helped many employees share experiences, offer support, and organise events through healthy discussions and forums.

We use Amazon Connections, an innovative program that helps

employees provide continuous feedback confidentially. By asking employees quick questions daily, Connections leverages real-time information to learn more about their experiences and introduce positive changes. We develop a variety of engagement, feedback, and remediation mechanisms that help us continually improve our work experience basis the inputs we receive via Connections. Our goal is to help develop leaders who earn trust, remove barriers to excellence, and make Amazon an inspiring place of work.

Since 2020, Amazon has been collaborating with SignAble to deploy a virtual and interactive interpreter platform that has enabled real-time communication between DHH (Deaf and Hard of Hearing) associates and others and have primarily launched it in our fulfillment centers for associates from DHH and SHI talent pool in their fulfillment centers. This tool has resulted in higher collaboration and strengthened morale. By partnering with 'SignAble', Amazon India has enhanced communication for Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHH) associates, enabling seamless real-time troubleshooting and effective interaction.



Q/ How have initiatives like SignAble and the provision of Mental Health Support for the children of Amazon employees impacted the overall well-being and satisfaction of Amazon's workforce?

At Amazon, we always work backward from the employee base and come up with policies and processes that find favor with them and align with the wellness roadmap of the organisation. This is reflected in the deployment of SignAble which helped in several touchpoints with DHH associates in our fulfilment centres. For example, standups, training, and other operational updates in our fulfilment centers are done using SignAble benefitting DHH associates. This has also enabled us to have coaching conversations or discussions on support/help for the associate without worrying about the knowledge of sign-language or the presence of an interpreter. Consistent use of this tool has also enabled managers and leaders to learn sign language beyond basic words which brings higher commitment from the associate groups, as they see their leadership making efforts to communicate with them.

Our **Pediatric Care Program** provides Amazon corporate employees with free mental health support for their children. It's counselling and coaching program is designed to help Amazon families navigate challenging times. The service builds on our existing mental health benefits and is delivered in partnership with our Employee Assistance Program (EAP) partner. This specialised support addresses a wide range of behavioural health needs, including Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), anxiety, depression, trauma, and more.

Peer-Reviewed Hires: Amazon's Innovative Hiring Policy

Amazon has a peculiar culture and we maintain a high bar when interviewing and follow a comprehensive interview process where the candidate is evaluated not just by their future peers, but also by other stakeholders of the

role. Our interviewer panel is diverse, focuses on data-driven decision-making, and is equipped with tools like bias buster mechanisms, Bar Raiser, who works as an objective third party in the interview loop to ensure a hire has long-term potential at Amazon with 3 primary responsibilities - Interview, drive decisions, teach and mentor.

Based on the role and level, we first deploy assessments to test functional/technical skills for the role, before inviting the candidate to an on-site interview process. Our interviews evaluate the candidate for technical competence and assess their experience based on Amazon's leadership principles. The process is intentionally designed to ensure we hire candidates who would thrive at Amazon and are better than 50% of the incumbents in the role and level. This thorough hiring process ensures that we minimise any process bias and have a well-rounded approach to hiring. We work relentlessly to provide a frustration-free experience for our candidates and aid them with resources to prepare for the interview process, all made available under one tool.

Candidate feedback is equally important for us. We make continuous improvements to enhance our hiring practices. For example: how we prepare candidates, continuous touch points with the candidates through and timelines to provide a best-in-class candidate experience.

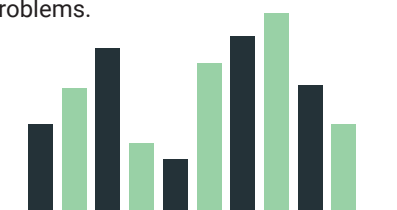
Q/ What initiatives have been launched to provide skills training to employees? What insights into employee needs drive the development of L&D programs?

Nurturing talent and fostering skill development is at the core of Amazon values. We believe that our employees

are our most valuable assets, and we are dedicated to provide them with the resources and opportunities they need to thrive and grow in their careers. We focus on the importance of learning through **"Learn and Be Curious"** leadership principle. We ensure that candidates and employees spend time in learning on the job and asking questions to help their development.

Amazon offers a wide bouquet of training opportunities ranging from classroom leader led sessions to self-service trainings where employees can self-enroll and learn basis their individual career aspirations and learning needs. Being a transparent organisation, we believe that employees can choose their own career path. Amazon's slate of programs and opportunities meets the changing needs of employees while propelling their career growth. Through the entire employee life cycle, we ensure they have access to resources to aid their training and development. We have various e-learning modules available for employees across levels, about their job roles, which they can go through at their convenience in a self-paced manner.

We offer various avenues for growth and development with programs like **Atlas** which provides opportunities for employees to transition from non-tech to tech roles. **Machine Learning University** provides our tech employees with opportunities to learn about and apply machine learning concepts. **ML Gurukul** aims to educate SDEs on fundamental ML concepts and techniques to enable them to frame ML problems and identify appropriate modeling techniques to solve business problems.



Some of the other programs we offer are:



Amazon Mentoring Program (AMP):

AMP is available to every Amazon employee and connects prospective mentees to mentors, provides structure to their relationships, creates opportunities for skill building, and helps people grow their network inside Amazon.

Amazon Career Rotation:

The Career Rotation Program is aimed at upskilling, developing, and providing career support to all Amazon India Talent Acquisition employees who aspire to learn new skills or build competencies for a new role. In this program, employees can take temporary assignment(s) to learn the role across teams to become proficient in the competencies and skills in a hands-on manner. It equips participants to own their development and explore challenging assignments beyond their work.



Dynamic Leadership Series:

This initiative aims to elevate the skills of all people managers within the Amazon India Talent Acquisition team so that they can set up teams, and as a result, themselves, for success.



Interview

Girls Belong in Tech: Mrinalini Nayak on Lenovo Driving Change through the Spirit of Innovation

Biswajit Bhattacharya

Whether it's their cutting-edge 'Meet Your Digital Self' project fresh out of the lab, illuminating the transformative role of advanced AI and technology in addressing the global youth mental health crisis, or their initiative empowering high school students to lead in 'Girls Belong in Tech', Mrinalini Nayak articulates with sparkling alacrity about Lenovo's expansive array of pioneering initiatives in harnessing talent. As the Global Employer Brand Manager, she unsheaths powerful words about the company's culture, values, diversity objectives, and more, illustrating how Lenovo occupies a pivotal nexus of innovation and development.

Mrinalini Nayak

Global Employer Brand Manager, Lenevo

Mrinalini Nayak is the Global Employer Brand Manager at Lenovo, bringing over 17 years of expertise in recruitment marketing and digital media. Known for launching, growing, and shaping talent trends while driving profitable market leadership through innovative initiatives, Mrinalini integrates Lenovo's EVP and cultural values into business objectives, focusing on operational efficiency and championing DE&I. Her passion lies in attracting top talent to build high-performing teams that achieve exceptional results.

Q/ Tell us about your initiative **Girls Belong in Tech. How does it differ from any other Women in STEM initiative?**

'Girls Belong in Tech' was designed four years ago by a **high school intern** working at Lenovo. The program has grown annually garnering positive feedback from students and teachers.

Lenovo is staunchly committed to advancing gender equality across all fronts—in the workplace, marketplace and community. Recognising our pivotal role in promoting women in STEM, Lenovo stands at the forefront of initiatives aimed at empowering women in technology.

The roots of gender bias in STEM are deeply entrenched, often taking root in early education. According to UNICEF's report on Mapping Gender Equality in STEM from School to Work, evidence of gender bias in STEM emerges as early as primary school. While a girl's

proficiency in STEM can initially be influenced by factors such as her place of birth and family's socioeconomic status, prevalent barriers and biases persist even in the most developed countries, affecting girls from higher socioeconomic backgrounds.

At our Morrisville, North Carolina (NC) headquarters, the Girls Belong in Tech initiative takes on even greater significance, in partnership with education nonprofit NAF, exemplifying our collective commitment to nurturing the next generation of female tech leaders, equipping them with the skills, confidence and opportunities to thrive in the tech industry. Over 250 students from across NC participated in the half-day event.

The event showcased an array of activities designed to inspire, educate and motivate young women in tech. From dynamic networking sessions to immersive coding workshops and insightful panel discussions, every aspect of the event was meticulously crafted to break down barriers and foster a culture of inclusivity and empowerment.

Q/ **Lenovo's motto is 'We are Lenovo'. How is it absorbed in the company's culture, values and practices here in India?**



WE ARE LENOVO

**WE DO WHAT WE SAY,
WE OWN WHAT WE DO,
WE WOW OUR CUSTOMERS.**

This succinctly captures the essence of our culture and our pledge as employees and as a company.

Lenovo's culture is distinguished by its unwavering commitment to diversity, innovation, customer satisfaction, teamwork, adaptability, excellence, social responsibility and the seamless integration of global and local business practices. This unique blend helps Lenovo maintain its position as a leading global technology company. At Lenovo, we champion cross-cultural collaboration and understanding, recognising the value of diverse cultural perspectives in driving innovation and growth.

With D&I being a cornerstone of our teamwork, alongside integrity and trust as fundamental cultural values, we embrace the power of global inclusivity and respect for all individuals and viewpoints.

At the same time, Lenovo is committed to sustainable practices and mitigating its environmental impact through various initiatives and policies while, actively engaging with communities through philanthropy and volunteerism, aiming to make a positive social impact.

Lenovo places a high emphasis on innovation, continuously investing in research and development to stay ahead in the technology sector. The entrepreneurship spirit is enriching through various programs and opportunities for employees to contribute new ideas.

The spirit of collaboration and teamwork are fundamental to Lenovo's operations where all employees are encouraged to synergise across functions and geographies to achieve common goals while being agile and adaptable to changes.

Q/ **Could you highlight a project or initiative at Lenovo that you find particularly noteworthy**

and are proud of?

Lenovo recently released the newest iteration of its Work For Humankind project, titled **'Meet Your Digital Self'**. The project highlights the role that smarter technology and AI can play in helping to advance change and support mental health professionals in addressing the global youth mental health crisis. This work aims to address the challenges young people face when living different lives in the real world versus online, as two-thirds (67%) of Gen Z feel a disconnect between their online and offline selves, fueling feelings of loneliness and anxiety. While almost half (49%) of Gen Zs say it's easier to express themselves online than offline, 60% wish they could have difficult conversations with family and loved ones in real life.

In this first-of-its-kind social experiment, Lenovo pioneered the use of AI made possible by its broad portfolio of technology, from mobile phones and PCs to infrastructure, software, services, solutions, and cloud. The combined technology brought to life the entire online personas of two Gen Z project participants as lifelike avatars capable of having unscripted, natural conversations.

The experiment facilitated impactful, heartfelt conversations between the participants, their family members, and the avatars—conversations that might not have happened otherwise, in real life. The family members either didn't know about their Gen Z participant's online world or didn't understand and accept it: be it their career choices or gender identity. By asking the digital avatars questions and having real-time conversations, each family member gained invaluable insights into their Gen Z loved one's true self as expressed in the online world and was able to better understand and reconnect in real life.

The project is a pioneering proof of concept demonstrating the positive impact technology can have in advancing positive change in the youth mental health epidemic, which has been worsened by their struggle to balance two distinct online and offline identities.

Q/ How does Lenovo India prioritise work-life balance for its employees and ensure their sustained commitment to their roles?

Lenovo is dedicated to cultivating a work environment that supports work-life balance through flexible policies, comprehensive benefits, and uplifting corporate ethos. Employee feedback is predominantly positive, although akin to any large organisation, there are areas for improvement we actively seek to address.

There are flexible work arrangements, including remote work options, flexible hours, and compressed work weeks. This adaptability allows employees to harmonise their personal and professional lives. In terms of employee benefit there is a spectrum of support employees are entitled to vis-à-vis their well-being, such as:



Wellness Programs



Comprehensive Health Insurance



Parental Leaves



Paid Time Off and Holidays

Lenovo encourages a positive work culture that emphasises teamwork, innovation and inclusivity. Our global presence encourages cultural diversity and cross-cultural collaboration, which enriches the work environment.

The company invests in employee development through various training programs, mentorship opportunities and career advancement initiatives. The emphasis on personal growth helps employees achieve a fulfilling career without compromising their personal lives.

Employee testimonials and feedback underscore Lenovo's commitment to its workforce, highlighting efforts to establish a balanced work environment. We regularly seek input through surveys and town hall gatherings to address concerns and refine workplace policies.

Leveraging its technological prowess, Lenovo ensures that employees have access to state-of-the-art tools and resources that boost productivity and facilitate a flexible work approach, be it office or at home.

Furthermore, we encourage employees to engage in community service and social responsibility projects. Lenovo supports volunteer efforts and provides opportunities for employees to participate in philanthropic pursuits, promoting a sense of purpose and balance.

Q/ In terms of career development opportunities, how does Lenovo empower its employees to grow and advance within the organisation? Can you share insights into training programs, mentorship initiatives or career pathing opportunities available to employees?

At Lenovo, we have a focused learning program for women:

The **Women's Leadership Development Program (WLDP)** is a 10-month course that prepares (our) high-potential women for senior leadership roles within the company. The program aims to accelerate the development of Lenovo's women leaders, prepare women to assume significant leadership roles and provide participants with an extended leadership experience to accelerate individual, team and business outcomes.

EDGE (Educate/Grow/Develop/Excel) for individual contributors and early managers. In 2021, an analysis of our DEI progress data revealed an immense turnover rate of women employees with around 5-8 years of experience due to numerous personal and professional reasons. The program was designed to accelerate the career growth of Hi-Po Women at individual contributors and manager levels, enabling them to demonstrate readiness for broader managerial/leadership roles. The six-month-long learning journey includes workshops, simulations and action learning projects along with networking opportunities across teams to forge effective alliances. All workshops/sessions are aligned with Lenovo's strategic direction and cultural values.

The **Catalyst Mentoring Program** is a key initiative at Lenovo that aims to support the development and growth of female employees. The program pairs mentees with experienced mentors who can provide guidance, support and advice on career development. The program is designed to provide structured support and mentorship to help mentees achieve their career goals.

We also celebrate special initiatives

like a recent one we did for International Women's Day. In this unique capability-building initiative women employees/spouses were asked to share their learning goals. We selected 5 women on their learning journeys, funding their learning interests. This applied to vocational and professional courses/certifications and was limited to a set funding cap per person.

Q/ Feedback mechanisms are essential for strengthening open communication and continuous improvement. How does Lenovo solicit feedback from employees, and how is this feedback utilised to enhance the employee experience? Are there formal channels for feedback collection and action planning?

Lenovo's commitment to listening to its employees and fostering a supportive work environment is evident in several key initiatives and practices:

Continuous improvement of the employee experience through feedback. We highly value what our employees share as it helps us to build on our strengths and take proactive measures against areas that need attention, thereby ensuring we evolve as an organisation.

Through our Annual survey called '**Lenovo Listens**' we regularly conduct employee surveys to gather feedback on various aspects of the workplace, including job satisfaction, work-life balance, and overall company culture. These insights help us identify areas for improvement. Along with that, regular town hall meetings allow employees to voice their concerns and ask questions directly to senior leadership, promoting transparency and open communication.

Apart from this, Lenovo supports

various Employee Resource Groups (ERGs), which provide a platform for employees to share their experiences, advocate for their needs, and contribute to a more inclusive workplace. Feedback gathered from these groups informs the development and implementation of action plans to address identified issues effectively. Lenovo's structured approach to feedback collection and action planning corroborates that employee voices are heard and valued. This ongoing process ensures that the company adapts to evolving employee needs and market conditions.

Q/ How does Lenovo strategically align its EVP with current employee expectations and emerging market trends to ensure it remains compelling and competitive in attracting and retaining top talent?

As a part of driving Lenovo's EVP strategy, our mission lies in utilising and engaging multiple digital platforms and forms of media, internally and externally to engage internal employees and potential candidates, provide the right content to convert the interest into applications with a result of having the top talent emotionally engaged, ready to innovative and inspired to create.

The war for talent has opened a new digital battlefield. Lenovo sees this as a great opportunity to leverage our brand across the digital landscape.

The Lenovo Employer Brand Team is dedicated to promoting and enhancing the reputation of Lenovo as an employer of choice. We strive to embody Lenovo's EVP pillars of global/local, respect/trust, growth and transformation, and rewarding experiences in all of our initiatives.

Our mission is to attract and retain top

talent by creating and executing innovative employer branding strategies that showcase Lenovo's unique culture, values and opportunities. We are committed to building strong partnerships with our internal stakeholders and collaborating with external partners to amplify Lenovo's brand globally. Together, we aim to create an inspiring and engaging

candidate experience inspiring more people to join us as we create smarter technology for all.

Employee Value Proposition (EVP) and Employer Branding (EB) are to the human resources department what marketing is to the organisation. Through our EB efforts, we position ourselves against our competitors in

the marketplace by communicating the salient features of our EVP offering to prospective candidates. Our goal is to streamline our talent acquisition process, ameliorate the quality of hires, reduce costs by finding candidates directly (and vice versa), communicate our culture, values and EVP and offer a compelling reason for top talent to choose us as their employer of choice.



Parmesh Shahani's Blueprint for Corporate Inclusivity at Godrej DEi Lab

Parmesh Shahani is the maverick behind India's LGBTQ+ inclusion revolution and the head of Godrej DEi Lab. A successful author and dynamic speaker, Shahani drives inclusivity through anti-discrimination policies, gender-neutral washrooms, and queer-affirmative hiring. His efforts ensure Pride is a year-round commitment to safe spaces for LGBTQ+ employees. In this interaction, he shared insights into these transformative initiatives and why you should 'bring love to work'. A true visionary, his contributions span from academia to activism, making him a vibrant force in shaping a more inclusive world.

Parmesh Shahani

Head of Godrej DEi Lab
at Godrej Industries

Parmesh Shahani is the head of the Godrej DEi Lab at Godrej Industries, empowering inclusive ecosystems within and beyond the Godrej group. From 2011 to 2021, he led the Godrej India Culture Lab, exploring India's evolving society. Shahani authored 'Gay Bombay' and the award-winning 'Queeristan', lauded for its insights on LGBTQ+ inclusion in the workplace. He holds an MS in Comparative Media Studies from MIT and is a TED Senior Fellow, Yale World Fellow, and World Economic Forum Young Global Leader.

Q/ Many companies strive to create queer-friendly workspaces, yet during Pride Month, there seems to be a surge in performative allyship. Do you believe that inclusivity has become a competitive endeavour? How does Godrej DEi Lab maintain genuine inclusivity beyond token gestures?

There is a valid point about the rise of performative allyship during Pride Month, and it resonates at a workplace like ours, where walking the talk and being accountable are core values. We measure our success through an inclusion scorecard, employee feedback, and a continuous improvement process built on data and open dialogue. At Godrej DEi Lab, we strive to deepen and amplify the Godrej Industries Group's efforts to build a culture of genuine inclusivity. We do not believe that symbols and flashy campaigns are the beginning and end of Pride; instead, we focus on creating a safe space where LGBTQ+ employees can be their authentic selves and thrive. Our Pride celebrations build on these efforts, integrating everything we have achieved through policy, health benefits, communications, and culture to say: whoever you are, you are safe here, and you are welcome.

Q/ What specific policies have Godrej implemented to foster a more inclusive workplace? Additionally, what survey methods or research does Godrej DEi Lab utilise to identify and implement effective measures?

At Godrej, we've implemented several policies to foster a more inclusive workplace. These include comprehensive anti-discrimination policies that specifically protect LGBTQIA+ employees:

- Ensuring access to gender-neutral washrooms.
- Offering parental leave policies that are inclusive of same-sex couples.
- Upgrading our medical and family care benefits to be as inclusive as possible.

So if you're from a non-traditional family, if you're in a queer partnership, if you need gender-affirming medical care – we'll have your back just as we do for your straight colleague.

Every business in the group is serious about hiring from historically excluded groups. We've pledged to **hire 5% of our workforce from the LGBTQIA+ community** for the upcoming Godrej Consumer Products factory in Tamil Nadu. This is in addition to the **100+ LGBTQIA+ individuals already working across businesses at the Godrej Industries Group**. Businesses provide internships for LGBTQIA+ individuals, housing assistance, and healthcare support. We're continuously building on these efforts to ensure ongoing progress.

Q/ Despite the celebration of Pride Month and the implementation of inclusive policies, acceptance of queerness is often viewed through a heteronormative lens. What measures does Godrej DEi Lab take to educate new employees about inclusivity during onboarding?

The DEI Lab works with the group at large on building a more inclusive culture, and that begins even before an employee comes on board – we're so happy that some of our businesses have been doing queer-affirmative hiring. The group's approach goes beyond basic anti-discrimination

training. Our onboarding modules delve into LGBTQIA+ identities, history, challenges, and the importance of allyship. Some of our businesses find that mentoring is the best way to help new employees from historically excluded groups; a **Queers & Allies ERG**, set up a couple of years ago, is a thriving network of support and allyship. And of the things I've noticed over the last few months is how our Lab has functioned as a sort of lighthouse for our queer employees, signalling that our workplace is a safe space and that you can find friendship, support and inclusion here simply by coming up to us and saying hello.

Q/ Sensitising employees about LGBTQIA+ issues is crucial for fostering an inclusive environment. What strategies and training programmes does Godrej DEi Lab employ to ensure that all employees are aware and supportive of these issues?

Sensitisation is not just about ticking boxes or hosting a one-off workshop. It's about creating a culture shift, and that takes consistent effort. At Godrej DEi Lab, we believe in what I call **'cultural acupuncture'** – moving the psychological energy of our organisation towards building a healthier, more inclusive world. We support every business in finding the approach to allyship that works best for them. This could mean inclusivity training programmes, communications, and building products that serve queer people. One of our businesses, Godrej Properties, has a spectacular **'Queering Workspaces'** initiative in partnership with Gaysi Family, a powerful tool that highlights the stories of queer professionals, discussing everything from policies to personal experiences.

Senior leadership is actively involved in

advancing inclusion. The group Diversity Council, comprising select leaders from across the group, meets quarterly to track progress and share best practices. Senior leaders' annual goals include weighted goals for diversity, equity and inclusion. This top-down approach sends a clear message that LGBTQIA+ inclusion is a priority at all levels.

Q/ Queer empowerment must be intersectional to be truly effective. What steps does Godrej DEi Lab take to promote leadership diversity among marginalised communities?

The group's focus cohorts include women, LGBTQIA+ people, and people with disabilities. While we currently closely track and study career growth and leadership for women, the pool of leaders who are queer or live with disabilities remains small. We believe that working to increase representation and creating a culture in which everyone can thrive is how we'll arrive at a more diverse leadership. This is a work in progress for us.

Q/ Could you share insights about the Pride celebrations event on 21st June and how it broadens Godrej's vision for diversity and inclusion?

This Pride celebration on June 21st wasn't just another corporate event – it was a powerful statement of who we are and what we stand for at Godrej. Nisaba Godrej, Executive Chairperson, Godrej Consumer Products Limited, led the Pride March, along with senior leaders and MDs from almost all our businesses. When your senior leadership is literally walking the talk, you know it's more than just lip service. But what really excited me was that after the march, we kept the spotlight

on our wonderful queer employees. Four queer *Godrejites*, who are also artists, led a discussion about owning their narratives. As a queer person myself, I can't tell you how much it means to see my colleagues feel safe and empowered enough to share their stories not just within the firm, but with the public. It did feel like the celebration was a culmination of all those efforts we've made around the year.

This Pride celebration broadened our vision by showing that diversity and inclusion aren't just HR policies – they're lived experiences. We're creating a space where people can bring their whole selves to work, where different perspectives are not just accepted but celebrated. And we're doing this not just within our company, but reaching out to the wider community too.

Q/ Reflecting on your career, what has been the most rewarding aspect of your role as the Head of Godrej DEi Lab?

When I started my corporate career, I was one of only two out and proud employees. Fast forward to today, and we have over 100 LGBTQIA+ individuals working across various levels and departments at the Godrej Industries Group. That transformation? That's what gets me out of bed every morning. The most rewarding aspect of my role is seeing the real, tangible impact we're making in people's lives. It's not just about numbers or policies – though those are important too. It's about the stories of change and acceptance that I get to witness firsthand.

Another aspect that I find immensely fulfilling is the opportunity to drive change not just within Godrej, but in the broader corporate landscape. Through initiatives like our 'Manifesto for Trans Inclusion in the Workplace' or our collaboration with Pride Circle, we're

helping shape the conversation around LGBTQIA+ inclusion in India's corporate sector.

Above all, the most rewarding part is seeing the ripple effect of our work. When we create inclusive products and communications, when we hire openly LGBTQIA+ individuals, when we stand up for queer rights – we're not just changing our company culture. We're contributing to a broader societal shift towards acceptance and equality. Remember, **inclusion isn't a race, but a team sport**. And being able to lead and be part of this team at Godrej – that's incredibly rewarding. We're not just changing policies; we're changing lives. And in the process, we're doing better business too. Now that's what I call a win-win!

Q/ Godrej, a globally established company, has the resources to create an all-inclusive platform. What advice would you offer to smaller companies or start-ups aiming to establish queer affirmative environments?

Creating an inclusive environment doesn't require a massive budget. Smaller businesses and startups can start by establishing clear anti-discrimination policies and fostering a culture of respect for all employees. Partnering with LGBTQIA+ organisations or diversity consultants can be incredibly helpful, and there are many free online resources available as well. Most importantly, be sincere in your efforts. Employees can see through performative actions. Focus on creating a space where everyone feels valued and can contribute their unique talents and perspectives. That's the foundation of a truly inclusive and thriving workplace.

Q/ Could you take us through

your journey as an author? How does your experience as a writer influence your approach as a leader, or is it the other way around?

My journey as an author began during my time at MIT, where I actively worked to amplify marginalised voices, organising events like a South Asian LGBT film festival. Writing *Gay Bombay* and *Queeristan* allowed me to delve into LGBTQ+ issues in India, shaping my understanding of diversity and inclusion. This experience significantly influences my leadership at Godrej Industries, where I lead initiatives

promoting inclusivity. I see my roles as a writer and a leader as deeply interconnected, each reinforcing my commitment to driving societal change and creating an inclusive environment.

Q/ In your opinion, what are the most impactful ways an individual can be an effective LGBTQ+ ally?

Dive deep! Learn about LGBTQIA+ identities, the history of the movement, and the ongoing struggles. Read books by LGBTQIA+ authors, listen to their podcasts, and follow them on social media. Don't treat it as a one-time thing

– stay curious and keep learning. Who knows – you might make some queer friends along the way if you haven't already. Being an ally is about creating a safe space. Let LGBTQIA+ folks around you know you're someone they can trust. When you hear homophobic, biphobic, or transphobic comments, speak up. Correct them respectfully, and explain why those remarks are hurtful. And as my boss Nisa likes to say, "Bring love to work", let those around you be themselves without judgement, without assumption, and without hindrance. Simple, no?





Interview

Ritu Bhatia on Genpact's Employee First Culture and Creating a World that Works Better for People

— Akanksha Thapliyal

While success doesn't always equate to happiness, happy employees consistently outperform their unhappy peers. This 2019 Research by Oxford University's Said Business School has found that happiness and productivity are related. It says that **happy employees are 13% more productive at work**. The researchers found that happy workers do not work more hours than their discontented colleagues – they are simply more productive during their time at work.

Genpact takes huge pride in creating a happy place for its employees. Its employee-first approach focuses on how people work every day, how they are treated, and how they are heard and engaged in the business. In this insightful conversation with Ritu Bhatia, Global Hiring Leader, Genpact, we explore why fostering a joyful workplace is essential and how employee happiness can drive business success.

Ritu Bhatia

Global Hiring Leader,
Genpact

Ritu Bhatia is an experienced Human Resource professional with over 2 decades of experience in the Information Technology and Services Industry (ITES). She has extensive breadth and depth in executive search, recruitment, policies, strategic HR partnerships, and implementing enterprise-level HR transformation projects. She has a proven record of working in a global environment and building strong teams with a core focus on providing strategic partnerships to stakeholders.

Q/ What are the key programs or platforms utilised to facilitate continuous learning and development among employees?

As we progress as an AI-first company, learning the agility of our talent is one of the most vital attributes. We continue to invest in and integrate AI to reskill our employees, help them harness their curiosity, build their careers, and drive value for our clients.

We use our AI-assisted scalable learning platform, Genome to upskill our employees at scale. It offers over 90 skills, with more than 600 subject matter experts curating relevant content and courses in line with evolving industry trends. To scale it further, we also rolled out a generative AI-powered bot, AI Guru, as a digital twin of all the master gurus collectively, available around the clock as a learning assistant, providing personalised learning recommendations and

nano-learning bytes in the flow of work.

- In 2023, nearly 55,000 people were actively learning on Genome each month, spending an average of 7 to 8 hours.
- Our global workforce completed approximately 10 million training hours on Genome this year, consecutively for the fourth year.
- Our internal Generative AI Playground with over 60,000 users. Here, our employees can test and learn how generative AI can be utilised to solve client problems and unlock value.

We are also collaborating with best-of-breed external partners for deep skilling in advanced digital and tech skills to complement the contextualised learning delivered by in-house experts.

Q/ We're seeing a trend of GenZ and Millennial talent prioritising gender diversity at workplace a lot more. What are some of Genpact's initiatives in this direction and any strategic goals moving forward?

Driving diversity has always been a big priority for us. At Genpact, we recognise the strong connection between diversity, inclusion, and innovation. We firmly believe in the notion that different backgrounds and diverse perspectives lead to breakthroughs.

Our focus on gender diversity has led to women comprising 42 percent of our full-time employees globally and 50% of our board. But for us, a very important milestone would be getting to a 50/50 gender split, across all levels of the organisation.

We aim to create a supportive

ecosystem for women in India and the Philippines (operating centers with a 24x7 working environment) returning to work from maternity leave, for which we created the Returning Moms Program.

In 2023, 87% of women in India and 92% in the Philippines returned to roles at Genpact after their maternity leave.

Additionally, we've set targets for gender diversity in executive hiring and are working to increase female representation at the hiring funnel stage. We aim to evaluate at least 50% women candidates and are strengthening the sourcing of diverse talent through various initiatives, including partnering with vendors specialising in hiring diverse candidates.

Program created in collaboration with Korn Ferry to build a pipeline of future women leaders; a cross-company mentorship program in association with the 30% Club; a Women in Genpact network to serve as an employee resource group; and a Pay-it-Forward initiative to encourage leaders to sponsor women protégés and provide support during their professional journey.



Q/ Why do employees love working at Genpact? In your opinion, what are the key attributes that make Genpact a

great employer? Also, share how Genpact ensures employee satisfaction.

With the accelerated pace of change, the way we work, and employee expectations continue to evolve. But what remains a key differentiator for businesses, which will make them emerge as best employers, is the pivot towards an employee-first culture that focuses on how people work every day, how they are treated, and how they are heard and engaged in the business.

In my view, there are 4 core fundamentals why people go to work and choose to stay there – Great company, Great leaders, Great rewards, and Great career. This essentially means that the way people perceive their employers' culture, leaders & leadership style, rewards and career growth opportunity is mission-critical in

driving employee satisfaction and retention.

Genpact's purpose is designed to be simple – the relentless pursuit of a world that works better for people and translates wonderfully into local geographies and communities we support. We're also big believers in leading with empathy, focusing on employee health and wellness, and providing competitive compensation and recognition programs, as well as meaningful opportunities for learning and development to drive superior employee engagement and keep our people happy and encouraged. We believe the opportunity to learn new skills and solutions and work on digital, generative AI, and other new technologies in many of our client engagements is a big talent attractor and is also driving retention for us.

Q/ Could you provide insights into how Genpact nurtures its talent? Please share some employee journeys here.

As a global professional services firm, we are as good as the talent we have. Our employees are front and center of what we do and are efficiently enabled to deliver flawlessly on evolving client priorities. To nurture our talent, we're invested in building a culture of continuous learning and development, where our employees can learn new skills, move into new roles, and subsequently grow their careers, within the company, in the direction they aspire to.

- We use Talent Match as our talent transformation initiative to match the skills and job aspirations of our employees with existing and future job opportunities at Genpact.
- We are preparing employees for future career aspirations by upskilling and reskilling through Genome (our learning platform) and using Talent Match to make staffing decisions and find roles internally for our employees.
- This helps provide our employees the opportunity to take their careers in their desired direction, thus increasing employee satisfaction, and bolstering our ability to scale the work from anywhere model.

Genome has been helping us meet our talent needs internally by filling 21% of roles above entry level through internal promotions. While through Talent Match, over 26000 employees found a career of their choice last year. Additionally, about 30% of internal fulfillment (26600) was done through upskilling resources.



Learning and growing is a key part of our employee value proposition and our dedication to employee growth is reflected in the numerous success stories of our executive leadership and many more employees who've learnt, grown and been succeeding across various roles to build fulfilling, decades long career at Genpact, while we continue to attract external talent with our robust culture and investment in



continuous learning of individuals.

Genome has been helping us meet our talent needs internally by filling 21% of roles above entry level through internal promotions. While through Talent Match, over 26000 employees found a career of their choice last year. Additionally, about 30% of internal fulfillment (26600) was done through upskilling resources.

Q/ In one of our recent polls on Naukri's App, 65% of job seekers indicated they would accept a salary offer slightly lower than their expectations from a solid brand. This percentage of jobseekers ready to be associated with a great brand underscores the power of a good employer brand. Could you

elaborate on how Genpact strategically builds and maintains its strong brand reputation?

We're seeing that employees today want to work for a company that is driving a sense of shared purpose that extends beyond profit and keeps people moving towards a collective goal of creating a diverse, more inclusive, and sustainable world. People care about brand value/equity and the impact that their job has on people, society, and their communities.

At Genpact, fostering a purpose-driven culture is core to our talent strategy and positive brand reputation. We continue to work towards creating a strong ecosystem of change, centered around

a solid company culture, that can help shape an enduring future for us all. Our unique culture framework also allows us to build trust, empathy, and engage 125,000+ employees in over 30 Genpact operational countries. It encourages our people to lead change by being curious, incisive, and courageous while championing integrity and inclusivity.

This deep passion and focus on giving our people an opportunity to be better, be fearless, take bets, innovate and continuously learn and grow is a big talent attractor for us and driving retention for us, thereby helping build and maintain our strong employer brand.



Interview

Winning as ONE: Jay Thakkar on ABHFL's Vision for a Unified Employee Experience

— Biswajit Bhattacharya

Jay Thakkar, the Head of Human Resources & Administration at Aditya Birla Housing Finance Ltd. and Aditya Birla Capital Digital Ltd., leads innovative HR practices in the financial services sector. Committed to fostering an inclusive workplace, Thakkar excels in employer branding, diversity, employee well-being, and onboarding. Under his leadership, the company has achieved stellar employee satisfaction metrics and set new industry standards. Thakkar's approach, rooted in Aditya Birla Group's values, emphasises a collaborative environment where every employee feels valued and empowered, enhancing the organisation's reputation as a great place to work.

In this exclusive interview with All Things Talent, Jay Thakkar shares his visionary perspectives and insights, offering a closer look at the HR practices driving Aditya Birla Housing Finance Limited's success.

Jay Thakkar

Head HR & Admin,
ABHFL and ABCDL

Jay Thakkar, the Head of HR & Administration at Aditya Birla Housing Finance Ltd. and Aditya Birla Capital Digital Ltd., boasts over 16 years of expertise in Compensation & Benefits, Performance Management, Talent Management, Engagement, and Talent Acquisition. He has diverse experience across consulting and financial services, including 13 years with the Aditya Birla Group in various roles. Jay holds an MBA with a gold medal from Symbiosis Institute of Business Management, Pune, and a Bachelor's in Electronics Engineering from Mumbai University.

Q/ How would you define employer branding in the context of Aditya Birla Housing Finance, and what key metrics do you use to measure the success of your employer branding efforts?

At Aditya Birla Capital, our mission is to ensure a consistent experience for all our customers, regardless of the product or line of business they engage with. This commitment extends to both our external and internal customers. For our external customers, our approach is encapsulated in the principles of "One Customer, One Experience, One Team."

In 2023, we introduced a guiding philosophy for our internal customers: "Enriching Lives. Winning as ONE." This value proposition is at the heart of our employee experience across all Aditya Birla Capital businesses, including Aditya Birla Housing Finance.

What "Enriching Lives. Winning as ONE." entails, is clearly articulated in our Employer Brand Manifesto. It includes:

- **Include as ONE:** We are People-First. We respect, welcome and celebrate diversity. We embrace and integrate new thinking.
- **Learn as ONE:** We are Future-First. We are consistently evolving and transforming. We expand our horizons of ideas and influences.
- **Build as ONE:** We create a legacy. We build each other. We collaborate to forge new paths. We make things happen with speed.
- **Serve as ONE:** We become leaders and role models. We are stronger together. We find new ways to contribute, to serve and grow each other, our community and our organisation.
- **Win as ONE:** We win when our customers, partners, community and society win. We win when we fulfil lives and contribute to the growth of the Nation and its people as ONE Force.

One of the foremost metrics to measure the effectiveness of any employer branding efforts has always been voice-of-employee surveys. At Aditya Birla Group, we concluded our very own **VIBES Survey** in 2023. And the results for ABHFL have been extremely heartening.

A section of the VIBES Survey is dedicated solely towards measuring the effectiveness of employer branding activities and the extent to which the employer brand resonates with the employees. In that section, ABHFL scored an overwhelming **93 out of 100**. This score is a **5-point increase from the scores of the last survey**. It is also

better than the overall ABC Score (88 out of 100), the overall ABG score (86 out of 100), and the industry's high-performance norms (79 out of 100).

Apart from the Employer Brand section, ABHFL also scored exceptionally well on two key statements:



I WOULD RECOMMEND ADITYA BIRLA GROUP AS A GREAT-PLACE TO WORK
- SCORED 96 OUT OF 100.

I FEEL PROUD TO BE AN EMPLOYEE OF ADITYA BIRLA GROUP
- SCORED 98 OUT OF 100.

Incidentally, a large chunk of our talent sourcing happens through employee referrals. This also validates the success of our efforts towards providing an enriching employee experience because our employees have become our biggest promoters!

Q/ Studies suggest that effective onboarding can improve employee retention (52%) and productivity (60%). How does Aditya Birla Housing Finance personalise the onboarding experience for new hires? How do you ensure that each employee feels valued and integrated into the company culture from day one?

Onboarding is a pivotal event in the lifecycle of any employee. We emphasise and enable a comprehensive orientation from day one, aligning employees with our values

and individual goals. Understanding the importance of onboarding and training, particularly for sales professionals in the BFSI sector, we have designed the Functional Onboarding piece to cater to their unique needs and roadblocks by offering specialised support to help them reach targets and optimise incentives. Our customised program aims to enhance employee satisfaction and bolster retention efforts. The three-part module includes:

- **HR Connect:** Completed within the first 7 days of joining, this is an HRBP-led intervention covering the essentials of HR Processes and policies, ensuring a seamless integration with the ABHFL ecosystem.
- **Saarthi (ABHFL's Functional Onboarding):** Completed within the first 12 days of joining, this is a Training team-led intervention covering the essentials about the team, the manager, products, incentives, growth opportunities and systems for sales force support. The employees are handheld for the next 15 days.
- **Manager-led On-the-job training:** Completed within the first 12 days of joining, this is a manager-led intervention with a pre-defined list of actionable that include team introductions, setting expectations and distribution plans, process training, followed by assigning a buddy to the FOS.

Between these three modules, we ensure that not only are our employees abreast of the organisation's values, which they have a significant duty to uphold in front of the customers, but they also have the necessary support system around them which enables them to start delivering on their key performance indicators (KPI) in a short span of time.

Q/ According to a report by Great Place to Work, 1 in 4 women in the BFSI feel inconsistency in workplace equity. How does Aditya Birla Housing Finance assess the effectiveness of its diversity and inclusion efforts? Could you highlight any initiatives or campaigns that help measure this impact?

A recent report titled, "Women in Leadership in Corporate India" by LinkedIn and The Quantum Hub, a New Delhi-based public policy consulting firm, has highlighted that in 2024 the representation of women in senior leadership roles, across all industries in India, is at **18.3%** and around **19%** in the Financial Services sector. Compared to that, ABHFL currently has **26.7%** female representation in its senior leadership. This is especially significant given we are in the financial services sector where, historically, gender diversity has been modest across all levels.

Another trend across industries, historically, has been that the representation of women decreases as we move up the hierarchy. Currently, women leaders in ABHFL are handling crucial portfolios such as **Head of Business Development & Distribution, Head of Products & Digital Transformation, Head of Operations & Process Excellence, Head of Customer Service, Chief Compliance Officer, and Head of Marketing**, to name a few. And therein lies the success of our efforts to make ABHFL a more diverse and inclusive organisation.

Our commitment to diversity goes beyond hiring; we provide an ecosystem that supports women in realising their potential throughout their careers. Our initiatives include:

- **Diversity Hiring:** We partner with organisations like **myAvtar** and **Monster.com** for job fairs focused

on women. We also work with specialised talent search consultants to hire diverse candidates, including returning mothers.

- **Mentoring:** Our flagship **ABC Mentorship Program** pairs high-performing women in middle and junior management with senior women leaders to facilitate career growth, learning, and professional development.
- **Training:** At the ABC level, we offer "**Shrestha**", a program for women in junior management designed to foster essential growth behaviours like assertiveness and self-advocacy. At the ABG level, we provide the "**Springboard**" program for women in middle management, preparing them as potential successors for senior management roles.
- **Sensitisation and Allyship:** Our "**Men as Allies**" program educates male employees on how to support their female colleagues and promote inclusive behaviour. Additionally, the "**At the Helm**" program trains team leads and managers to build and nurture inclusive teams.
- **Policies and Interventions:** Our robust policy network includes an extended Maternity policy (now covering single fathers), a Creche and Nanny Reimbursement policy, and the "**Celebrate Motherhood**" program.

Through these initiatives, ABHFL not only hires diverse talent but also ensures a supportive environment where all employees can thrive and reach their full potential.

Q/ A study by Randstad found that 31% of employees in India have encountered ageism in the workplace. Given that your 2023-24 annual report indicates

that 92% of Aditya Birla Housing Finance's workforce comprises Millennials and Gen Z, how do you ensure a sense of inclusion for employees of all ages throughout the company?

At Aditya Birla Housing Finance Limited, our commitment to being fundamentally people-centric is a legacy inherited from the Aditya Birla Group. A key tenet of the Group's values is **"Seamlessness"** which emphasises the need to broaden our thinking and reach across age groups, hierarchies, and geographies to leverage diverse perspectives. And that culture percolates down from the leadership.

At ABHFL, we have been successful in establishing and fostering a culture where everyone feels psychologically safe and is open to sharing their thoughts irrespective of their age, tenure or seniority within the organisation.

This is again validated by our scores on three key statements in the VIBES Survey 2023:

1. "Senior leaders foster open, honest communication." – Scored 95 out of 100
2. "Senior leaders are visible and accessible." – Scored 97 out of 100
3. "Good ideas are adopted here regardless of who suggests them or where they come from." – Scored 94 out of 100

These scores are a testament to our dedication to cultivating an open, inclusive and collaborative environment where every voice is valued.

Q/ How is Aditya Birla Housing Finance addressing the growing importance of employee health and well-being in its future work strategies? What initiatives are

in place to ensure that employees feel supported in these areas?

As an organisation, Aditya Birla Capital has always been at the forefront of championing employee health and well-being. From our industry-leading **Group Medical Coverage** and **Top-Up Policy** to the extensive lifestyle and well-being offerings available through the AB Multiply app at no additional cost, we ensure our employees prioritise their health.

At ABHFL, our commitment towards employee health and well-being is driven with the same fervour. In the last fiscal year, we were successful in covering **more than 700 management cadre employees in Health Assessments** to gauge key health indicators such as blood pressure, fasting blood sugar, BMI and LDL Cholesterol levels. Apart from this, for employees above the age of 45 years and for our senior management, we ensured coverage of comprehensive **Annual Health Checkups** by partnering with a leading medical service provider. All of these were done at **no cost to the employees** and discounted rates for their family members as well.

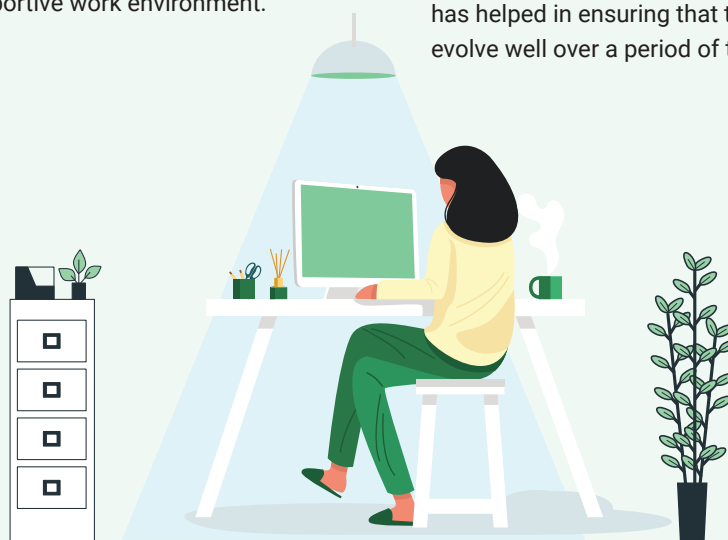
Our proactive approach to employee health and well-being underscores our dedication to fostering a healthy and supportive work environment.



A KEY TENET OF THE [ADITYA BIRLA] GROUP'S VALUES IS "SEAMLESSNESS" WHICH EMPHASISES THE NEED TO BROADEN OUR THINKING AND REACH ACROSS AGE GROUPS, HIERARCHIES, AND GEOGRAPHIES TO LEVERAGE DIVERSE PERSPECTIVES.

Q/ Can you share any lessons learned or best practices from your experience that could benefit others in similar roles?

I think the biggest lesson that I have learnt is from one of my first professors in College – He mentioned, "Let the best not be the enemy of the better". This has helped me in ensuring that decision-making on new initiatives is taken at a quicker speed as long as the benefits outweigh the cost of doing them. In addition, a lot of initiatives that we take in HR, especially which involve culture and people take time to show fruits, hence staying the course and not always changing course unless there is a marked difference from the strategy has helped in ensuring that the results evolve well over a period of time.





Interview

The Flipkart Values: Dr Varadharaju Janardhanan on Enabling Flipsters to Become the Best Version of Themselves

— Akanksha Thapliyal

What defines a company as an exceptional workplace? Is it its policies and perks, the prevailing culture, the calibre of its people, or the seamless integration of all these elements? For employees, the defining factor of a brand lies in its treatment of talent, whether current members of the workforce or prospective hires.

To delve into these crucial aspects, **All Things Talent** featured **Dr Varadharaju Janardhanan**, who serves as the Vice President- Human Resources at Flipkart. In this role, Varadharaju draws upon his extensive HR expertise to facilitate the organisation's talent discovery, growth, development, and substantial expansion. Before joining Flipkart, Varadharaju held significant leadership positions at esteemed organisations such as [24]7.ai, JDA Software, LG, and Zoho.

Dr Varadharaju Janardhanan

VP HR, Flipkart

Dr. Varadharaju Janardhanan is a seasoned global HR leader, thinker, author, educationist, and coach with over 28 years of deep industry experience. In his illustrious career, Varadharaju has helped budding start-ups, mid-sized companies, as well as large multinational corporations, build and scale up their talent and people functions - with a specific focus on capability and talent development, leadership talent management, culture shaping, talent acquisition, and overall HR strategy and partnering.

Q/ What are the core values that define Flipkart's work culture, and how integral are these values to the company's operations?

Flipkart's momentous 16+ year journey of empowering every Indian's dream by delivering value through innovation in technology and commerce has always been supported by our key behaviors of thinking big and taking bold bets, agility in thinking and execution, driving customer-centric innovation, all the while making sure that our moral compass is always pointing in the right direction. And that's why, these behaviors were codified to form our core values: Audacity, Bias for Action, and Customer First, with Integrity & Inclusion (ABC, I&I).

Here's how we define them:

- **Audacity** - Taking bold bets and changing the paradigm.

- **Bias for Action** - Having a sense of urgency to solve problems strategically and putting great ideas into action.
- **Customer First** - Looking at the world from our customer's point of view, keeping customers at the heart of everything we do.
- **Integrity** - Always do the right thing and be committed to our customers and stakeholders.
- **Inclusion** - Value the uniqueness in everyone, respect differences and foster a sense of belonging.

Our values are at the core of what we do, and every Flipkart employee lives them each day in 3 primary ways. Firstly, by seeing them manifest around them. Secondly, by experiencing them in action through various programs and initiatives. Lastly, by deploying them in their decision-making.

Our values also make an important component of our performance and feedback processes. When evaluating performance, employees are encouraged to share how they have leveraged our values in their decision-making. During feedback, both managers and peers also give feedback by behaviors expected as per our values.

Our rewards and recognition policy is aligned with our core values and takes into account the recognition and appreciation of employees who demonstrate audacious thinking, agility, customer-first behavior, integrity, and inclusion. There are specific awards presented to employees who are custodians of our core values of ABC with Integrity and Inclusion. Annual awards such as Business Excellence, Customer Excellence, Rainmaker Award, and Value Ambassador Award, and quarterly BU-level awards such as Value Champion and Mission

Impossible are designed to recognise employees demonstrating Flipkart's values in their thinking and action. And most importantly, our values act as the guiding light for our business decisions. So whether it be launching cash on delivery when e-Commerce was first becoming popular, to launching an AI-powered shopping assistant and AR-enabled product previews, all of our values are being put into action.

Our core values and culture have been such a strong influence that they've not only powered our growth but also the growth of 200+ start-ups that ex-employees of Flipkart have gone on to create and imbibe the same values and culture in.

Q/ Flipkart's work culture has received significant employee acclaim, evident from the positive reviews on platforms like Ambition Box. Could you expand on the primary factors that foster a favorable work environment?

At Flipkart, we've created a world of maximisation which includes:

The Purpose that inspires us:

Empowering every Indian's dream by delivering value through innovation in technology & commerce.

- **Our Employee Value Proposition:** Together, we dare to maximize its 4 pillars - leave a mark, experiment, learn, grow, work with the best, and care.
- **The Values that guide us:** Audacity, the bias for action, customer first, integrity & inclusion.

When these 3 elements come together, employees can experience maximisation in whatever form they choose - including the impact they can

every experience we design for employees has one of the above elements at its core.

I am sharing two examples from the world of wellness and learning at Flipkart which are critical to any person looking to build a long and fulfilling career:

- **Zen Garden:** Established in 2023, the Zen Garden is a dedicated space hosted at our head office in Bengaluru. It is designed to promote the mental well-being of employees through scientifically curated healing and rejuvenation techniques sourced globally and promises instant rejuvenation within 10 minutes through 3 distinct zones.

The balance zone focuses on the realignment of focus, strength, and senses through sensitisation and grounding through touch and auditory stimulation. It helps calm the nervous system, rewire brain waves, and harmonise yin and yang energies for a holistic balance. The blossom zone focuses on transformation and acceptance of emotions, activation of joy through self-identification, acceptance and creative expression, and increased self-awareness to foster personal growth and maximise potential. The bliss zone enables energising and transcending to a higher self, through a dynamic meditative space to tap into the higher self.

- **Continuous Learning:** We constantly strive to build a strong learning culture aligned with our EVP and career development philosophy. Our learning proposition is hyper-personalised to employees' needs, their learning styles, and is also agile to accommodate evolving business

needs. Our offerings cater to the asks of varied stages of an employee lifecycle (examples: new joiner assimilation programs, personal development training, leadership development programs, manager capability programs, developing org culture around customer centricity, enhancing business productivity, enhancing cross-team collaboration, innovation, etc.), based on skills/functions/roles. Hyper personalisation of learning offered through moderated subscriptions to content platforms enables learners to learn just-in-time for their work. These platforms offer content in varied forms including books, courses, sandbox labs, live virtual training, and streamed conferences. These initiatives, along with similar ones across areas such as talent development, learning, rewards, benefits, DEI, and more have endeared the organisation to employees and make us an attractive place to maximise careers.

Q/ Flipkart is recognised as a leader in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI), particularly in its efforts to hire individuals with disabilities and a special focus on women employees. How does the organisation ensure inclusion for people with disabilities and prioritise diversity in its hiring practices?

Flipkart is an equal opportunity employer that focuses on inclusive talent attraction, talent development & retention, and culture & policies, supported by strong leadership commitment. Here are some of the things we do to prioritize diversity in our hiring processes:

- Unconscious Bias in the Hiring

Process is an online module that serves as a guide to encourage Flipsters to reflect, enquire and explore biases that they may not currently be aware of, and how they may impact our hiring decisions. Currently, 80% of eligible hiring panels have completed this module.

- To ensure fairness, we screen applicants without any bias by masking the non-essential information.
- We also use open-source tools to validate that our job descriptions are gender-neutral and inclusive, focusing solely on the skills.
- Post Interview, the candidates are also asked to share their thoughts through a feedback survey that captures if the interviewer(s) was unbiased and given a fair opportunity to present skills and knowledge and whether during their interaction they were made to feel comfortable to share thoughts and be their authentic self.
- For PwDs (Persons with Disabilities), we have created special hiring constructs and programs. We also ensure that they thrive at the organisation. Some of our programs include:

eDAB: In April 2017, we first hired Persons with Disabilities through a pilot program called eDAB to offer sustainable professional and economic growth opportunities to PwD. This later evolved into a program under which we started hiring people with speech and hearing impairments as **Wishmasters**. Employing over 2,100 people with disabilities in 20+ states, across its supply chain, Flipkart continues to create a diverse, inclusive, and equitable workplace with its eDAB initiative.

- our hubs where Persons with For Women, in addition to ensuring that our processes are inclusive, we have created several special programs targeted at engaging, empowering, and hiring women talent:
 - Flipkart Inspired and Flipkart Make Your Mark: Designed to attract and engage women talent in technology and business, these 2 flagship

events give women an opportunity to hear from women Flipsters. Alongside, they get to experience our cutting-edge work and participate in accelerated hiring.

- Flip Forward is our career returnship program that offers work opportunities to women who have taken a career break for personal reasons, and are

looking to restart their careers. It is a 6-month program for women returnees that offers impactful projects across multiple domains and functions, and is open to any woman who has taken a career break of anywhere between six months to two years.

Flipkart Initiatives For Employee Growth And Skill Development

Individual Development Plan

The Career Fest is a one of its kind expo where business and HR teams collaborate to land end-to-end talent experiences for employees. It is the manifestation of our entire career development philosophy in a week-long high engagement and high excitement event.

3 Key Objectives of Career Fest:

- Drive Conversations around Careers
- Spreading Awareness about Flipkart's Career Development Offerings
- Maximise employee engagement and stickiness

Flipkart Career Fest

Employees start by crafting individual development plans (IDPs) that outline what they want to achieve and a plan for how they will do it. Every employee has their own IDP that provides them the clarity they need to build long-term, sustainable careers at FK. Completed IDPs also help managers and team leaders in designing team structures, goals, and growth paths for their teams, as well as better understand the ambitions of their team members.

Thrive

Flipkart Luminaries is the mentorship program that aims to pair experienced Luminaries (mentors) with eager mentees. Luminaries act as a guiding light for the mentees to develop new skills and competencies, network beyond their domain, and discuss their aspirations and development.

Flipkart Luminaries

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Q/ Is there a particular campaign or project at Flipkart that stands out to you as a source of pride?

While there are so many things that we do every year that make me proud of working at Flipkart and being a Flipster, there are two I'll share that I think are game-changers and we hope examples that every company can emulate:

- **The Healthy Flipkart Project:** This project, aimed to make Flipkart the healthiest workplace in India, began its Phase 1 with comprehensive health check-ups through doctors partnered with Flipkart Health+. We covered nearly 5,000 employees in Phase 1 across 30+ locations through camps and walk-ins. In Phases 2 and 3, we will further develop and begin to offer customised offerings within the organisation based on our baselining exercise. This baseline was executed at 0 cost to employees and was a significant investment by the organisation.
- **Democratisation of Campus Hiring:** We are strong believers in the fact that inclusive teams are the best ones. Therefore, a couple of years ago, we set out on a journey of ensuring that we can extend the Flipkart opportunity to as many of India and the world's students as possible.

Flipkart GRiD and WiRED are our award winning flagship challenges which enable students to participate, solve case challenges and get hiring opportunities with Flipkart. We've opened both of them up to students of ANY engineering college or business school in India. This means that those with ambition, wherever they may be, will get the opportunity. Last year, nearly 1.6 Lakh students participated in GRiD - this was a national record! Over 60,000

participated in WiRED. We are extremely proud of this.

- **Specialised Programs for Women:** At Flipkart, Inclusion is one of our core values, and as one of India's leading and most aspirational employers, we believe it is our duty to provide employment and learning opportunities in an equitable manner. This is why we created Flipkart Girls Wanna Code, Runway, Neev and Disha - all of these are programs designed around learning, internships and hiring for women in sectors which typically have low gender diversity - technology and supply chain. These are some of the initiatives that are really close to my heart and make me proud and excited to come to work every day.

Q/ Looking ahead, what does the future hold for Flipkart, especially in terms of employer branding? What strategies does Flipkart have in place to enhance its reputation as an employer of choice?

Flipkart's employer brand story is built around our promises to potential and current employees - Together, We Dare to Maximise. This is our EVP, and the core of our messaging is built around its 4 pillars - Leave a Mark, Experiment. Learn. Grow., Work with The Best and We Care. We have a two-fold employer brand strategy of providing maximised experiences to existing employees and showcasing our stories of maximisation to potential candidates. A few ways in which we do this and will continue are:

Authentic Storytelling: Flipkart is an exciting place to be. For us, the scale of our work, innovation in what we do, and building an inclu-

sive culture are key narratives that we will continue to talk about.

- **Leader Voices:** Our leaders also talk about our organisation and culture priorities and champion them internally and externally.
- **Industry Recognition:** Flipkart is recognised for its culture of maximisation by several leading industry bodies - including Great Place to Work, Avtar, ET Now, People Business, Universum, Great Manager Institute, and more across categories including culture, wellness, DE&I, innovation, and more.
- **Industry Events:** We want to share the Flipkart experience with as many people as possible. Therefore, the audience can interact with us through various owned events such as Inspired and Make Your Mark at our own offices.
- **Employee Voices:** Platforms such as AmbitionBox are critical to any employer brand strategy in two key ways. It allows employees to share their experiences honestly and for employers to better understand how they are doing in various aspects. **We are proud winners of ABECA and have also had a lot to learn from the insights provided by the platform.**





Interview

Adil Nargolwala, SVP & Head, Talent Acquisition, WNS, on the Tenets of Creating an Equitable and Opportunity-led Work Environment

Akanksha Thapliyal

With 46% women professionals, 24% women leaders, and 44% women board members, WNS calls itself a proud people force with a healthy gender mix and a multi-generational representation of communities.

We had the privilege of talking to Adil Nargolwala, Senior Vice President and Head of Talent Acquisition. Adil passionately shared insights into WNS' approach to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI), emphasising their three core pillars: Gender Advancement, Mental Well-being, and Inclusion.

Adil Nargolwala

SVP & Head Talent Acquisition, WNS

With over two decades of expertise in talent acquisition and talent management, Adil Nargolwala is a prominent figure in the Indian hiring landscape. His journey at WNS spans 20 years, beginning as a procurement head and ascending to leadership positions in the HR division. Beyond his leadership in recruiting top talent for WNS, Adil is an avid marathon runner dedicated to promoting health and fitness awareness. He holds accolades as an Ultraman, Ironman 6Star World Major finisher, and marathoner across all seven continents.

In our conversation, Adil discussed how these pillars form the foundation of WNS' DEI strategy, driving their mission to foster a workplace where every individual feels valued, supported, and empowered to thrive.

Q/ There is this quote about office culture that reads, "Culture is what the hearts and stomachs of employees feel on a Sunday eve about a Monday morning." What do you think about this statement and how is the culture at WNS?

Let me begin by saying that the feeling in my heart and stomach is definitely positive! My journey began with WNS in 2006, when WNS acquired the firm I used to run with my partners. Since then, I have donned multiple hats at WNS, but my longest stint has been in talent acquisition, and currently, I am the Head of Talent Acquisition in India.

Our north star is the CIRCLE of Values, which stands for Client First, Integrity, Respect, Collaboration, Learning, and Excellence. This credo drives each of our 60,000+ employees in our daily decision-making and forms the bedrock of our efforts to fulfill our mission.

We firmly believe that by prioritising employee welfare, we optimise their potential to deliver exceptional results and ultimately elevate client satisfaction. As an aspirational business, we strive to enhance our connections with clients and acknowledge human capital as our foremost asset.

By providing the right professional and personal development opportunities, we enable our employees to unlock their full potential and pursue their aspirations with confidence and enthusiasm. In essence, our commitment to human capital is not just about maximising productivity or profitability, it is about empowering them to their core, catalysing a transformation that turns them into agents of change, driving personal growth, and inspiring change in others. A great success metric is that today most of our front-line managers are home-grown leaders.

Q/ How does your commitment to creating a workplace that celebrates individuality and ingenuity translate into your hiring strategy?

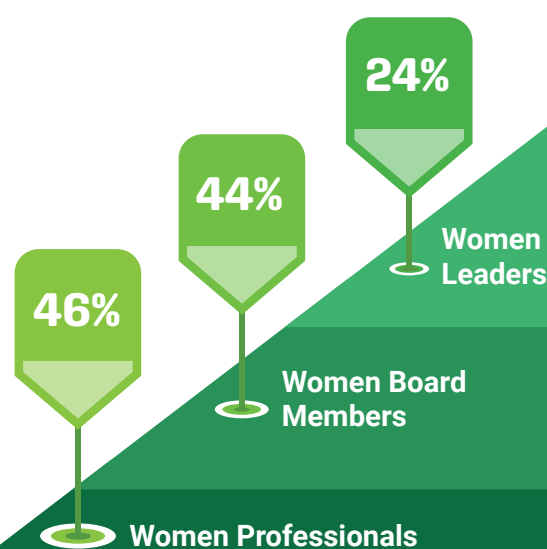
Anyone who recruits for WNS knows that our success hinges not only on financial metrics but also on the talent, creativity, and dedication of our people. We are the first touchpoint in an employee's or potential employee's journey with the organisation. Therefore, it becomes our prime responsibility to attract the best talent by creating differentiated hiring

programs.

Q/ WNS has three pillars of DEI - One is gender advancement, the second is mental well-being, and the third is inclusion. How does it hire people diversity-wise?

WNS is dedicated to fostering diversity, equity, and inclusion by strictly prohibiting discrimination based on race, gender, age, religion, sexual orientation, or disability. Our policy aims to cultivate a culture where all employees feel valued, respected, and empowered to deliver their best work. Throughout our recruitment, hiring, professional development, and advancement processes, we ensure that merit and potential are the sole criteria for success, free from bias related to race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, or other characteristics.

We continually refine our inclusive policies and infrastructure to support our diverse talent across various regions, including underrepresented groups such as LGBTQ+ and persons with disabilities (PWD). Our commitment to increasing diversity is reflected in our deliberate approach to hiring and promotions.



The recruitment team sets specific diversity targets, conducts specialised referral drives, and collaborates with exclusive vendors to recruit diverse candidates for leadership positions. The Organisation Effectiveness team analyses internal mobility data, monitors diversity at each level, tracks the percentage of women recommended for promotions, and encourages managers to enhance the diversity ratio within their teams.

Q/ How involved are the employees in your diversity efforts or your Employer Branding efforts? Do you take feedback from everyone while designing your hiring strategies?

Our employees are actively involved in running various leadership development programs, co-created with consulting and academic partners, for present and potential employees as part of our employer branding efforts. These programs reflect a collaborative effort in which employees contribute to the design and execution, enhancing our brand and demonstrating our commitment to development and diversity. We actively encourage our employees to participate in the formal election of an employee representative. This initiative aims to empower our workforce by giving them a direct voice in organisational matters. By electing a representative, our employees have the opportunity to advocate for their interests, contribute to decision-making processes, and foster a collaborative work environment. Then, another initiative Centurion accelerates high-potential female employees into leadership roles. The CEO's Millennial Council offers hands-on business experience and leadership interaction. At WNS, the entire HR team including talent acquisition works in tandem with the business team. Our hiring strategy is constantly evolving based on the

feedback received from regular review meetings with the business team. It really enables us to meet dynamic business requirements.

Q/ WNS has a good spread with a 41% millennial workforce and 52% Gen-Zs too. What is being done for their growth and learning?

The cornerstone of our people strategy is building the skills of tomorrow by providing an equitable and opportunity-led work environment. We prioritise the holistic development and well-being of our workforce. Through strategic talent acquisition, development programs, and performance management initiatives, we align our human capital with organisational objectives, ensuring a seamless integration of talent with business goals.

GLINT, our learning experience platform, hosts extensively updated content that offers a spectrum of opportunities for every employee to stay updated on business knowledge, products, systems, and industry regulations. Our training team offers digitised learning with over 500 specialised e-modules and simulation-based learning environments for practical learning in controlled settings. This learning system enables employees to work more efficiently in real-life scenarios within a controlled environment. We use Empowered LMS, an advanced training workflow tool that streamlines the systematic tracking, measurement, and reporting of training progress and metrics, helping us stay ahead in talent development and offering transparent insights into the effectiveness of our training programs. We also offer cross-functional programs that create internal opportunities and enable talent to develop skills for career growth.

Our programs offer a holistic digital learning experience, blending technical expertise and leadership skills to prepare employees for a digitally driven environment. With tailored content focused on AI and Gen AI, we equip our workforce for the future of our industry.

Adil being a marathon runner and a sports enthusiast himself has ensured that sports is a part of the WNS DNA. He spoke in detail about the sports programs at WNS.

At WNS, we have a sports program called WNS Sports, engaging nearly 10,000 employees across 10 locations, consisting of over 300 teams, in various sporting activities such as running, cycling, swimming, cricket, volleyball, basketball, throw ball, and badminton. We also provide dedicated indoor sports facilities, including table tennis, carrom, and chess in select offices. Additionally, we support employees' participation in external sports activities. Our women and corporate cricket team have registered over 28 wins in their merit roster. This initiative aims to promote a health-enhancing lifestyle through physical activity, driving better health outcomes, fostering community, and enhancing teamwork. By participating, employees can improve their physical and mental well-being, boost energy, and increase productivity.

We believe in holistic well-being of our workforce hence in addition to physical fitness, mental wellbeing is also a very big part of our culture. This includes providing access to counselling services and self-help resources, facilitating awareness campaigns and workshops, promoting a healthy work-life balance, training managers to support employees' mental well-being, and having a Well-being Ambassador Committee for effective care.

Q/ Has the advent of AI affected your hiring strategy? Since you hire a lot of Gen-Z, people who are under 25 years of age. Has it also come down to you or have you changed your strategy around hiring people from campuses?

To underestimate the influence of AI is to ignore a significant reality. AI will profoundly affect all aspects of life. In our industry, automation is poised to affect certain job roles; however, it will also create numerous new opportunities. Now is the optimal time for individuals to upskill and prepare for future job requirements. As the global population expands and business dynamics evolve, new manufacturing and service sectors will emerge, generating employment opportunities. To thrive in these new industries and roles, individuals currently performing basic tasks will need to enhance their

skills to meet the demands of the evolving job market. This underscores the importance and impact of upskilling in response to AI-driven changes.

Q/ Your fitness journey has been nothing short of inspiring. Did you run a half marathon in a professional suit last year?

Yes, I did run wearing a trouser, shirt, and tie because I was running to raise awareness about the need to stay active. We have a colleague at work who lost his brother to a sudden heart attack. His father, too, had died of a heart problem. When he rejoined work after his brother's death, I suggested that he also get himself tested, just in case it was a genetic thing. He is also a runner, by the way.

When he came back from a check-up, it was discovered that there were two major blockages. Within a couple of

days, he was operated on and stents were put in. That is when it struck me that there are many people who do not even know that there is a time bomb ticking inside. Staying healthy is very important. I am not telling everybody to go run marathons. Even if you do simpler things like climbing stairs, walking for some time, that should help you stay active. I walk up and down 30-40 floors a day. Initially, it takes a little effort but with regular practice, you will achieve success.

We concluded our conversation with a wish from Adil's bucket list. He hopes for a day when a high school senior is as prepared to run a marathon as they are for college life.





Sanjay Bhatnagar on Sony's People Philosophy and Crossing the 90 Mark in the Employee Satisfaction Index

Sanjay Bhatnagar Vice President, CHRO, Sony, offers valuable insights into fostering work-life balance, enhancing job satisfaction, and sustaining employee happiness—a testament to Sony's enduring success in nurturing a motivated and content workforce.

Sanjay Bhatnagar

Vice President, CHRO, Sony

Sanjay Bhatnagar boasts a career spanning over three decades, renowned for his innovative prowess. Sanjay is celebrated as a dynamic leader with a knack for swiftly turning ideas into successful ventures. Currently leading Sony's human resources division, he also serves as National Head of CSR, Device Sales & Marketing, Legal Tax & Internal Audit, earning recognition such as the DEI Champion award for his impactful contributions.

For generations, we've been harnessing the power of bright ideas and brilliant thinking to illuminate every part of the human experience; and to create the emotional connections that give life texture and depth. But there's no process or procedure for doing it. Only talented people, work together to turn a vibrant mix of perspectives, passion, and potential into meaningful innovations that enrich our world.

Our approach is comprehensive. We foster a culture of continuous learning, ensuring employees stay abreast of the latest skills and knowledge through robust training programs and career growth opportunities. Emphasising inclusivity and diversity, we recognise that diverse perspectives drive creativity and innovation. We prioritise employee well-being and acknowledge the importance of work-life balance.

- Sony India's **Employee Satisfaction Index** has crossed the 90 score, far above the national average of other similar basket companies after introducing policies such as **hybrid working, menstrual leave paternity leave,** and focusing on engagement. (Culture has evolved in the years due to our consistent efforts focusing on performance-oriented people-centric approaches)
- Our flexible and hybrid work policies, and wellness programs such as, **We Care** offer services like 24x7 health assistance, and health awareness sessions by reputed doctors.
- Our **Ascent Program** aims to create a learning journey for key talent as a succession planning initiative.
- Extended **Sony Family Connect** program involves Family Day

celebrations, **Kids Connect** programs like career development sessions, and career counselling.

Our support system enables employees to thrive both professionally and personally. Recognition and rewards are also central to our strategy, with performance management systems that celebrate exceptional contributions and offer clear pathways for career advancement. Through these programs, we seamlessly integrate our commitment to innovation and quality into our people policies, creating a workplace that attracts and retains top talent.

On Attracting Industry's Best Talent

Sony positions itself as an employer of choice through a compelling work culture, employee success stories, and a strong commitment to social responsibility. Our talent acquisition strategy includes competitive compensation packages, robust career development opportunities, and a supportive work environment designed to attract the industry's best minds. Our **Envision Program** targets young talent, recruited through campuses for specific roles that have helped bring fresh minds to maintain the pace with business growth and market dynamics.

We actively seek candidates with skills aligned with our strategic objectives, including proficiency in emerging technologies, adept problem-solving abilities, and a passion for innovation.

Balancing Employee Needs with Business Requirements

Balancing employee needs with business requirements in a hybrid model requires a flexible and adaptive approach at Sony. We offer robust support for flexible work arrangements, empowering employees to effectively manage their personal and professional

lives. Our investment in advanced technology and infrastructure supports seamless collaboration and productivity, regardless of location. Prioritizing employee well-being, we provide access to mental health resources, wellness programs, and more.

Clear and consistent communication is fundamental, ensuring employees are informed about business goals, expectations, and any policy changes. Our performance management systems focus on outcomes, promoting a culture of trust and accountability. By adopting these strategies, we create an environment where employees can thrive while meeting the evolving needs of our business.

Special You, Diverse Sony

The culture at Sony is defined by "People-Centered Management," embodying our People Philosophy: **Special You, Diverse Sony**. Sony is a place where each unique individual can grow and be challenged. We believe in mutual growth—where the development of our employees, who are the driving force of our business, is central to our purpose. We foster an environment where the company and its employees engage on equal terms, with mutual expectations for growth and advancement. We prioritize diversity and inclusion, tapping into a wide range of talents and perspectives that fuel our innovation and overall success. Specifically, we seek individuals with technical expertise, creative thinking, adaptability, and a collaborative mindset—individuals who excel in their fields and thrive in dynamic, cross-functional teams.

Our people-centric approach is reinforced through initiatives such as our **Management Trainee Program** and **Family Visits**, which cultivate a supportive and inclusive environment. At Sony,

every employee is valued and empowered to contribute to our collective success, ensuring that diverse perspectives and talents drive our innovation and sustained growth.

My 28 Years of Association with Sony

I embarked on a transformative journey with Sony 28 years back, driven by a passion for human resources and a commitment to excellence. Starting as a young professional in the vibrant offices of Sony, I quickly embraced the company's ethos of innovation and dedication to quality. Over the years, my role evolved, presenting opportunities to contribute significantly to Sony's growth trajectory.

From the early days in office roles to assuming leadership as Head of HR and Administration, each step has been

a testament to Sony's culture of nurturing talent and fostering leadership. At the age of 35, I was honored to become the one of the youngest HR head among Sony Group companies, a milestone that underscored my dedication and strategic vision.

As my journey progressed, my responsibilities extended beyond HR to include pivotal roles. Currently Heading HR, Admin & Facilities, CSR, Legal, Tax, Internal Audit and Device Sales and marketing functions. Management also entrusted the responsibility of heading Corporate compliances in Sony India.

Throughout my tenure, I have focused on laying strong foundations for Sony's future success. Key achievements include developing leaders by identifying and grooming talent to form a robust pipeline driving the company

forward. I've also fostered a transparent culture emphasising fairness and consistency, which has enhanced cohesion and trust across the organisation. My approach combines strong business acumen with proactive HR strategies aligned closely with Sony's overarching goals. Currently, my focus is on corporate social responsibility (CSR) and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). Our CSR initiatives encompass sustainable projects spanning around Education, Education for dropouts, Health for needy people, Village development, Heritage development, Sports for youth, Old Age Medicare, Medicare for Orphanage. On the DEI front, I have been honored as DEI Champion for taking up various initiatives in this area.

Success Mantra for the New Generation

To the new generation of professionals aspiring to carve their path, I offer the following insights: Dream big by setting ambitious goals and pursuing them with unwavering passion. Focus and dedication are essential channel your energy towards continuous improvement and personal growth. Embrace challenges outside your comfort zone; they offer opportunities for growth and learning. In the face of adversity, maintain composure and focus on finding solutions. Adaptability and resilience are key traits, as is developing a strategic vision. Finally, leadership is most effective when collaborative, leveraging diverse perspectives and strengths to achieve shared goals.

Leadership at Sony is about taking people along, giving them confidence, and showing trust. Our open-door approach helps employees to share varied ideas and implement those ideas. And that is how we grow together at Sony.



The Secret Sauce of

Onboarding

Excellence in India

Imagine entering the vibrant hubbub of an Indian street market — colours bustling around you, the air filled with the tantalising aromas of spices and street food, and a symphony of sounds from vendors calling out their wares to the bustling crowd. The excitement is palpable. Just as a seasoned guide can transform your market experience from bewildering to enriching, a well-crafted onboarding process can make all the difference in the corporate world. In India, where the job landscape is as diverse and dynamic as its bazaars, effective onboarding isn't just a nicety — it's a necessity.

In the rapidly evolving corporate landscape of India, effective onboarding has emerged as a critical strategy for boosting employee morale and retention. According to a study by SHRM, when a company has great

onboarding 69% of employees are likely to stay for at least 3 years. With the Indian workforce featuring a dynamic mix of generational, cultural and professional diversities, tailored onboarding processes are more important than ever. Let's delve into the specifics of how well-structured onboarding processes can make a significant difference in Indian organisations, supported by relevant strategies and insights from both global and local studies.

Why Warm Receptions Matter

In today's competitive landscape, companies are always striving for an edge. While factors like innovation and efficiency are crucial, a surprising secret weapon is often overlooked: hospitality. Yes, creating a welcoming environment for new team members

isn't just about courtesy — it's a strategic move with a significant impact on your bottom line.

Mitalee Dabral, Country HR Leader at Wayfair, a global online retailer, emphasises, "In the dynamic landscape of India's workforce, effective onboarding stands as a cornerstone for cultivating engaged, motivated and loyal employees. It is a profoundly transformative process that transcends mere orientation, establishing a solid foundation for long-term success." But dynamism hinges on several key factors, including the following:

- **Psychological Safety:** A warm reception fosters a sense of psychological safety within the team. This allows members to take risks, share ideas freely, and learn from each other without fear of



judgement. When new hires feel secure and supported, they are more likely to engage fully and contribute meaningfully to the organisation.

- **Team Effectiveness:** When new team members feel welcome, they're more likely to be engaged and contribute their best efforts. On the flip side, a cold greeting can lead to indifference or even disengagement. An inclusive onboarding process ensures that new employees feel like a part of the team from day one, enhancing overall team cohesion and productivity.
- **Financial Performance:** Studies reveal a clear connection between welcoming teams and a company's financial performance. This link highlights the importance of

- team effectiveness and psychological safety in driving business success. Engaged employees are more productive, which directly contributes to the company's bottom line.
- **The High Cost of Disengagement:** When workplaces fail to prioritise elements that differentiate themselves, like fairness, work-life balance and employee involvement in decision-making, staff become susceptible to disengagement. This disengagement has a ripple effect, impacting retention, productivity and innovation.

According to a survey conducted by CareerBuilder and SilkRoad Technology, 1 in 10 employees have left a company due to a poor onboarding experience, and 37% felt

their manager did not play a critical role in their onboarding support.

The absence of proper onboarding procedures can lead to increased employee turnover and decreased productivity. Conversely, engaged employees are 87% less likely to leave their company according to a report by the University of Southern California, making them five times less likely to leave compared to unengaged employees. Companies with great onboarding see 69% of employees staying for at least three years.

Building a Welcoming Onboarding Process

So, how can you create a welcoming onboarding experience that fosters team spirit and boosts morale? Here are some key points to consider:

- **Hyper-Personalisation Takes Over** — Onboarding should be tailored to individual preferences, needs and even cultural backgrounds. Pre-onboarding surveys, AI-powered skill assessments and welcome kits aligned with personal hobbies or career aspirations are becoming the norm. For example, Zomato's customised onboarding kits have led to a 15% increase in employee satisfaction by providing regional cuisine, local language resources and personalised welcome notes.
- **Virtual Onboarding** — With the increasing trend of remote work, adapt your onboarding process for the virtual world. Utilise video conferencing platforms to create a sense of connection and allow for face-to-face interaction. Utilise online collaboration tools to share documents, assign tasks and facilitate communication. Explore virtual team-building activities to break the ice and encourage interaction among new and existing team members.
- **Perks Beyond Tenure** — Don't tie all perks and benefits to an employee's tenure. While seniority should be acknowledged, offering opportunities for growth and recognition early on demonstrates a commitment to their development. This could include access to mentorship programs, participation in cross-functional projects, or the chance to take on leadership roles in smaller initiatives.
- **Embrace New Ideas** — Actively involve new team members in decision-making to demonstrate trust and encourage their unique perspectives. Vikas Goel, CHRO of o9 Solutions a cloud-based

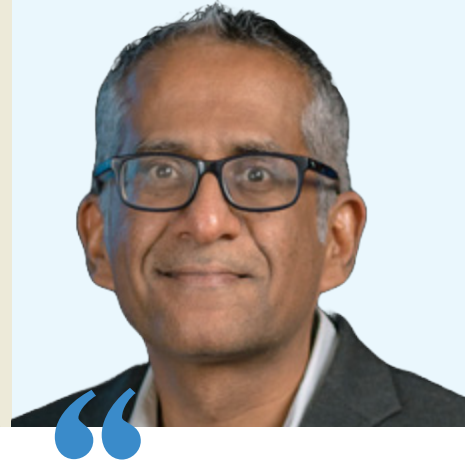


“IN THE DYNAMIC LANDSCAPE OF INDIA'S WORKFORCE, EFFECTIVE ONBOARDING STANDS AS A CORNERSTONE FOR CULTIVATING ENGAGED, MOTIVATED AND LOYAL EMPLOYEES.

MITALEE DABRAL
Country HR Leader, Wayfair India TDC

business management platform, highlights how initiatives like 'Inspire o9ers' and 'Passion Circles' in India meet the expectations of millennials and Gen-Z by promoting a balanced work culture and allowing employees to share their interests and creativity. He added, "These initiatives not only attract and retain top talent but also foster a supportive workplace culture that employees are proud to be a part of. This commitment to a dynamic and supportive culture has been integral to o9 Solutions from the beginning." By creating opportunities for brainstorming and sharing expertise, new hires feel valued and integral to the team.

- **Diversity, Inclusion and Equity (DEI)** — Be mindful of creating a welcoming environment that promotes diversity through inclusivity. This means nurturing an atmosphere where everyone feels comfortable sharing their ideas, regardless of background or experience. Utilise DEI training for



INITIATIVES LIKE O9ERS AND PASSION CIRCLES ATTRACT, RETAIN, AND MANAGE TOP TALENT BY **FOSTERING A WORKPLACE THAT EMPLOYEES ARE PROUD TO BE A PART OF.**

VIKAS GOEL
CHRO, o9 Solutions

existing team members to ensure they understand the importance of creating a welcoming space for all.

Why Warm Receptions Matter

Leveraging technology can revolutionise the onboarding process. HR technology platforms and AI can automate administrative tasks, provide interactive training modules and facilitate continuous learning. This not only improves efficiency but also ensures that new hires have access to the resources they need to succeed.

Imagine an onboarding experience where new hires can navigate a virtual tour of the company, meet their colleagues through video introductions, and access a personalised learning dashboard tailored to their role and career aspirations. AI-powered platforms can analyse new hires' previous experiences and learning styles to customise their training modules and development plans, ensuring a more personalised and effective onboarding experience.

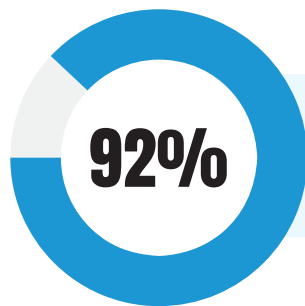
Companies like Zomato are already pioneering this approach by offering customised onboarding kits and learning resources that cater to regional preferences and languages. By integrating such technological advancements, companies can provide a seamless and engaging onboarding experience that meets the diverse needs of their workforce.

sessions with senior executives can inspire new hires and provide insights into the company's vision and goals, aligning their personal ambitions with the organisation's objectives.

Mitalee adds, "When new hires are seamlessly integrated into an organisation's culture, equipped with the necessary knowledge and tools, and made to feel genuinely valued, their morale boosts. This positive mindset

challenge in India's bustling job market, where opportunities abound, and job-hopping is common. A robust onboarding process can be a key differentiator. By making new employees feel valued and engaged from the start, organisations can reduce turnover and build a more stable and productive workforce.

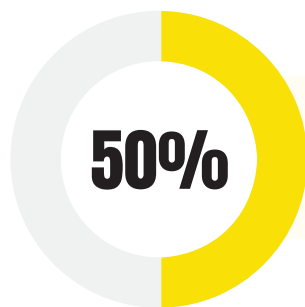
In a job market characterised by high attrition rates, organisations must



Percentage of HR professionals are cognizant of AI and Automation's role in hiring and during onboarding

helps their work, increases productivity, and fosters an unwavering

focus on creating a strong first impression and fostering long-term



Percentage of HR professionals who believe AI can enhance the onboarding experience

Long-Term Effect

Onboarding should be viewed as a continuous learning path. Incorporate leadership talks, ongoing training programs, and career development plans to foster long-term engagement and growth. This helps employees see a clear career trajectory within the organisation, boosting their motivation and commitment.

Continuous learning and development are critical in today's fast-paced job market. Incorporating regular check-ins, mentorship programs, and access to advanced training resources can help new hires feel supported and valued beyond their initial onboarding phase. Leadership talks and Q&A

commitment to their roles. By prioritising a comprehensive and empathetic onboarding experience, organisations can retain top talent and foster an environment where engagement flourishes. At Wayfair, engaged employees are the driving force behind our success, and effective onboarding empowers them to unlock their full potential."

Additionally, providing opportunities for career development and upskilling ensures that employees remain engaged and prepared for future challenges. By embedding a culture of continuous learning into the onboarding process, companies can cultivate a motivated and loyal workforce.

Challenges and Opportunities

Employee retention is a significant

engagement. Personalised onboarding experiences, driven by data and technology, can address the unique needs and preferences of each new hire, making them feel valued and integral to the organisation.

Moreover, integrating wellness programs, flexible work arrangements, and mental health resources into the onboarding process can significantly enhance employee satisfaction and retention. By prioritising employee well-being and work-life balance, companies can create a supportive work environment that attracts and retains top talent.

The Indian Way Forward

The attrition rate in India in 2023 was over 18 percent. The future of onboarding in India holds several

exciting predictions and trends. In India's dynamic and diverse corporate landscape, effective onboarding is crucial for boosting employee morale, engagement, and retention. Just as a seasoned guide enriches the experience of navigating a bustling market, a well-crafted onboarding process transforms new hires' initial days. Prioritising hospitality, psychological safety, and team effectiveness creates a welcoming environment that fosters productivity and innovation.

Companies embracing hyper-personalisation, virtual onboarding, and continuous learning meet the unique needs of their diverse workforce. Engaging onboarding programs driven by data and technology reduces turnover and builds a stable, motivated team. Successful

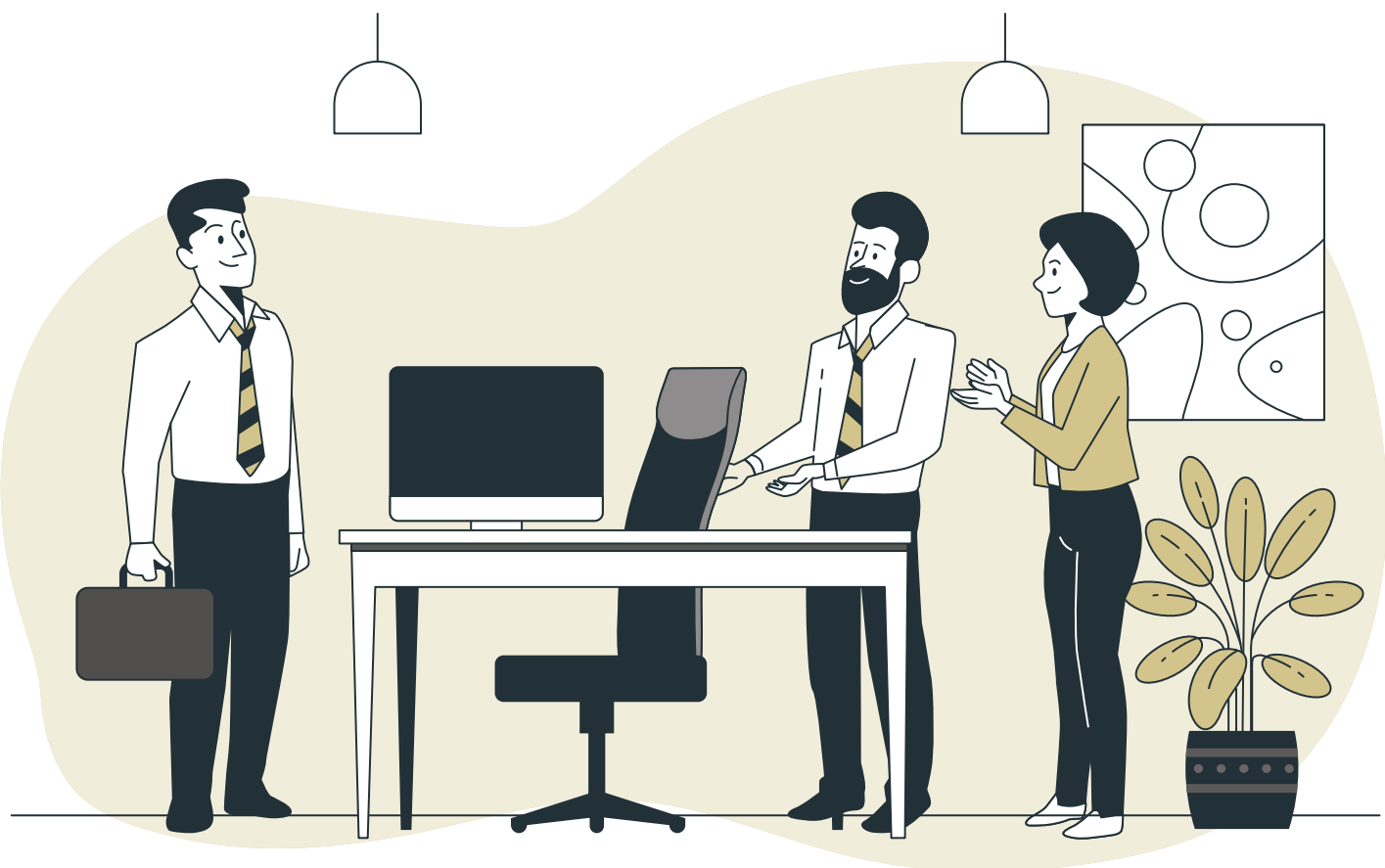
tactics involve underscoring the importance of comprehensive and empathetic onboarding, noting its role in boosting morale, increasing productivity, and fostering long-term commitment.

Similarly, Vikas Goel, CHRO of o9 Solutions, highlights the significance of initiatives like 'Inspire o9ers' and 'Passion Circles' that cater to millennials and Gen-Z by promoting a balanced work culture and creativity, thereby attracting and retaining top talent. As India's job market evolves, creating strong first impressions and fostering long-term engagement are essential. Leadership talks, career development plans, and opportunities for upskilling keep employees engaged and prepared for future challenges. Integrating wellness programs and flexible work arrangements further

enhances employee satisfaction and retention.

The future of onboarding in India holds exciting trends: personalised welcome kits, digital platforms, virtual onboarding, and the integration of VR and AR technologies. Continuous learning and development remain integral, ensuring long-term success and engagement.

Companies investing in innovative and effective onboarding strategies will gain a competitive edge in attracting and retaining top talent, driving sustained growth and innovation in India's vibrant job market. Embracing these strategies ensures a motivated, loyal workforce ready to meet future challenges and contribute to organisational success.





Interview

Jayanthi Gopal, Head of People at Mashreq Global Network India Discusses Importance of Rewarding Employees Beyond Appraisals

— Akanksha Thapliyal

Banking heavily on innovation, Mashreq Global Network in India has 1800+ employees, the majority of them working remotely. Currently MGN is present in India, Pakistan, and Egypt, employing over 2200 people across these markets.

This insightful conversation with Jayanthi Gopal, Head of People and Intellectual Capital, Mashreq Global Network revolved around the health of GCCs in India, the hiring spree in the industry, and how Mashreq has been rewarding its neatly managed remote workforce through its Pay for Performance model.

Jayanthi Gopal

Head of People & Intellectual Capital at Mashreq Global Network India

Currently serving as the Head of People & Intellectual Capital at Mashreq Global Network India, Jayanthi Gopal is a Chartered Fellow CIPD with a three decades long career in Human resources. Her experience in human resource functions ranges from formulating business strategy, developing HR programs and initiatives to support businesses.

Q/ How does Mashreq welcome an employee in its ecosystem?

We put a great deal of effort into the realisation of our values: Socially Responsible, Passionate about Clients, Innovative, Respect for Colleagues, Integrity, Transparency. It is one of the first and foremost things we do at Mashreq. We emphasise a lot on innovation. We strive to create an innovative ecosystem where everyone can pool in with their ideas and thrive. We make sure that those ideas are listened to and implemented where applicable. It is because of this approach that we've been able to create some of the best practices at Mashreq. This value is followed across hierarchies and levels. Your system should be such that people should be able to make mistakes, learn from them, and contribute to the story.

Q/ How does Mashreq accommodate its employees'

need for flexibility in their work arrangements?

From early on, we decided that our workforce would not necessarily be from any particular location or any particular country or region.

Our work model makes sure that people contribute from wherever they are. However, it comes with its challenges. We want people to imbibe the values we have set up at Mashreq. We do that by having constant touch with employees through our cultural workshops and touch base with them through various face-to-face meetings and travels.

Jayanthi didn't hesitate to accept the imbalance employees face in their work and professional lives. She says that the financial services and fintech world demands more working hours from people. However, she was quick to add that it is seasonal and Mashreq ensures that the flexibility that it offers makes employees feel that work-life balance is under their control.

For example, we emphasise on all employees switching off during the year and mandate utilisation of their annual leaves.

We have surveys and focused groups with managers and employees, where every manager is responsible for the feedback that we elicit from time to time. We invest a lot in exit interviews and share the feedback within the group. We do remedial actions as much as we can. When you know what is troubling the employees, you can act swiftly on it.

We have been **Great Place to Work** certified, twice in a row and it means that our employees trust us and give feedback freely.

Q/ Deloitte's report on Gen-Z and

millennials say that they associate more if they get a sense of purpose at their place of work and hence they stick around more. What is the spread of the Gen-Z and millennial workforce at Mashreq?

On average, our workforce consisting of Gen-Z and millennials would be about 20 percent. To give perspective on what we have been doing for this set of employees:

We recently collaborated with Microsoft to help our business harness the true potential of AI through a series of strategic, in-depth lessons. The AI Academy program spans a 10-week period, and focuses on 3 tracks: AI for Business Executives, AI For Beginners (All Employees) and AI For Developers (Developers having Experience with AI Development, Analyst or Machine Learning). We have seen high resonance and enthusiasm for the program with the younger generation. People could choose the session as per their requirements. If they were in HR, they chose AI in HR. If someone is in risk management, they could ask what is it that they could do with AI in a very practical way.

Employees at Mashreq can take virtual training and learn from them. We want Gen-Zs to choose our **Self-Paced Learning module** called the **Learning Pathways** and take up the courses they want. Of course, these would be related to their respective area of work in the banking industry.

Jayanthi also spoke of Mashreq's Diversity program. She spoke of the **Reignite** program which was earlier called the **Returning Mothers Program**. The rebranding came from the understanding that a woman could have taken a career break for reasons beyond maternity.

We look at including women employees who have taken a career break of around a year and are willing to join. Plus, if they fit into the current role we are looking out for, we would like to have them in the organisation. Not only does it help us maintain our diversity but also helps us dip into a talent pool which is a blind spot. One of the learnings while working on this program was about the fact that ambition matters differently for these women. For them, being able to create balance in their work and family life is also an achievement. Navigating work life could be a challenge for returning women. Hence, we invested in mentoring these professionals reassessing their ambitions, circumstances, and challenges.

Our Diversity percentage in India is

around 35% which is less than Pakistan and Egypt where it is touching 40-50 percent. Mashreq Global Network wants to achieve its 50% diversity target by the year 2025. We want to achieve this by hiring women employees at the junior level, middle management level, and leadership level.

We are also proactively sensitizing ourselves to work with Persons with Disability (PWD). We work strategically to identify the talent pool among PWD. Our hiring managers have been told that when they have the requirement, they should look out for diverse and inclusive talent without compromising on the core requirements of the job.

Q/ GCCs in India are hiring the top talent and they are being paid well. What are the kind of skills that Mashreq is hiring or looking to hire?

Surely, the GCC landscape in India has

evolved differently. A lot of innovative and strategic work takes place from the GCCs in direct collaboration with the global teams. At Mashreq, the GCC are called Mashreq Global Network and are integral parts of the overall banking structure.

An organisation emerges from somewhere but the talent that advises them in the next level can come from anywhere in the world.

Mashreq is a leading financial institution in the MENA region and we have people from various nationalities. We have the Americans, the French, the Swiss, the Canadians, the Brits, Indians, Pakistanis, Egyptians and other nationalities, about 90 in total – all of them who work for Mashreq and bring in a lot of diverse thoughts and ideas.

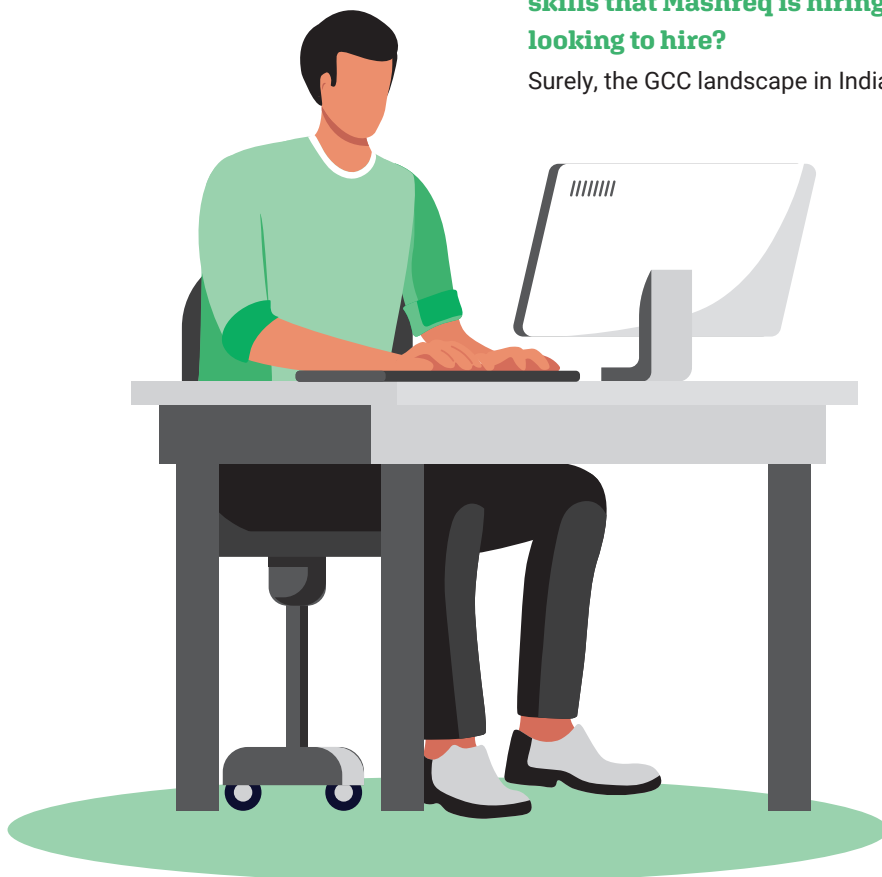
I have worked in three GCCs and have been involved with these in the nascent stage and I can say that it (the sector) has evolved a lot in the last 15 years. The cost factor is no more an advantage for India. People want to work out of India for the quality and availability of talent. Cost arbitrage existed 10-15 years ago; not anymore.

Tussle for Talent Within the GCCs is Very High in India.

While speaking highly of the quality of talent in India, Jayanthi points out the instability of the talent as a challenge. She spoke of the highly competitive GCC market and high attrition rates. Jayanthi also shared insights on how companies are constantly looking for experienced talent from the GCC industry while sourcing talent from outside their comfort industries as well.

“We are going to survive through this struggle,” she says. Next year is going to be another amazing year for GCC.

MGN India is a relatively small GCC and is looking at ‘build’ and ‘buy’ models for



its talent. We are focusing on strengthening our current talent pool, not just by hiring laterally (buy) but also by building the talent internally by investing heavily on L&D (build).

Q/ Please tell us something about the Pay for Performance reward value that is spread across the Mashreq network.

We want to make sure that we are rewarding the right talent. Our appraisal system tracks both 'Performance' and 'Behaviour'. Apart from tracking goals against performance, we also appraise Mashreq values and track their performance basis exhibiting those values. Apart from good performance, we also want to ensure

that people who speak up, challenge the ecosystem, bring innovative ideas, and go above and beyond their job expectations to ensure customer-centricity, are adequately rewarded by way of monetary benefits. This is reflected in their increments and bonus. Our rewards and recognition are designed in a way that we shouldn't have to wait a whole year to reward good performances.

Q/ How was the Pay for Performance Policy been received by the employees and the changes it brought?

It's a hit amongst people who are superlative performers. We have seen Millennials and Gen-Zs getting supercharged after receiving such

rewards. Their motivational levels are high and it is reflected in their performances.

Q/ What is that one challenge and one perk of working with a multi-cultural and globally diverse workforce?

The biggest challenge is to get people from so many places together and inculcate the feeling of belonging with Mashreq. Managing a diverse and remote workforce is an everyday challenge. And the best thing about working with a diverse workforce is cross-pollination of ideas. Even though we don't see each other every day, each one of us contributes and feel like we are part of One Mashreq.



We Need to Change the Mindset of Viewing **LGBTQIA+ Hiring** as Mere Diversity Recruitment

Beginning as a Software Developer intern, Karthik embarked on a transformative path, emerging as a prominent figure within Thoughtworks' LGBTQIA+ community. Karthik's impact reverberates through Thoughtworks' culture, where they spearhead initiatives like "Interning With Pride" and co-leads the Mitra Collective, driving meaningful change from within. Their vision for a more inclusive tech industry is rooted in equity, urging companies to embrace diverse voices and dismantle systemic barriers.

Karthik Damarsetti

Senior Applicator Developer,
Thoughtworks

Meet **Karthik Damarsetti**, a trailblazer in the tech industry and a passionate advocate for LGBTQIA+ inclusion. With a journey spanning over six years at Thoughtworks, Karthik's narrative is one of empowerment, resilience, and driving meaningful change.

Working As An LGBTQIA+ Employee At Thoughtworks

I joined Thoughtworks 6 years ago as a Software Developer intern. It has been an exciting journey since then, from being one of the few 'out' LGBTQIA+ individuals working in tech at Thoughtworks, to representing the organisation at several conferences on DEI and now currently leading the India LGBTQIA+ Employee Resource Group.

The folks I've had the pleasure to work with have been fabulous, always encouraging me to be myself and to share my unique perspective at internal platforms and external conferences.

But I must say, I have been privileged enough to have this experience. I recognize that my experience is not what other colleagues may have and I want to change it - I want to be able to tell people, "you be you, we will change mindsets together."

Stereotypes About LGBTQIA+ Individuals In The Tech Industry

I believe the biggest misconception is that there are no LGBTQIA+ individuals in the Tech industry / STEM fields. The stereotype exists that LGBTQIA+ folks can only do Human Resources or non-technical professions such as Arts, Fashion, etc.

But you'd be surprised that our identities are not a limitation when it comes to working in the tech industry. There are a lot of us who work in the Tech Industry, but we may not choose to be public about our identities because it shouldn't matter to what kind of work we do and how we deliver it.

Here's How The Tech Industry Can Be More Inclusive Of LGBTQIA+ Individuals

The tech industry should accept that the skills needed to excel are not limited to a selected few - oftentimes we don't see many women growing in their careers in this industry. Similarly, we don't know many LGBTQIA+ individuals who have a success story, only Tim Cook comes to mind, and sadly Alan Turing, who was punished for being from the LGBTQIA+ community.

I'd like to say that we are adept problem solvers, because we think outside the box - thanks to our skills in navigating a heteronormative society that is not built for us. The tech industry should embrace practices of seeking diverse voices - sometimes the room is filled with people who think along the same lines.

Embracing diversity, creating equitable opportunities, providing mentoring support for people who want to come into the industry, creating an inclusive space where people are not afraid to share their pronouns (as part of their introductions), etc. These are just some of the ways the Tech Industry can become more inclusive and supportive of the LGBTQIA+ community.

Another way the industry can become more inclusive, is to not look at LGBTQIA+ hiring as "diversity hiring". That limits the mindset to a purely numbers game. While numbers and targets are important, putting the focus on diversity numbers limits the company's focus and we lose perspective of inequity. The industry should seek to build programs where hiring can happen through equity investments

I Lead These Projects Within Thoughtworks For The Community

My career at Thoughtworks began as

part of the pilot "Interning With Pride" program which was an Internship specifically targeted towards the LGBTQIA+ community members passionate about Technology. I joined the company as part of this initiative.

Since then I have been an active member of the LGBTQIA+ Employee Resource Group, Mitra Collective, and am currently co-leading it for the past 2-3 years.

I've also been involved in representing India at a Global LGBTQIA+ Inclusion group that consists of members from other countries and we work with the organization's leadership, consulting on the Pride Theme and on initiatives that would benefit the LGBTQIA+ community.

Fostering A Culture For Non-Heteronormative Individuals

The theme for LGBTQIA+ Pride Month for Thoughtworks is "You be You" - centered on the notion that one is welcome and empowered to bring their whole selves to work. Creating a space which is non-judgemental and recognizing that diversity can exist in many forms is key to creating such an inclusive culture.

We have been so conditioned that being gay or lesbian or transgender means that people will look a certain way, behave in a certain way, etc. We need to recognise that these are biases that we all carry - we need to be able to introspect and challenge the biases. No two LGBTQIA+ individuals will have the same lived experience. Thoughtworks sees merit in approaching inclusion in a very intentional and nuanced manner. Another approach is to have people who can lead by example, ideally people in leadership, or people who are visible.

My Pronouns: They/Them

Expanding on the suggestion to share pronouns: I go by 'they/them' pronouns. Now, for the longest time, I didn't feel comfortable correcting people when they used incorrect pronouns. But now, I share my pronouns as part of my introductions. Doing so has helped normalize the idea that people can have different pronouns (other than he/she), and I can softly nudge people to correct their mistakes. The added benefit is that another LGBTQIA+ individual will potentially feel safe to share their pronouns because it would be a normal practice.





Interview

upGrad's CHRO Saurabh Deep Singla on Attracting the Best Talent and Future Trends in Higher Education

— Akanksha Thapliyal

Talent acquisition and employer branding synergise to define an organisation's recruitment strategy, anchoring its quest for elite talent. We hosted upGrad's esteemed **Chief Human Resources Officer, Saurabh Deep Singla** for an exclusive interview to understand how this symbiotic relationship cultivates a compelling employer image that resonates with prospective candidates, thereby fortifying the organisation's appeal in the competitive talent market.

In this interview, we uncovered the secrets behind upGrad's success in talent management and explored the future trends driving innovation in the education sector.

Saurabh Deep Singhla

CHRO, upGrad

Saurabh is an accomplished HR professional with over two and a half decades of experience spanning diverse sectors, including Start-ups, Manufacturing, Managed Services, Food/FMCG Retail, Telecom, Mining, Ecommerce Logistics and Higher Education. He has driven exponential growth in start-up environments. His proficiency in mergers and acquisitions, coupled with a deep understanding of the interplay between business and HR, has led to building up of successful partnerships and agile organisations.

Q/ It's appraisal season, and we'd like to begin by discussing your 6-point checklist for the interviews. Why do you believe this checklist is so crucial?

Job interviews are a crucial topic that I've discussed in many forums. I believe when a candidate goes for an interview, it is important for both the candidate and the organisation that both sides are well-prepared. Let's focus on the candidate's side. A well-prepared candidate has researched the company and knows the role's details, including the input and output metrics needed. Such a preparation breeds confidence during the interview. A confident candidate can assess whether the questions asked are relevant and can make a strong first impression through their appearance and eye contact.

Moreover, understanding the organisational culture is vital. If a

candidate feels that they might not fit in, they can ask questions to learn more. Conversely, if they are confident about the culture, they can share relevant inputs.

Q/ upGrad has been actively hiring for key leadership positions. What are the key factors shaping your hiring strategy and the education industry in general?

We want to clarify that we are not a startup. Also, we focus on higher education outcomes. We've been fortunate to attract brilliant and impactful leaders, creating one of the best leadership teams in the industry. Culture fit is essential for us. Our culture values learning and the learning process, with a strong focus on output since we are an outcome-driven company. Execution is crucial; strategies are pointless without proper execution. Therefore, the right leader must craft effective strategies, understand the business depth, know the customer, and drive output. Innovation and excellence are also critical traits we seek.

Adaptability and digital fluency are integral to our hiring strategy, especially in leadership roles. The digital revolution is rapid, hence leaders must understand the importance of adaptability and resilience and be digitally savvy. We look for subject matter experts who can demonstrate their impact, whether in PnL leadership or customer service roles.

We don't restrict ourselves to hiring from the same industry. Our team includes professionals from retail, FMCG, media, logistics, and e-commerce; creating a diverse mix.

Q/ What soft skills do you look for when hiring CXOs and for

leadership positions, and why are they important?

Soft skills are crucial. A leader's ability to think and negotiate success with the team and processes around them is vital. At upGrad, we view our work as a journey, not just a job. Curiosity and love for learning are essential. Leaders here must coach and guide others, embracing various perspectives and driving action.

The problems we are trying to solve, and the gaps we are trying to fill need leaders who can pull together a great team and get action done. Someone who has an obvious focus on what needs to be done. When we interview, we look at people who can influence positively and not just because they have a point of view.

Our product is education and you cannot go wrong with it cause education changes lives. So, our leaders need to think from the POV of a learner. For all of this to happen, soft skills become non-negotiable.

Q/ What challenges do you face while hiring highly skilled talent, especially in a competitive industry like yours? How do you attract the right talent to upGrad?



HIRING IS A CONTINUOUS JOURNEY. WE CONNECT WITH RIGHT PARTNERS LIKE NAUKRI AND PLATFORMS LIKE LINKEDIN TO FIND TALENT.

Attracting talent hinges on making employees successful, as success breeds confidence. We support our employees with skills development,



Image (L-R) **Phalgun Kompalli** Co-founder, **Mayank Kumar** Co-founder MD and **Ronnie Screwvala** Chairperson Co-founder upGrad

which helps attract and retain the right people.

We're known for taking the unbeaten path, offering high-growth environments, and building wealth-creation opportunities. Our ESOP pool is among the best in the industry, and we were recently featured in the top 10.

We recently won an ABECA Best Employer Award. Our employees were thrilled, celebrating their success, which reflects our positive work culture.

To retain talent, we engage employees through various development programs, mentoring, and wellness activities like Zumba and yoga. Our mental well-being platform, YourDOST.com, and our "Let's Talk" series address various queries, enhancing our employees' experience.

Q/ You mentioned AmbitionBox

and the importance of employer branding. Can you elaborate on this?

Employer branding is crucial in a competitive talent market. Organisations must communicate their culture, mission, and values to attract talent. It's about creating a lasting legacy, not just a one-off post or article.

During the conversation, Saurabh pointed out that top talent is often passive rather than active job hunting. Attracting such rare talent requires effective employer branding.

Q/ What does the future hold for upGrad? How are things shaping up?

The future will be very different from today. Our content teams continuously engage with learners and monitor market trends to create relevant

programs. Our **#AageKiSoch** program focuses on future planning. For instance, we quickly launched a program on ChatGPT soon after its release.

We collaborate with institutions like Golden Gate University to offer cutting-edge programs. Our CEO and leadership team engage with learners to understand future needs.

Q/ Regarding your skill-based courses, what are some of the most sought-after skills in the IT and non-IT sectors?

AI is the biggest game-changer now. Basic AI/ML understanding is becoming essential. Many industries are undergoing shifts, requiring people to reassess their skills. Large companies invest in reskilling and upskilling their workforce.

Skills in AI/ML, data sciences, and digital marketing are in high demand. Over the past year, we received 1.6 lakh sign-ups for our tech and data-related courses. Digital marketing has also seen significant growth, with non-marketing professionals signing up.

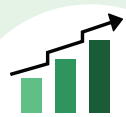
In FY24, a learner signs up for a digital

marketing course every 10 minutes. We've launched our 75th cohort of the Digital Learning Program with MICA, emphasising the importance of skills-first hiring.

80% of our learners complete their courses, thanks to our hands-on pedagogy and industry-relevant training. We also bring in new-age

founders for special classes, continuously updating our techniques and standards.

As we wrapped up the conversation, Saurabh clarified that their goal wasn't just to sell a product, but to improve the learning experience. They are dedicated to this mission for the current quarter and beyond.



1.6 Lakh
Sign Ups for **Tech**
and **Data** related
Courses



Every
10 Min.
Learners Sign Up
For **Digital Marketing**
Courses in FY24



80%
Learners
Complete Courses
at **upGrad**



The HR Wish List Featuring **Vijayakumar Dilli,** VP- Talent and Culture, Bounteous x Accolite

Leadership must recognise the strategic value HR brings to the organisation. Involving HR in business decision-making processes is crucial to maintaining a healthy organisational culture, enhancing talent engagement, and improving people retention.

Vijayakumar Dilli

VP - Talent and Culture, Bounteous
x Accolite

Vijayakumar Dilli has been serving as the VP - Talent and Culture at Bounteous x Accolite which was previously known as Lister Technologies where he gave more than 18 years of his prestigious career. Vijaya is an expert in talent as well as project management.

Today's tech-supported world requires HR professionals to stay ahead, continually enhance their skills, remain informed about industry trends and best practices. Leadership expects HR to be champions of change, rather than just executing tasks. A significant aspect of this is fostering a mindset shift. HR professionals must perceive themselves as enablers of employee success, understanding the organisation's culture and values, the demand supply chain, and the company's service offerings. This alignment is crucial for HR to support the company's vision, which is often overlooked in favor of routine HR execution.

This new perspective should be complemented by an outside-in approach to learning frameworks, incorporating continuous upskilling programs that cover essential areas such as talent engagement, DEI, HR operations, analytics, compliance, and legislation.

HR Wish List 01: Learning and New Tools

HR professionals must possess a strong functional understanding of various tools and technologies. These can be broadly classified into:

- **Process-Driven Technologies:** Including Human Resource Information Systems (HRIS), Recruitment and Applicant Tracking Systems (ATS), and Performance Management Software (PMS).
- **Data-Driven Technologies:** Encompassing HR Analytics, Reporting tools, Workflow management systems, and Auditing tools.
- **General Purpose Technologies:** Such as the Microsoft Office Suite, Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools,

and other productivity software.

A thorough working knowledge of these tools, along with an understanding of their limitations, is essential.

The importance and expectation of integrating these tools into daily operations are significantly increasing. The impact created by HR could be exponential if they begin to learn and apply these technologies in their everyday roles and decision-making processes.

To meet these evolving requirements, Learning and Development (L&D) programs must be designed thoughtfully, prioritizing core HR competencies while equipping HR professionals with the knowledge and skills necessary to address contemporary needs.

HR Wish List 02: To be Strategically Involved in Business Strategy

HR professionals want to evolve into strategic partners and actively collaborate with businesses so that they can align human capital with organisational objectives. This requires a deep understanding of the people-related factors that drive business success, identifying the talent most suitable for the organisation, and participating in early-stage discussions to define success, design appropriate frameworks, and recruit the right individuals. Securing business support and buy-in is crucial, as the process of identifying and nurturing the right talent requires time.

They want the organisations to transition from institution-based to merit-based hiring, establish clear hiring strategies, and prioritise the impact of hires over their quantity. Fostering a culture of continuous learning, where individuals take initiative in their own development, is essential. They also

want to shift away from tenure-based promotions, focusing instead on outcome-oriented metrics that emphasise alignment with the company's culture and values for Performance measurement. Businesses should accommodate this shift and empower HR to drive these behaviors within the organisation.

By being strategic partners, the HR function will ensure that individuals feel valued and develop a greater sense of belonging within the organisation.

HR Wish List 03: Clear Communication from C-Suite and Leadership

For HR to effectively contribute to organisational goals, alignment between the C-Suite, leadership, and the HR function is essential. Key areas that can foster confidence and build trust include:

Empowerment: Delegating authority and responsibility enable HR to operate with greater independence and drive meaningful initiatives. Leadership should encourage risk-taking, view failures as learning opportunities, and steadfastly support innovative endeavors.

Communication and Shared Vision: Providing HR with a seat at the boardroom table facilitates a deeper understanding of leadership priorities and ensures that HR can effectively execute these priorities. An inspiring vision is essential to foster a shared commitment across the organisation.

Budgetary Support with Assurance: Adequate funding is crucial for HR to implement and sustain effective campaigns.



Interview

DEI Head Dipsi Thakkar Kundal on Thoughtworks' Support for All Identities and Same-Sex Parent Policy

— Akanksha Thapliyal

In an era where diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) are at the forefront of organisational priorities, Thoughtworks, a global tech consultancy is creating its own blueprint for reshaping the DEI initiatives. Leading the charge is Dipsi Thakkar Kundal, the head of DEI at Thoughtworks. With a keen focus on fostering an inclusive workplace for employees of all identities, Kundal shares invaluable insights into Thoughtworks' innovative approach to supporting its diverse workforce. In particular, she sheds light on the company's groundbreaking same-sex parent policy, Interning with Pride, a testament to Thoughtworks' unwavering commitment to equity and fairness.

This conversation delves into Thoughtworks' innovative approach to DEI and explore how it has become a beacon of hope for transformative change in workplaces worldwide.

Dipsi Thakkar Kundal

Head of DEI, Thoughtworks

As the Head of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) for Thoughtworks India and Middle East region, Dipsi Thakkar Kundal leads the strategy and execution of initiatives that foster a culture of belonging, respect, and empowerment for employees, clients, and communities. With over 12 years of experience in consulting, program management, and delivery, Dipsi has a proven track record of enabling organisational growth and performance through data-driven and client-centric solutions..

Q/ Can you provide an overview of Thoughtworks' approach to diversity, equity, and inclusion, and how it's integrated into the company's values and practices?

As a people first organisation, Thoughtworks is committed to fostering diversity and inclusion at the workplace. Thoughtworks prioritises diversity of thought, background, and experience, and actively seeks talent from diverse communities.

Initiatives like **Interning with Pride** and inclusive parental policies also demonstrate Thoughtworks' dedication to supporting employees of all identities. We prioritise creating a supportive environment through practices such as encouraging pronoun usage and providing unbiased channels for reporting concerns. **The Mitra Collective** serves as a vital Employee Resource Group (ERG),

fostering community and driving positive change, while promoting inclusiveness and ally ship

Thoughtworks' objective is twofold: to create a workplace where every individual can bring their authentic selves to work and to advance equity and justice within our organisation and the broader tech industry. The reception to Thoughtworks' DEI efforts has been overwhelmingly positive, reaffirming the belief that inclusivity is both a moral and business imperative.

Q/ Please mention initiatives within Thoughtworks that support underrepresented groups, including women, LGBTQIA+ individuals, people of colour, and individuals with disabilities, among others.

Thoughtworks houses several initiatives supporting underrepresented groups across diverse, some of which include:

- **Interning with Pride:** Offering opportunities for LGBTQIA+ individuals to enter the technology industry.
- **Inclusive Parental Policy:** Ensuring all parents have equal access to benefits, regardless of gender or orientation.
- **Medical Health Insurance Coverage:** Extending coverage to same-sex partners as dependents for equitable healthcare access.
- **Gender Affirmation Policy:** Guidelines to support individuals going through a gender transition.
- **Mitra Collective:** An ERG advocating for LGBTQIA+ rights, allyship and inclusion.
- **Diversity Recruitment Programs:** Actively recruiting talent from diverse backgrounds.

- **Sensitisation Sessions:** Conducting regular sessions to raise awareness of diverse identities.
- **Speak Up Policy:** Providing unbiased reporting channels for workplace concerns.

Q/ Can you share any stories or notable achievements related to Thoughtworks' DEI initiatives?

Thoughtworks has seen several success stories and notable achievements stemming from its DEI initiatives:

- **Increased Representation:** Thoughtworks' commitment to diversity recruitment programs has resulted in a more diverse workforce, with increased representation of women, LGBTQIA+ individuals, people of colour, and individuals with disabilities across various roles within the organisation.
- **Positive Employee Feedback:** Employees have provided overwhelmingly positive feedback on the inclusivity and supportiveness of the workplace environment. Many have expressed gratitude for initiatives such as the **Interning with Pride** program and the **Gender Affirmation Policy**, which have enabled them to thrive personally and professionally.
- **Recognition from External Organisations:** Thoughtworks' DEI efforts have garnered recognition from external organisations and institutions.

For example, the Indian Institute of Management in Bangalore (IIMB) drafted a case study on LGBTQ inclusion at Thoughtworks, highlighting the impact of its inclusive culture on the tech industry.

Thoughtworks also received a certification from **Great Places to Work in 2023** for the initiatives being implemented across the board.

- **Community Engagement and Advocacy:** Thoughtworks' Mitra Collective has been instrumental in driving wider engagement of the **LGBTQIA+** community, both within the company and in society at large. Through advocacy efforts and community-building initiatives, Thoughtworks has become a leading voice for **LGBTQIA+** rights in the tech industry.
- **Tangible Policy Impact:** Thoughtworks' policies, such as the **Inclusive Parental Policy** and **Medical Health Insurance Coverage** for same-sex partners, have had tangible positive impacts on employees' lives, ensuring equitable access to benefits and support for all.

These success stories and achievements underscore Thoughtworks' commitment to creating a workplace where diversity, equity, and inclusion are not just buzzwords but integral components of the company culture. They demonstrate the tangible benefits of prioritising DEI and serve as inspiration for ongoing efforts to drive positive change within the organisation and beyond.

Q/ How does the company foster allyship and advocacy among its employees to support diversity and inclusion efforts?

Thoughtworks fosters allyship and advocacy within its workforce through a comprehensive array of strategies. Employees benefit from education and training programs designed to heighten awareness of diversity and inclusion issues, empowering them to become

informed advocates. Employee Resource Groups, such as the Mitra Collective, serve as vital conduits for fostering community and solidarity among employees, providing platforms for shared experiences and driving focused advocacy initiatives.

Open dialogue and communication channels are also meticulously cultivated to facilitate constructive discussions on diversity topics, encouraging employees to share perspectives and offer suggestions. Leadership support is also prevalent through active participation in diversity initiatives and their unwavering advocacy for inclusive policies. Moreover, employees are encouraged to actively engage with external communities and organisations, thus extending their contributions to diversity efforts beyond the confines of the company. Thoughtworks proudly recognises and celebrates individuals who demonstrate unwavering commitment to diversity and inclusion, thereby fostering a culture where every member feels empowered to contribute meaningfully to positive change within organisation and broader society.

Q/ How does Thoughtworks address unconscious bias and promote cultural competence among employees?

Thoughtworks addresses unconscious bias and promotes cultural competence among its employees through a multifaceted approach. The company provides comprehensive training programs focused on raising awareness of unconscious bias and its impacts on decision-making processes. These programs equip employees with the tools and strategies to recognise and mitigate bias in their interactions and decision-making. Additionally, Thoughtworks fosters a culture of

continuous learning and dialogue, encouraging employees to engage in open discussions about diversity and inclusion topics. This includes providing resources and forums for employees to deepen their understanding of different cultures, perspectives, and experiences. Furthermore, the company integrates diversity and inclusion considerations into various aspects of its operations, from talent acquisition to project delivery. By prioritising cultural competence and actively addressing unconscious bias, Thoughtworks aims to create an inclusive workplace where every employee feels valued, respected, and empowered to contribute their best work.

Q/ Looking ahead, what are some future goals or priorities for Thoughtworks in terms of diversity, equity, and inclusion?

Looking ahead, Thoughtworks is committed to advancing its efforts in diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) by setting ambitious goals and priorities. One key priority is to further enhance diversity within the organisation, particularly in leadership positions and technical roles, by implementing targeted recruitment strategies and fostering an inclusive culture that attracts and retains diverse talent. Additionally, the company aims to deepen its focus on equity by ensuring fair and equitable access to opportunities, resources, and support for all employees, regardless of their backgrounds or identities. Thoughtworks will continue to invest in initiatives aimed at promoting inclusion and belonging, such as expanding Employee Resource Groups and enhancing cultural competency training programs. Furthermore, the company is dedicated to leveraging its platform and influence to drive positive change in the

broader tech industry by advocating for policies and practices that promote diversity, equity, and inclusion. By

prioritizing these goals and initiatives, Thoughtworks seeks to create a workplace where every individual feels

valued, respected, and empowered to thrive, while also contributing to a more equitable and inclusive society as a whole.



Godrej Leads Workforce Diversity, Sabre Promotes Inclusive Programs, and AKP Wins Gold: **A Look at Diversity Initiatives in India**



For those who have seen the movie *Laapataa Ladies*, the characters of Manju Mai and Jaya stood out. Jaya and Manju Mai embody the essence of diversity through their contrasting yet complementary characters. Jaya's bold and outspoken nature represents vibrant urban youth navigating life's complexities with modern sensibilities. While Manju Mai signifies experience. The two characters showcase a dynamic interplay of perspectives, illustrating how diversity in backgrounds, beliefs, and experiences enriches their journey and shapes their evolved identities.

Diversity is celebrated to bring fresh perspectives and innovative solutions, highlighting its crucial role in any organisation. Increasingly, workplaces have embraced diverse workforces and multicultural professionals for their

ability to foster the exchange of new ideas, thereby enhancing company health.

A report by **Manpower Group** said that employers in India are more welcoming to diverse hires compared to other economies of the world. As per this report, 54 percent of employers in India expressed optimism in their company's Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB) initiatives being on track to increase female participation at different levels, way above the global average of 46%.

The survey that examined 3,150 Indian employers, noted that internal leadership development programs are most effective in retaining and securing diversified talent. Sector-wise, the Information Technology (IT) sector leads the way in strengthening the diversity ratio, closely followed by the

healthcare and life sciences sectors.

All Things Talent reached out to some HR leaders to gauge what's happening in their respective industries and how they look at this uptick in diverse hiring.

For Godrej Capital, their commitment to DEI has helped them recruit top talent, leading to an overall workforce diversity of 27% surpassing their industry average of 21%.

Bhavya Misra, CHRO, Godrej Capital shares details of some of the company's DEI-rich initiatives.

Bhavya writes, 'Godrej Capital has implemented several initiatives to enhance diversity and inclusion. Our Employee Resource Groups (ERGs), 'SHE Rises' and 'ENABLE', celebrate the



achievements of our diverse workforce and addresses their unique challenges through mentorship, networking, and professional development. Beyond traditional policies like maternity, paternity, and adoption leaves, we offer comprehensive healthcare policies, like trust-based unlimited sick leaves and primary caregiver leaves.'

'To support working parents, we cover 55% of the cost of our on-site daycare facility and offer flexible work arrangements, late-night transport, and the option for mothers to bring their infants on work trips. Our policies also cover mental health support, childbirth expenses, medical transition coverage, and disability support, ensuring holistic care for our employees. These initiatives create a supportive environment, enabling all employees to thrive both professionally and personally.'

Rency Mathew, Global People Leader APAC, Sabre

For Sabre, it is inclusive programs like Women In Technology (WIT), Ascenders, Women's Career Network (WCN) elevating their commitment towards diversity. Rency Mathew speaks of Sabre's commitment in driving progress by embracing and celebrating diversity.

'DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) is a fundamental part of Sabre, supporting our team members, business strategy, and the communities where we live and work. We provide our team members with opportunities to build connections through our inclusion groups, such as Women In Technology (WIT), Ascenders, Women's Career Network (WCN), Pride, and many more. These groups play a crucial role in amplifying our team members' voices and creating a sense of belonging,

while also influencing Sabre's broader business strategy.'

'We also host various programs throughout the year that provide a platform for our team members to be heard and to celebrate our organisation's diversity. Additionally, our campus hiring program ensures a good mix of women hires, visiting colleges across India to recruit individuals with diverse backgrounds and perspectives. In our recent batch, 51% of hires were women, selected from top colleges nationwide.'

For Acuity Knowledge Partners, their LGBTQ+ inclusion policies won them a gold in The India Workplace Equality Index (IWEI). Chief Human Resource Officer Avadhesh Dixit shares his DEI priorities.

'In today's dynamic landscape, prioritising DEI is crucial for companies to align with evolving societal values. At Acuity, we strongly advocate for DEI across our offices, comprising 36.7% of women indicating a strong balance for diversity. In 2023, The India Workplace Equality Index (IWEI) recognised Acuity as a gold employer. Acuity successfully embedded LGBTQ+ inclusion in policies, hiring practices, and external communication, demonstrating a long-term and in-depth commitment to DEI. To foster an inclusive and diverse workplace, Acuity has implemented targeted recruitment campaigns, policies of inclusivity, and extensive training programs to eliminate unconscious biases.'

Avadhesh highlighted some successful DEI projects at Acuity Knowledge Partners.

'We have an LGBTQ+ ally network and have undertaken initiatives, such as Project Gurukul in partnership with the Tweet Foundation to provide career readiness and mentoring to transgender individuals and have made significant progress in making sure their benefits are inclusive. We also have implemented policies on inclusive parental leaves, gender affirmation leaves, and thorough anti-harassment protocols.'

Looking to Cultivate a Successful Diverse Workforce? CHRO Holds the Key

Bhavya Misra, CHRO, Godrej Capital shares critical notes for leaders. The critical step for leadership is to walk the talk. A leader's belief in building an inclusive culture and their actions supplementing that belief is important. Then, challenging societal norms and addressing unconscious biases through continuous education and training is essential. This helps



REGULAR FEEDBACK SESSIONS AND EMPLOYEE SURVEYS ARE IMPORTANT FOR ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF OUR INITIATIVES AND MAKING NECESSARY ADJUSTMENTS. LISTENING TO AND ACTING ON FEEDBACK, ESPECIALLY FROM WORKING MOTHERS AND MINORITY COMMUNITIES, ENSURES THAT OUR POLICIES REMAIN RELEVANT AND EFFECTIVE.

BHAVYA MISRA
CHRO, Godrej Capital

create awareness and promote inclusive behaviors across the organisation.

Implementing flexible work arrangements, sabbatical options, and career path changes is key to accommodating the diverse needs of our workforce. Mentorship programs are also vital, providing guidance and support to help employees navigate their career paths effectively.

Regular feedback sessions and employee surveys are important for assessing the impact of our initiatives and making necessary adjustments. Listening to and acting on feedback, especially from working mothers and minority communities, ensures that our policies remain relevant and effective.

Fostering a culture of empathy,



WE HOST VARIOUS PROGRAMS AND EVENTS THROUGHOUT THE YEAR THAT PROVIDE A PLATFORM FOR TEAM MEMBERS TO BE HEARD AND CELEBRATE OUR ORGANISATION'S DIVERSITY. ADDITIONALLY, OUR CAMPUS HIRING PROGRAM ENSURES A GOOD MIX OF WOMEN HIRES, VISITING COLLEGES ACROSS INDIA TO RECRUIT INDIVIDUALS WITH DIVERSE BACKGROUNDS AND PERSPECTIVES. IN OUR RECENT BATCH, 51% OF HIRES WERE WOMEN, SELECTED FROM TOP COLLEGES NATIONWIDE.'

RENCY MATHEW
Global People Leader
APAC, Sabre

support, and continuous improvement is crucial. By prioritising the well-being and professional growth of our employees, we create an environment where diversity and inclusion are integral to our organisational DNA. This not only benefits individual employees but also drives overall organisational success and innovation.

Avadhesh Dixit also points out the importance of creating a value system.



“WE HAVE AN **LGBTQ+ ALLY NETWORK** AND HAVE UNDERTAKEN INITIATIVES, SUCH AS PROJECT GURUKUL IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE TWEET FOUNDATION TO PROVIDE CAREER READINESS AND MENTORING TO TRANSGENDER INDIVIDUALS AND HAVE MADE SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS IN ENSURING THAT THEIR BENEFITS ARE INCLUSIVE. WE ALSO HAVE IMPLEMENTED POLICIES ON INCLUSIVE PARENTAL LEAVES, GENDER AFFIRMATION LEAVES, AND THOROUGH ANTI-HARASSMENT PROTOCOLS.’

AVADHESH DIXIT
CHRO, Acuity
Knowledge Partners

As the CHRO, I take pride that we at Acuity create a culture where every individual feels valued and respected regardless of their sexual identity or orientation. We have representatives at every position who have volunteered for PRISM to create an ecosystem where individuals can navigate their journey without any roadblocks. The stronger the leadership commitment and allyship, the more collective power we lend.



A 14-Years Journey in Talent Acquisition

John Matthew Sebastian, DGM & Head – Talent Acquisition, V-Guard

In the ever-evolving landscape of human resources, my passion for identifying, engaging, and nurturing top talent has been the driving force behind all my professional endeavours. Over the past 14 years, I have had the privilege of navigating the intricacies of the talent acquisition field, adapting to industry trends, and consistently delivering impactful results.

John Matthew Sebastian

DGM & Head – Talent Acquisition,
V-Guard

John leads the Talent Acquisition team at V-Guard Industries Ltd, a pioneering force in the consumer electrical industry. With over 14 years of honed expertise in talent acquisition, he has spearheaded transformative strategies to attract, engage, and retain top-tier talent, aligning with V-Guard's mission of innovation and excellence.

My journey began with a fervent belief in the power of people to drive organisational excellence. From early experiences in recruitment, I honed my skills in sourcing, interviewing, and selecting candidates who not only met the technical requirements but also aligned with the cultural fabric of the organisations I served.

As I progressed in my career, I embraced leadership roles where I successfully designed and executed comprehensive talent acquisition strategies. I have collaborated with diverse teams, leveraging innovative technologies and methodologies to streamline processes and elevate the overall recruitment experience. One of the hallmarks of my journey is my commitment to continuous learning. I have kept pace with the ever-evolving landscape of HR function, staying abreast of emerging trends, and incorporating cutting-edge practices to ensure that my contributions remain forward-thinking and impactful.

Talent acquisition is not just a profession; it's a dynamic and ever-evolving field that requires a blend of expertise, adaptability, and a genuine passion for connecting the right talent with the right opportunities. In the subsequent chapters of my narrative, I will delve deeper into the pivotal moments, transformative experiences, and lessons learned that continue to define my trajectory in the world of talent acquisition.

Year 1-2: The Foundation

Starting relatively as a candidate with one year of experience in V-Guard and a degree in Human Resources, the first years were about grasping the basics of recruitment. From understanding job requirements to conducting initial candidate screenings, the focus was

on building a solid foundation. Learning the intricacies of resume parsing, effective communication with candidates, and basic negotiation skills became crucial.

Year 3-4: Sourcing Mastery

With a few years under the belt, the focus shifted to becoming a sourcing expert. Learning advanced search techniques on job boards, social media, and professional networks, this period was about building a network of potential candidates. The emphasis was on understanding the importance of a diverse talent pool and implementing strategies for reaching passive candidates.

Year 5-6: Leadership Aspirations

As competence grew, so did the desire to lead. The individual transitioned into a team lead role, taking charge of a small group of recruiters. Leadership skills were developed, and the focus shifted to not just personal success but the success of the entire team. This period involved learning about team dynamics, conflict resolution, and setting and achieving team targets.

Year 7-8: Technology Integration

Recognising the transformative impact of technology on recruitment, these years were about embracing and integrating new tools. Learning about Applicant Tracking Systems (ATS), AI-driven recruitment tools, and data analytics became essential. This phase was marked by a commitment to staying technologically current, ensuring that the team remained efficient and competitive in the rapidly evolving recruitment landscape.

This phase of embracing technology in recruitment marked a transformative period, where staying ahead of technological advancements became synonymous with staying competitive

in attracting and retaining top talent.

Year 9-10: Strategic Recruitment

Having gained expertise in tactical aspects, the focus shifted to strategic recruitment. This involved aligning recruitment efforts with organisational goals, understanding workforce planning, and contributing to employer branding initiatives. Learning to partner closely with hiring managers and understanding broader business strategies became paramount. This experience allowed me to develop a keen understanding of the importance of aligning recruitment efforts with the overall business strategy.

Year 11-12: Adapting to Challenges

The career journey hit a challenging phase with economic downturns, especially COVID-19 and talent shortages. These years were about adaptability and resilience. Learning to pivot strategies, engage in cost-effective recruitment, and navigate uncertainties marked this period. The importance of continuous learning and staying agile in the face of adversity became clear.

During this challenging phase, we experienced a shift towards remote work as a necessity to ensure business continuity. The rapid adoption of digital technologies and collaboration tools became crucial for maintaining productivity and communication. Embracing virtual work environments highlighted the significance of technological literacy and the ability to adapt to new digital platforms.

Year 13-14: Thought Leadership and Mentorship

With a wealth of experience, these few years were about giving back to the industry. Engaging in thought

leadership, speaking at industry conferences, and contributing articles on recruitment trends became central to my agenda. Becoming a mentor to junior recruiters, sharing insights, and contributing to the professional development of others marked the culmination of a rich and rewarding

career in Talent Acquisition.

Throughout this 14-year odyssey, I have encountered and overcome challenges, built lasting relationships with both candidates and colleagues and witnessed the transformative impact that exceptional talent can have on organisational success.

As I look back on this incredible journey, I am excited about the possibilities that lie ahead. My passion for talent acquisition remains unwavering, and I am eager to leverage my wealth of experience to contribute meaningfully to the success of our organisation.



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