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Abstract

In the present day world, organizations can stay in business only by delivering value to its customers. In this endeavor, those who are most valuable are the employees of the organization- Not just at any particular segment, but all. Focusing on employees has become a necessity for organizational survival. But, if the standard package/ job offer is made to all the employees working at a particular level, then it works against the objective of attracting the best talent, motivating employees for superior performance and retaining the performers within the organization. In the 21st century as increasing customization of products is necessary for any company to expand its customer base, similarly, for attracting and managing talented workforce, one size no longer fits all. As, no two employees are the same in terms of capabilities and aspirations, the organizations HR practices should also be customized and one-to-one for having optimum benefits for employer and employee- maximum advantage of the employees' unique value at the lowest possible cost.

Keywords

*Value, workforce, HR
practices, customized*

Introduction

Organizations no longer can be run on the power of the personality of an individual, brand, technology or financial strength. What is required now is an organized approach with human resources leading the way. The HR department should be able to create the perception that its work is vital to the organization's success and that it is not meant merely to process benefit forms and track vacation days with the help of a bunch of clerks. An important HR mandate today is to attract and motivate good employees and stop slow bleeding- losing key employees. Hence, there is a need to spend a good deal of one-on-one time with each valuable employee, and also evolve a plan to help educate all the organization's employees to develop and maintain a positive corporate culture. Given the realities of today's complex business environment, it is no longer possible to satisfy a workforce with one broad standard approach. Organizations are today facing their most diverse workforce yet- not only in terms of age, gender and nationality but also in terms of interests, abilities, cultural norms, aspirations and life values. Employees are expecting- even demanding- an individualized experience at work based on their own encounters with customization as customers. This has led to an individualized approach to talent management, treating each employee as a "**workforce of one**"

Concept

Practiced rightly, one to one human practices can increase the value of the company's employee base. The idea is simple: one-to-one human resource practices means being willing and able to change your behaviour / offer towards an individual employee, based on what the employee tells you and what else you know about the employee through using HR instruments. One to one HR turns a different shade according to the requirements of the individual employees.

The job content should be in complete harmony with the concerned individual's preference and aptitude. The employee should have the discretion to decide which path he wants to tread. Provided it falls within the organization's area of operation. But, of course, he has to deliver within a stipulated time frame. In case he fails to do so, he should be coaxed to explore other areas for which he is better suited. Although the concept is simple, it cannot be practiced in a company unless proper facilities- human and non-human are available.

Degree of Implementation

The mechanics of implementation are complex. It is one thing to have a compensation policy for the employees, but quite another to interact with an individual employee and then reconfigure the compensation plan to meeting his need. More so, when people change with time.

So, is your company ready to implement one-to-one human practices? In large part the answer depends on the scope of the programme. For some companies, being ready simply means being prepared to launch a limited initiative. Substantial benefits can be gained from taking steps even small ones towards one-to-one human practices in specific areas. For others, being ready means positioned to implement an organization wide programme.

To help an organization assess the type of programme it should begin with and determine what it needs to do to prepare itself, one can benchmark the processes against the criteria in the HRD Audit designed by the Academy of Human Resource Development's T.V. Rao and Udai Pareek for HR executives, line managers and employees at all levels of an organization. Reviewing the list will help the organization determine what type of one-to-one HR programme can be implemented immediately, what it needs to do to position the programme for a large scale initiative, and how to prioritize the HR plans and activities.

Rationale

Before determining the correct scope of an organization's HR efforts, there is a need to understand the rationale for undertaking a one-to-one initiative and the basic components of such a strategy. Workforce of One HR practices are grounded in the idea of establishing a learning relationship with each individual employee, starting with the most valuable ones, and also appreciating their contribution in the organization. One may think of a learning relationship as one that gets smarter with each interaction. The employee's capabilities are explored and the organization customizes some of the job content and / or context factors to use them. Every interaction and modification improves the components of the job offer to better suit the singular needs of the individual employee and is effectively used for upgrading/ strengthening employee skills.

Eventually, even if a competitor offers the same type of customization and interaction, the employee may not find the decision to leave the organization easy, mainly, because of the buildup confidence.

Steps of the Process

There are four key steps for putting a one-to-one human resource programme to work:

- Identifying the employees
- Differentiating among them
- Interacting with them,
- Customizing the job content and / or context to fit each individual employee's needs.

Identifying the Employees

To launch a one-to-one employee oriented initiative, the organization must make a list of its valuable employees. It is critical to know these employees in as much detail as possible: not just their names, departments, age and experience, but their performance and potential appraisal record, character traits like stability, perseverance, self reliance, loyalty, leadership, etc., job motivations such as security, power, perfection, competitiveness, services, etc., degree of emotional immaturity-dependence, selfishness, and disregard of consequences and other aspects. There is a need to identify the employees belonging to each level in all the departments of the organization, as we need to satisfy the employees working within every division of the organization.

The organization requires satisfied and competent employees at all level. Identification of the employee-knowing each and every employee through and through- is vital for the health of any organization. It is followed by another vital function, which calls for taxing the grey cells and exercising creativity, by the HR team. For instance, in **ICICI Bank Ltd.** there is a system called the "Talent Pool" for spotting high performers. Employees who are a part of the talent pool enjoy various monetary and non-monetary benefits over and above those given to the other employees. Each employee and his immediate supervisor fill a simple performance appraisal form. A moderating committee made up of members of cross functional team's sits and takes a decision on performance bonuses and selecting employees to become a part of the talent pool. The score sheet is then returned to the immediate boss who then sits across with the appraised and shares the appraisal. Then the immediate supervisor discusses career options with the respondent. (See Exhibit-1)

Differentiating among Employees

Broadly speaking employees are different in two principal ways; they represent different levels of contribution/ value to the organization and they have different expectations/ needs. Once the organization identifies its valuable employees, differentiating them will help it to focus its efforts so as to gain the optimum advantage from its most valuable employees (See Exhibit-2).

By making a through assessment of employees' current performance and future potential using a variety of assessment techniques, they can be classified in a 2x2 **HR matrix** as presented below.

People Performance- Potential Matrix

- (i) **Stars** are individuals who have real potential for the future and are showing consistently high performance.
- (ii) **Work horses** are people who produce effectively; however, they have reached their level of competency and have no further scope of advancement.
- (iii) **Problem children** are individuals who have potential but are not performing well in their present role. This lot is the most challenging to deal with for the organization.
- (iv) **Dead wood** are employees who have no potential and are performing poorly as well.

The people performance- potential matrix gives the employers an ideal way of classifying their employee group for planning the investment decisions related to HR. The organization can then tailor its behaviour/ job offer to suit each employee's contribution. The degree and type of differentiation among employees can guide redefining the job offer and HR practices.

The critical component of individual employee oriented human resource practices is improving both cost efficiency and effectiveness. Cost efficiency is improved by assigning employees to those tasks which can make better utilization of their capabilities, as those lower in the hierarchy or less paid cannot do those tasks equally efficiently. Effectiveness improves by generating timely and relevant information, providing either better insight into an employee's expectations or a more accurate picture of an employee's contribution to the organization. There is a need to evaluate at regular intervals whether the individual employee attaches the same worth, if not more, to the various components of the job offer made to him by the organization. Is it the

right time to change the combination of the components? Is it that the employee has come to attach more value to a different set of components with the passage of time?

Every interaction with the employee should take place in the context of all previous interactions. A conversation should pick up where the last one left off, whether the previous interaction occurred with the line manager a week or fortnight back or with the HR manager last month. Another critical function of interaction is the need to develop close interpersonal rapport with each employee, recognizing their individual contributions and achievements and appreciating them(See Exhibit-3).

Customizing the Job Offer/ Employee's Expectations

Ultimately, to strengthen relationship with an employee, an organization must adapt some aspects of its job offer to meet the employee's individually expressed needs. This might mean redesigning the job or it could involve tailoring some aspect of the employee compensation plan. For example, at **Capital One and Microsoft**, employees choose from a variety of mix-and-match work environment options based on their individual needs and changing work tasks. In any case, the organization should be able to treat a particular employee differently based on what has been learned about the employee by the consultant, line manager or HR manager. The job offer must be molded as per the needs and requirements of the employee. (See Exhibit 4)

David Smith and Susan M. Cantrell in their book, "Workforce of One: Revolutionizing Talent Management Through Customization", discussed four workforce of one approaches after making a comprehensive study of more than 100 organizations. Each approach requires a different level of HR support as depicted in Table 1. They are built on the standards of flexibility rather than sameness which is what makes them controllable and manageable.

Table: 1

HR driven customization (More control; less customization)	Customized Approach	Human Resources
	Segment the workforce	Creates a variety of practices customized for specific groups of individuals
	Offer Modular Choice	Creates a variety of options from which all individual can choose.
	Define broad and simple rules	Creates a broad and simple rule with clear boundaries that can be interpreted in a variety of ways by each individual.
	Foster employee defined personalization	Support individuals in defining their own personalized people practices.
Employee driven customization (less control; more customization)		

Using the profiling of employees based on the **HR matrix** discussed earlier the above customization approaches can be matched with the relevant category to produce optimum benefits for both the employers and the employee.

Low Performance- Low Potential (Deadwood):

People who are currently performing below average and do not show any potential for the future are no more than a cost burden on the company's resources. The best strategy for such employees would be no investment and **planned exit**. Keeping such deadwood in your company not only jeopardizes its growth but also blocks the entry of fresh, young and more talented lot who have the potential to increase the organizational efficiency. Unless they can be reinducted or relocated to a more appropriate role, the deadwood employees are likely to remain a liability for the company in the future as well.

Low Performance- How Potential (Problem Children)

Employees who have a high degree of potential but are presently showing poor performance are the most controversial lot. These people have a lot of raw and unused competency but the current work profile is not utilizing their talent appropriately. They may be struck in boring, monotonous and mechanical jobs which are not tapping their innovation and creativity. Such a perpetual state not only breeds low performers but is likely to force such employees to move out of the organisation in search for greener pastures. Problem children need targeted and strategic investment and the most appropriate workforce for one approach in their case would be either **offering modular choices or broad and simple rules**. This group needs special emphasis with regard to job content factors which can make their work more challenging and interesting. Employers can offer modular choices in job content like: more authority, responsibility, and decision-making power, cross-training etc. for these employees or define broad and simple rules which ensure maximum autonomy and flexibility to them. Broad objectives in the form of strategy, value, time and money may be communicated to them, how they wish to achieve them should be left to them to decide. The second and third approaches to customization will ensure that they not only improve their current performance but continue delivering value to the organization for long.

High Performance- Low Potential (Work Horses)

Individuals who are currently delivering superior performance but do not have the required potential left to sustain for the future are termed work horses. This lot needs minimal investment by the organization to cash in their current performance. Since these employees have already reached their level of competency they require a short run customization approach rather than a strategic one. The **segmenting of workforce approach** works well for this category as they need a variety of attractive job context factors to keep them motivated for high performance. The workhorses can be clustered in distinct blocks based on their interests,

attitudes, performance, age and abilities. The employer can then offer each block a customized HR policy suiting their requirements, current needs and aspirations. Employees in this category need maximum motivation from factors like: salary, rewards, promotion, appreciation, work environment etc. which propels them to continue giving their best. Whatever cost the company incurs to keep them satisfied is recovered from the value they add to the organization with their high performance. Keeping this lot happy and satisfied through extrinsic motivation is important to harvest their current productivity.

High Performance- High Potential (Stars)

The rising stars of the organization, those who have immense potential for the future and are also contributing in a big way towards the present goals of the organization require a completely different and perhaps the most complex customization scheme. **Employee defined personalization** is the best bet in this case as these individuals have all the ingredients to become a strategic asset for the organization and need to be retained in the system by all means. The star employees can be given the freedom to define and create their own HR practices without any centrally defined limits, choices and policies. The system will give them a practically unlimited scope to define their work profiles, schedules and salaries based on what the internal employee market can bear. The ultimate objective is to keep these employees engaged and enable them to reach their full potential of development. This category requires maximum investment efforts by the organization and an enlargement of both the job content and context factors. The choice of customization rests with the employee however, the decision to implement the same lies with the organization. The company can exercise some degree of control by deciding which customization practices chosen by the employees to adopt and which to discard. However, the final decision should be one that balances star employees aspirations and the company's cost.

Each organization is different in its own way and based on its unique strategies, culture, employee base, and values a company can adopt either one, few or a combination of these workforce of one approaches.

Benefits for the Employer:

Although there are serious considerations such as cost involvement while going in for employee-oriented HR practices, even a very modest beginning- one that affects just one area, such as employee training, compensation, or job redesign can produce substantial benefits. Besides hinting at the value of a full-scale programme, often these short-term results are themselves enough to justify the funding and other support required for an incremental effort.

Increased skills and time utilization

With personnel costs soaring and employees seeking more challenging work assignments, we need to examine ways in which we can utilize staff capabilities fully. Three questions may be asked:

- ♦ Are employees spending their time appropriately?

- ♦ Could the work be reallocated to provide a more effective use of skills?
- ♦ Could jobs be re-designed?

The above questions can be addressed through analysis of activities performed. Data may be collected and analyzed in actual on-the-job activities by using work analysis techniques. Individual employee slack- time and skills that are not being appropriately applied- can be identified. If we can match the skills of the employee with the skills required, more precisely, we may utilize the higher talent individuals better on more demanding jobs, and motivate the employees by challenging them more fully.

Reduced employee attrition

One of the primary, and early, benefits of a one-to-one HR programme is that it generates increased loyalty among the employees. Try tracking attrition among employees exposed to one-to-one HR programme compared with a statistically identical control group not exposed to such initiative. The organization can save in terms of reduced costs of hiring and training.

Higher levels of employee satisfaction

A satisfied employee exhibits better performance and, more importantly, is likely to speak positive about the organization.

Effective utilization of benefits

Customized HR practices are basically oriented around the needs and expectations of an individual employee. Many a time, organizations offer certain benefits, which add little value to the employees’ expectations. One-to-one HR takes care of it and offers those benefits, which optimize for both- the individual and the organization.

The concept of Workforce of One requires high involvement and continuous attention and the company should ensure top management support to deal with different areas of concern. For any organization, implementing the concept of workforce of one involves creatively customizing its people practices in a strategic, thoughtful and proactive way which would transform its HR into a strategic powerhouse and position it to win in the long run.

In addition, the other significant benefits can be:

1. Increased value of the company’s employee base.
2. Organization knows about the potential of employees, specially key employees through using various HR instruments.

3. Regular review of employee performance, feedback and corrective action.
4. Improved ROI on different HR practices.
5. Helps organization prioritize HR plans and activities.
6. Minimizes the ratchet effect. Organizations’ dependence on external sources to meet its human resource shortage reduces and also keeps the organization slim and agile.

Benefits to the Employee

1. Job content is redesigned in harmony with the employee’s preferences and aptitude.
2. Employee is party to his career planning process.
3. Employees have clear idea about organization’s strategic plans.
4. Employees feel wanted.
5. Learning relationship is established with individual employees.
6. Employees know their specific contribution in the organization.

Conclusion

With the growing need for the employees to work smart, to maximize efficiency, to contribute meaningfully and for their self fulfillment, it is necessary to understand individual employees and tailor made HR practices to meet his singular needs.

The above four implementation steps overlap considerably. Nevertheless, they are roughly in order of increasing complexity and increasing benefit to both the organization and the employee. Identifying and differentiating employees, the first two steps, are largely internal analysis steps to be handled primarily by the HR department along with the line managers. Interacting with the employees and customizing job offers, however, are external action steps, visible even to other employees of the organization. From that perspective, the four steps can be used as a kind of general checklist to guide the organization’s efforts in implementing an employee oriented human resource programme. If the organization cannot identify the individual employees, there is no chance of differentiating among them and much less of adapting the job offer to meet individual employee’s needs and aspirations. Time is now appropriate to customize HR practices for optimum performance.

**Exhibit-1
Identifying the Employees**

Activity	Steps to be considered
Prepare a database of employee’s- HR inventory	Assign the work of data entry to someone in HR department
Collect additional information about your employee.	Collaborate with the supervisor and / or line manager
Update and verify employee data	Use HRIS

Exhibit-2
Differentiating Among Employees

The percentage can be decided by top management and may vary from the above figures.

Exhibit-3
Interacting with Employees

Activity	Steps to be considered
Pick any three of the top 10% employees of each department	Have conversation with them- make sure they are happy.
Keep in regular touch with valuable and good employees	Be ready to upgrade job offer. Compliment them on their achievements. Be in touch when they are not well. Wish them and their family members on special occasions like birthday, anniversary etc. Motivate the average performer.
Inform employees of facilities upgradation/ opportunities ahead.	Use newsletters, company mails, in-house communication tools. Minimize procedures/ paperwork to avail facilities.
Use technology to be in touch with your employees.	Have updated information about them on your laptop. Gather their e-mail address. Provide feed back regarding work related activities, incentives, etc. Also have alternative means of communication- Telephone no., address, etc.
Improve grievance handling procedure	Train your employees to handle employee grievances on the spot. Also, delegate authority to redress grievances. Note the no. of complaints you receive each day. Work to improve the ratio of complaints and those redressed instantaneously.
Have HR ambassadors	Assign individual members of HR staff to develop relationship with the employees in each particular department of the company.
Take the ambassador programme still further	Assign the HR man to a particular senior manager for educating, listening, counseling and guiding
Call to the organization and ask questions, evaluate the state of employee morale/ attitude.	Make 2 to 3 calls to different departments as a potential employee. Record and analyze them.
Build image of your organization among potential employees.	Use Search Professionals, Campus Placement Offices, Training Organization, etc. Inform them regularly about improvements, facilities offered growth plans, future prospects. Invite them to your organization.

Exhibit-4
Customizing the Job Offer