

Strategizing on Disability Inclusion- HR Perspective

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Abstract - In this VUCA world, talented employees are imperative for organizational success. Today, most organizations in India and abroad are embracing and weaving in diversity in their workforce for building and sustaining an inclusive culture. Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) form a vast pool of manpower resource which can become productive and be contributing members of society, with suitable training and support from the employer. Capitalizing on the untapped talent pool that the PwDs form will not only contribute towards societal development but will also make business sense by providing productive manpower resources which can be refined with suitable HR policies and practices.

This paper aims to discuss the business cases where some of the Indian organizations have adopted unique human resource management practices to successfully attract, engage, and retain PwDs in the workplace. This study maps the HR strategies adopted by these organizations in successfully attracting, engaging, and retaining PwDs and its impact on the overall organizational performance with the help of case-studies. Through this compendium an effort has been made to identify the catalyzing forces that have resulted in successful disability inclusion in these organizations.

Keywords- VUCA, Pwd

Introduction

“Employers have recognized for some time that it’s smart business to have a diverse workforce – one in which many views are represented and everyone’s talents are valued. Well, disability is part of diversity.” – Thomas Perez

India, being an epitome of diverse cultures, it is often observed that there is a naturally created diverse workforce in many Indian organizations. With the advent of globalization and digitalization, organizations have realized the importance of diversity and inclusion even more than what has been perceived before.

The term diversity is used to describe the composition of different work groups. Hays-Thomas and Bendick define it, as ‘the mixture of attributes within a workforce that in significant ways affect how people think, feel, and behave at work, and

their acceptance, work performance, satisfaction, or progress in the organization’.

It is well recognized today that diversity adds both tangible and intangible value to the business, even if it requires working through the issues and costs that sometimes accompany it. What we see today is that the discourse increasingly shifting from over and beyond that of diversity to that of inclusion. Empirical studies on organizational practices of inclusion are somewhat limited since inclusion has only recently entered the lexicon of popular discourse.

As per definition, inclusion is ‘the degree to which an employee is accepted and treated as an insider by others in a work system’. Inclusive workforce leads to improved business outcomes and such work-climates are linked to employee outcomes of well-being, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment. As per definition, inclusion is ‘the degree to which an employee is accepted and treated as an insider by others in a work system’.

The pairing of diversity and inclusion often leads to the misunderstanding that these are related and similar. It is argued that while diversity can be achieved by hiring different people in the organization, inclusion is the process that involves changing the mindset of all the employees in an organization.

Building a diverse and inclusive workforce requires a work culture where all employees feel fully engaged and able to fulfil their potential. Leadership and human resource practices both play critical roles in shaping an organization's work culture, and are therefore keys in making employers more inclusive of employees of all diversities and abilities.

It is estimated that about 7-8% of Indian population comprises of people with disabilities, but they form a very small portion (<1%) of workforce. This low level of inclusion attributes to myths around efforts and investment needed for effectively employing them and potential loss of productivity by appointing PwDs.

According to ‘WHO’, the term disability has a wide scope of coverage that includes impairments, activity limitations, and participation restrictions. Hence, disability drives challenges

in interaction between an individual and social/physical environment. Therefore, overcoming the difficulties faced by people with disabilities requires interventions to remove environmental and social barriers.

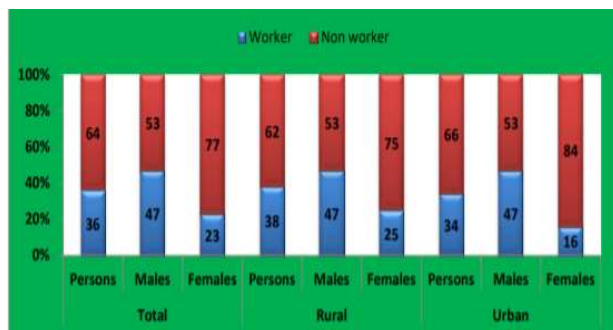
In India, a disabled person is perceived as someone who is dependent on charity and the assistance of others for survival. Disability is regarded as a culture rather than a condition where any person is stigmatized by the society who does not fit into what has culturally been defined as 'normal'. [Indian PwDs remain largely invisible to the rest of society](#) due to lack of accessibility or acceptability in public spaces—they can also be deliberately unseen as people avert their eyes.

Employing people with disabilities is still seen as an act of charity or mandated corporate social responsibility. Most Indian employers tend to believe that employing PwDs is not good for business economically. Thus, the key challenge in including people with disabilities in the 'mainstream' is changing people's perspective.

However, there are some exceptions and certain progressive firms have made considerable efforts to include differently abled people in their workforce. Over the years, these firms have included disability in their inclusion agenda but in most cases progress has been slow. And, irrespective of the commitments, hardly 0.5 % of PwDs are employed by companies in India. That said, the leaders of progressive work organizations and the well-informed, motivated HR specialist working there are actually making the difference.

In this colloquium, my attempt is to study and capture the inclusive measures taken up by different Indian organisations to include the differently abled people in the workforce and what are the roles of HRs in such organisations to foster an inclusive culture.

Distribution of disabled persons (in %) by work status in India - Census, 2011



Source: Persons with Disabilities (Divyangjan) in India - A Statistical Profile : 2021

Critical Review of the Policies and the Legislation process for Employment of Differently Abled in India

The fast-changing socio-economic scenario in the country and its impact on urbanization, industrialization and modernization of the economy have resulted in serious problems of over-crowding, increase in slum dwellers, unemployment, poverty, destitution etc. This has resulted in unemployment of most of the educated physically handicapped people. There are certain laws for protecting the interests of PwDs and their inclusion in employable group.

India being one among the signatories of The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol adopted on 13 December 2006 at the United Nations Headquarters in New York is obliged to organize, strengthen and extend comprehensive habilitation and rehabilitation services and programmes, particularly in the areas of health, employment, education and social services (Article 26). In 1997 the Government of India incorporated the National Handicapped Finance and Development Corporation (NHFDC) in order to help entrepreneurs with disabilities through financial assistance.

India enacted the **Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016** (the "New Act") and the rules there under (the "Rules") in 2017. The New Act replaced the Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunity Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995 (the 'previous Act'), which covered only seven disabilities. The New Act covers more than 15 disabilities including dwarfism, acid attack victims, intellectual disability and specific learning disability. It defines a 'person with disability' as someone with long term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairment which, in interaction with barriers, hinders his / her full and effective participation in society equally with others.

Under the New Act, persons with at least 40% of a disability (referred to as "persons with benchmark disability") are entitled to certain benefits like at least 4% of the total number of vacancies in Indian Government establishments are required to be reserved for their employment.

Although the private establishments in India are exempt from reserving jobs for persons with disabilities, the law makes it unlawful for an establishment to discriminate against a person on the ground of his or her disability unless it can be proved that the discriminating act in question is a proportionate means to a legitimate objective.

The New Act requires establishments to prepare and publish an Equal Opportunity Policy (the “EOP”) for persons with disabilities. A copy of the same is required to be registered with the State Commissioner or the Central Commissioner.

Besides the policies emphasizing on disability empowerment, Employment Exchanges under the National Employment Services as well as Special Employment Exchanges have been entrusted with the responsibility for the placement of persons with disabilities. These exchanges attempt to secure for the disabled the most satisfying form of employment suitable to their residual physical and mental potentialities

Literature Review

Governments of India and worldwide are trying to promote the employment of differently abled people by motivating workforce participation and reducing discriminatory tendencies.

While the passage of recent welfare and antidiscrimination laws has stimulated a great deal of research in legal studies, sociology, economics, and rehabilitation psychology, the impact on business and industrial and organizational psychology studies has been inconspicuous (Colella & Bruyère, 2011). This is especially true regarding the internal psychological states of PwD, such as perceived self-efficacy, and integration into the workplace. Colella and Bruyère (2011) summarized the current disability research into three broad categories: accommodation, selection, and integration. They noted, while research on the first two categories was abundant, relatively less research has focused on integration, or the process after PwD are recruited into the workplace.

Most of the workplace inclusion research has focused on retention practices and how such practices may influence the hiring of those with a disability (Habeck et al., 2010) or on the communication of organizational disability-specific engagement to stakeholders through annual reports (Kulkarni and Rodrigues, 2014) but not on true sense of inclusion in the workforce.

For workplace inclusion of persons with disabilities, beliefs and activities of the employer plays a vital role. Most of the extant research indicates that employers do not hire and retain persons with disabilities. This is a direct consequence of their beliefs. For example, erroneous beliefs about employees' reduced job performance, inaccurate knowledge about accommodations, concerns about legal liability, and beliefs about expenses associated with accommodations influence organizational access and treatment of persons with a disability (Houtenville and Kalargyrou, 2012; Kaye et al., 2011; Lengnick-Hall et al., 2008). For example, in a study

conducted with 21 administrators from three business sectors (i.e. healthcare, hospitality, and retail), Hernandez et al. (2008) noted that managers were concerned that supervisory time spent on employees with a disability would be high and productivity would suffer given possible absenteeism issues. Respondents in this study further noted that advancement was perceived as a problem as persons with a disability were hired in entry-level and semi-skilled positions and promotion opportunities for them were scarce. Furthermore, in a meta-analysis, Ren et al. (2008) found negative effects of disability on performance expectations and hiring decisions. Thus, overall, employers' expectations and beliefs can negatively influence the workplace treatment of persons with a disability (Stone and Colella, 1996).

Social integration is suboptimal when inclusion activities are unclear or laid out in an ad hoc manner as the workforce slowly becomes diverse (Kulkarni and Lengnick-Hall, 2011). Other activities such as not having in place role models or mentors and lack of critical feedback limit the career advancement of people with disabilities (Jones, 1997). In contrast, supportive policies and associated tangible activities can reverse the aforesaid suboptimal inclusion. For example, employer tax credits and incentives, flexible work schedules, and disability awareness training can lead to more organizational inclusion for persons with a disability (Houtenville and Kalargyrou, 2012).

The human resource systems framework (Arthur and Boyles, 2007) and the seminal disability-specific framework, which outlines how those with a disability may be treated within workplaces (Stone and Colella, 1996). The human resource systems framework (Arthur and Boyles, 2007) allows us to outline human resource principles (e.g. beliefs) and programs (e.g. sets of formal human resource activities) of employers across India. The disability-specific framework (Stone and Colella, 1996) also highlights the importance of such human resource systems because these principles and activities are directly relevant to how employees with a disability are treated within an organization. As an example, research shows that when the perception of a just organizational climate is high (i.e. when employees sense fairness and equity within the workplace), negative responses (e.g. turnover intention, low job satisfaction, low organizational loyalty) are tempered (Schur et al., 2009).

In a survey of Fortune 500 companies, McFarlin et al. (1991) found that employer attitudes are positive with respect to turnover, absenteeism, and performance. Furthermore, those with exposure to employees with a disability espouse more positive attitudes. Other research also indicates that employers describe persons with disabilities as loyal and hardworking

workers who have low absenteeism rates and long tenures (Hernandez et al., 2008).

While the World Health Organization (WHO, 2011) shows that employment rates vary across countries, “the bottom line is that, all over the world, a person with a disability is less likely to be employed than a person without a disability, often much less so” (Heymann, Stein, & de Elvira Moreno, 2014). Even when employed, workers with disabilities are more likely than their counterparts without disabilities to report underemployment, involuntary part-time or contingent employment, and lower than average salaries (Brault, 2012; Konrad, Moore, Ng, Doherty, & Breward, 2013; Baldrige, Beatty, Konrad, & Moore, 2016).

A primary reason for the lower participation rates and underemployment of individuals with disabilities is that employers often harbor pessimistic views about the work-related abilities of these individuals which have been well-documented in the literature (e.g., Gold, Oire, Fabian, & Wewiorksi, 2012; Hernandez et al., 2008; Kaye, Jans, & Jones, 2011; Lengnick-Hall, Gaunt, & Kulkarni, 2008).

However, it should be noted that employers who have already employed PwD are more likely to decide to hire people from this group. Similarly, co-workers who have people with disabilities in their families or among friends are more open and more willing to accept them in the workplace (Kwiatkowska-Ciotucha D., Załuska U., Grześkowiak A, 2020). It differs in the case of able-bodied people without prior personal contact with PwD, the key role in gaining knowledge about disability is played by popular culture texts in the press, radio, television, books etc. Unfortunately, the message that they convey does not show PwD in a favourable light. (Jeffress M.S., 2019).

Overall, while employers acknowledge the importance of positive attitudes and beliefs (McFarlin et al., 1991; Moore et al., 2010) and activities such as awareness building to increase workplace participation of persons with a disability (Kaye et al., 2011), we do not know what employers actually do toward achieving that goal. The outcome of such a situation is that persons with a disability do not always experience optimal workplace inclusion and must make efforts on their own to advance their careers (Kulkarni and Gopakumar, 2014).

With regard to beliefs, organizations should be keen to foster positive diversity mind-sets or climates throughout the organization (Nishii, 2013; Shore et al., 2011). In the case of disability, top management support can help overcome widespread stereotypes and negative attitudes held by stakeholders, such as colleagues and supervisors (Bruyère et al., 2003; Schur et al., 2005). It is plausible that large and

resource-rich organizations are relatively more likely to engage in inclusion efforts (Houtenville and Kalargyrou, 2012).

The current literature on disability and employment from India shows that PwDs have lower employment rates compared to the general population. In 2002, among all the working age PwDs (15–64 years) in India, 37.6% were employed with significant variations among sub-groups (Mitra S, Sambamoorthi S, 2006). The 2001 Census of India showed that more than a third of the males with disability and more than two-third of women with disability aged 15 to 59 years were found to be non-workers (not economically productive) as against 19% of males and 60% of females among the general population. Similar results were also observed by the National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO) Survey (2002), which estimated that only 25% of the disabled population was employed. Gender comparison showed that 36% of males compared to 10% of females with disability were employed and these differences were statistically significant.

The employment prospects for women with disability are even more of a challenge compared to men with disability. (Pawłowska-Cypriasiak K, Konarska M. 2013) The World Health Organization (WHO) observed that employment rates were lower for men with disability (53%) compared to men without a disability (65%) and similarly rates for women with disability (20%) compared to women without a disability (30%).

The National Centre for Promotion of Employment for Disabled People (NCPEDP) reported that the average percentage of employment of persons with disabilities in India was 0.54% in the public sector, 0.28% in the private sector, and 0.05% in multinational companies. For a country like India which is a growing economy, the low rate of employment of persons with disability will be a critical determinant of growth. (Benshoff L, Barrera M, Heymann J. 2014).

The Government of India has enacted laws that support the employment of PwD. The PwD Act, 1995 spells out responsibilities of the government at all the levels including establishments under its control. The Act also provides employment incentives for public and private sector companies that have at least 5% of their workforce comprising of PwD (Persons S, 2011).

Many people with disabilities want to work, but face employment barriers that have resulted in dismal employment rates. Successfully employed persons with disabilities have valuable experience that can help others seeking employment

(Jans LH, Kaye HS, Jones EC, 2012) a paucity of such evidence in India about the barriers and facilitators of employment for PwD in different industries.

Disability is presented as a constant struggle with adversities/handicap (with focus on “heroism”) or something that excludes people from society and makes them dependent on others (“weakness”). The image of a person with disability living a “normal” life, without prejudice or unnecessary overtones, is rare to see. Depicting PwD in such a way fosters social dislike towards this group, and it is the positive attitude of employers and able-bodied co-workers that is essential for a successful adaptation process for people with disabilities in the workplace. (Chan F, Strauser D, Gervy R, Lee EJ., 2010)

In Indian context, state owned organizations such as NTPC, BPCL, BEL, HAL and State bank of India recruit people with disabilities to a large extent. As on 2015, the prominent public sector employers are State Bank of India followed by Punjab National Bank, BHEL, BPCL and ONGC (Shenoy, 2011). With regards to the private sector, many organizations have realized the importance of employing Persons with disabilities in their workforce. They are flexible, cheerful, responsible and grateful to their employers (Rose, 1999). Inclusion of disabilities has been considered as a new source of value for the organisations to retain employee and this practice portray a positive public image too (Friedner, 2013). Employers have expressed generally favourable attitudes regarding the ability of the PwD to perform productive work (Levy et al. 1992). PwD have accomplished extraordinary tasks despite of their disability and even positively influence co-workers (Gustafsson et al.2013).

Public-Private Partnership ventures such as NSDC and Center for Persons with disabilities livelihood (CPDL) has tie-ups with provide employment opportunities for people with disabilities (DEOC, 2009). Apart from the initiatives from Government, private employers, public-private partnership firms, NGO’s, there are industry associations such as NASSCOM and CII who are also working towards generating employment of Persons with disabilities (DEOC, 2009).

Research Objective

To understand how Human Resource professionals across different organizations in India have developed disability management practices in order to increase workplace inclusion of differently abled people

Research Methodology

An exploratory research approach has been adapted to study the initiatives taken by 10 selected organizations of India for including differently abled people in their workforce. These

organizations have been selected based on their effort to promote disability inclusion and HR practices prevalent for differently abled employees in these organizations. The research objectives have been explored with varying levels of depth since this is an initial research, which will form the basis of more conclusive and definitive research.

It is generally difficult to formulate a formal hypothesis in exploratory study, since the aim of the analysis is to more thoroughly explore the research goals in order to establish some concrete hypothesis or assumption that can be used for future studies. This paper aims to find out patterns, ideas, theories and practices rather than validating the hypothesis by understanding the present HR practices across organizations that have successfully adopted an inclusive approach for the differently abled people.

The purpose of data collection is to gain insight into the research question by investigating and understanding the phenomenon. Qualitative approach of data collection has been planned though the analysis of the available secondary data from various reports published by reputed organizations like WHO, ILO, BCG, American Indian Foundation, JP Morgan, KPMG, Oxfam etc.

In addition to these sources, data from the census, articles published on blogs, online edition of newspapers, research papers published in authoritative foreign journals are the other sources from which secondary data are obtained relating to various PwD job stakeholders viz. employers, NGOs, industry associations and Govt. Institutions Findings and Discussions:

Case 1: Lemon Tree Hotels

Lemon Tree started its operation in 2002. Employing differently abled people in the organization began on 2007 and emerged as a winner of the prestigious Shell Helen Keller Award in 2010 for policies, practices and belief in equal rights and employment for persons with disabilities. 12-13% of their employees are PwDs as per recent reports. Lemon Tree has been awarded as the Best Employer for the Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities” by the Ministry of Social Justice And Empowerment in 2011. The company started with Speech and Hearing Impaired employees for back office roles, however now their workforce includes people with disabilities like SHI’s (Deaf), Physically Handicapped (Orthopaedically Handicapped), Visually Impaired (Low Vision-Partially Blind), Intellectual Disability (Down Syndrome, Slow Learner, Mild MR, IDD) and Autism as well as Acid Attack survivors.

Their HR initiatives comprise of “job mapping” where hiring guidelines are different for different disabilities. The HR department of the company has successfully designed

inclusion in such a way that the disability becomes irrelevant and does not stop the employee from performing that role. They have incorporated small practical solutions such as PwD cards, numbered menu items, emergency whistles with the dual purpose to sensitize the guests and make processes simpler for the disabled employees.

Training initiatives include 40% classroom training and 60% on the job training. The Training department has created the company's own unique exhaustive Indian Sign Language (ISL) dictionary which has won a national award.

The employees without disability are also intensively trained to learn the skill of communicating with disabled people in a manner that the disability becomes irrelevant. No employee is given job confirmation unless he or she passes the Indian Sign Language course/certification. It is also important to sensitize the entire staff as per HR policy of the company.

As per the HR department of the company, the single agenda of the Human Resource Department is to make people Happy and People with Disability are often more motivated than their counterparts and thus increase the happiness quotient at the workplace.

Case 2: Wipro

Wipro, one of the country's leading IT services companies has an inclusive recruitment policy that encourages selection based on merit and believes that persons with disability could aspire for any of these positions. The HR practices of the company are aligned to support the differently abled people in different aspects of infrastructure, training, and sensitization.

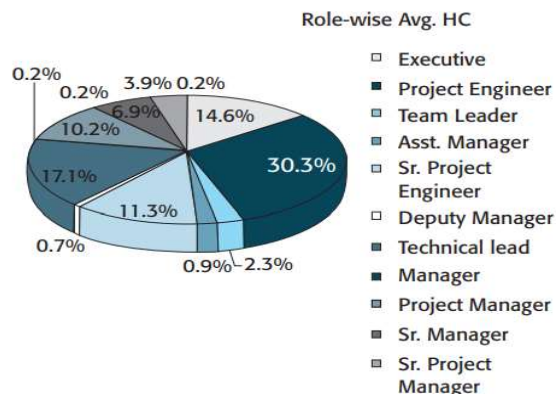
Wipro has a membership in Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), the National Association of Software and Services Companies (NASSCOM), and International Labour Organization (ILO). It regularly run job fairs with CII and NGOs, such as Sarthak, Ability Foundation, and Enable India, to help differently abled people with a platform to find job opportunities, beside organizing inclusive campus hiring with JSS, Dr Ambedkar Institute of Technology For Handicapped (AITH), and National Institute of Speech and Hearing (NISH).

The HR department have designed Interviewer Certification Programme which prepares interviewers to be inclusive. Provisions have also been made for self-identification form in which disabled employees could indicate any accessibility issue or accommodation requirement at the time of joining. Battery-operated vehicles have been procured for people with disabilities to travel within the campuses of the company.

Other HR initiatives include Wipro Kinesics website, That has been developed to create a communicative environment

between hearing and hearing-disabled employees in Wipro. The tool has sections on Wipro terminologies, detailed dictionary, conversation, and sign language basics. Wipro Kinesics brings to prominence the need for communication to be barrier-free and for such communication at work to include categories like speech and hearing impairment. There is also 'Winclusive', which is a vibrant community of employees with disabilities that discusses the applicants' accessibility. Apart, from this to create a disability inclusive work environment, managers and leaders are trained in sign language.

HR practices involve a PwD engagement calendar through which town halls, panel discussions, rewards and recognitions, feedback sessions are regularly planned and organized with managers of disabled employees.



Share of Different Roles for PwDs in Wipro

Case 3: KFC India

KFC India, then known as Yum! India opened the division's first specially-abled restaurant in 2008 and has since expanded to many hearing-impaired stores across the country. They employ speech or hearing - impaired people in higher designations as well like as shift- managers and Assistant Restaurant Manager. Their HR initiatives are aligned with their management practices which believes in giving back to the society.

It also invested in the project the KFC Academy (formerly known as Yum! Academy) to develop the right skill sets that can enhance employability of the disabled people not only with KFC, but also across the retail sector. The idea behind this noble cause was to go upstream and make the hearing and speech impaired youth employable. A fully sponsored programme for about 11 weeks teaches the deaf youth English and critical skills (English communication, realistic job preview, food safety, industry familiarization, life skills and grooming) for employment in the retail and hospitality sector.

In 2013, the company received the Presidential award from the former President Pranab Mukherjee for their outstanding performance for employing people with disabilities, and has also bagged a 2014 Economic Times Retail Award for its focus on employee diversity.

The HR policies ensure that the salaries of differently abled employees are at par with the normal employees of the organization.

Their specially-abled restaurant programs are driven by a 360-degree approach tailored by their HR fraternity to develop specially-abled team members with a focus on hiring, training and creating an enabling work environment and this has led to the success of these programs.

Case 4: Vodafone India

Making its entry into India in 2007, Vodafone today has built an ever growing and robust business in telecommunication sector. Their HR policies and practices ensure inclusion in true sense focusing on building a diversified workforce.

For working with differently abled, they have introduced the “Project Drishti”. To hire visually impaired associates for the call centre in Mumbai the company tied up with the National Association of Blind (NAB). These associates are supported by organizing specific training and converting the collaterals in Braille. They are also provided with infrastructure support in form of Braille-enabled phone and so on.

The core objective of this HR initiative is to create a win-win between the business goals and critical social cause by generating skill sets and earning opportunity amongst the differently abled people, and helping them become self-dependent.

Vodafone India has found that the productivity of differently abled people is higher than the others; they possess higher conviction and convincing power, are generally polite and persuasive, and their commitment is noticeably higher. Thus, Vodafone has approached NAB for the tie-up to start with this unique project called ‘Drishti’ and it has now spread in other circles across the country as well.

Case 5: Schneider Electric

Schneider Electric which offers integrated energy solutions across multiple market segments across the globe, exercises continuous effort to identify, engage, develop, and retain high potential diversity employees.

An area that the HR department have actively addressed at Schneider Electric India’s R&D centre has been the inclusion of persons with disabilities (PwDs). They have realized the managers were often not very aware of how the campus

supports or challenges the visually impaired employees. In order to help sensitize managers to the needs of these employees, a ‘Blind Walk’ was organized where several senior leaders were taken to the 8th floor of the building blind-folded, and then were asked to make their way down to the Ground Floor cafeteria on their own unassisted. This would have taken them less than 10 minutes in normal circumstances but as they had to walk like this, it took an excruciating 40 minutes for most of them. At the end of the experience, they were visibly moved by the challenges they had to encounter and as a result, could empathize deeply with their visually impaired team members. This also resulted in undertaking certain decisions to enhance accessibility in the building.

A similar exercise was also conducted for the Global HR Tools team to help them understand which tools are accessible for visually impaired employees and which ones need improvement.

The HR department also organized a ‘Demo Hour’ to help dispel the myths around the differently abled and their ability to contribute. Such initiatives and experiences have helped managers and other employees at Schneider to open their minds greatly to the differently abled people.

Case 6: ITC

ITC, a popular brand in India has pioneered in the hospitality industry with their premium brand of ITC Hotels.

In 2004-05, when ITC started working under the triple bottom line accounting framework, the organization was sensitized to the needs of the PwDs, and began taking steps towards offering them employment wherever possible.

PWD HR practices in ITC support disabilities like orthopaedic impairment, hearing impairment, visual impairment and cerebral palsy. The HR initiatives included modifications in infrastructure so that workstations are accessible for differently abled people and whistles were given to hearing impaired people to raise alarm in case of any emergency. The staffs are trained in sign language to enable communication with hearing-impaired colleagues and the company has also brought out several manuals for having an inclusive workforce.

Committed to their organizational principle that everyone should be treated with sensitivity and empathy, ITC-Wellcome group has created models which have been effective and have succeeded in sensitizing other employees to the needs of those differently abled.

For this substantial contribution to the cause of promoting employment opportunities for the differently abled people

over an extended period of time, the NCPEDP Shell Helen Keller Award was conferred on ITC-Welcome group.

HR policy of ITC links the Managers key performance indicators to the number of disabled they hire. This has contributed to success of ITC's effort of disability inclusion and resulted in making all new ITC hotels disabled friendly.

Case 7: SBI

State Bank of India, the largest bank of India started its disability inclusion with government's reservation mandate of 3 % of hiring for the disabled. Now it has turned into one of the largest employers of those with disabilities and has taken the lead to set up a Centre of Excellence (CoE) for training employees with disability in Bengaluru to support banks & other public sector units with their learnings.

The HR initiatives for disability inclusion are identifying suitable posts that can be assigned to youths with disabilities, developing appropriate in-house training for PwDs and relevant sensitization training for managers and supervisors.

SBI is willing and able to meet the PwDs preference with regard to their place of posting, since they have over 23,000 branches and even the transfer policy of every three years can be complied with without too much difficulty. If a PwD is required to travel for training purposes and is unable to do so alone, the bank bears the travel cost of a family member who may accompany him/ her for the same.

The HR policy of the bank allows extra time to PwD for the writing of the promotion exam depending on the requirement. All these measures have resulted in promotions being earned by PwD within the bank up to the AGM level even in operations, thus facilitating their career development.

In the training front, training centres are being made accessible for the PwDs, and specialist NGOs are also engaged to share their expertise over the best way to select and successfully place autistic individuals.

Case 8: Vindhya E Infomedia

Located at Bangalore, Vindhya E Infomedia is a business process outsourcing company which deals with data management, data entry, data processing, data conversion works. This company is different from others due to the fact that PwDs comprises 75% of its workforce. The HR initiatives include 'Refresher training programs' conducted for fresh hires as well as existing employees where employees with disabilities are trained to utilize specific software and correspond in English language.

Another significant initiative from HR perspective for disability inclusion is making the sign language as the official

language at Vindhya to eliminate communication barrier. Thus, all stuffs are trained in sign language. The entire training handbook is made in simple English with illustrative photographs to demonstrate the process which is mandatory for the employees at job. A screen reading software is deployed with every computer which helps the disabled employees to independently use a computer with keyboard, speech or Braille display.

Initially, when the HR department was small, the sources of recruitment were from NGO's who use to train the persons with disabilities candidates and prepare for the interviews, but later on various camps have been established in Tier II cities to build awareness about the employment avenues and recruitment process being conducted. According to the HR department, Employee referral program has proved to be the best source of recruitment.

Though as per NASSCOM report, the attrition rate in the business processing outsourcing industry is 30 to 40 percent but in case of Vindhya it is significantly low (5 to 8 %). The company believes disability inclusion impacts the business positivity as the differently abled people exhibit lower tendency of leaving the company. The clients are happy due to the low turnaround time (TAT) due to the high level of efficiency displayed the differently abled employees. Even the attitude of the employees is very positive that makes them a super achiever. This company has won the prestigious recognition "Shell – Helen Keller Award" for the employment of Persons with disabilities.

Case 9: Titan Company

Titan Company Limited, a joint venture between the TATA Group and the Tamil Nadu Industrial Development Corporation (TIDCO), is one of the earliest employers of disabled people.

Titan's unique recruitment strategy guided by its HR policy and practices meant to combine the countryside in search of capable candidates aged between 18 and 24. Appropriate selection procedures have been adopted, depending on the nature and category of the disability. The HR department of the company also organizes counselling sessions with the families, to make the transition into the factory smooth.

HR department of Titan uses the outreach programme to identify people with disabilities from lower socio-economic strata in communities close to its operations in Tamil Nadu, provides them with employment opportunities. Typically, jobs that involve tasks with low levels of body risk, minimum physical movement or verbal communication. Physically impaired persons are trained to polish watchcases and assemble components, the hearing-impaired people help strap

watch heads, and the visually challenged find a place in the company's packaging and dispatch division. Titan is also committed to providing employment opportunities for people with disability at the retail end. Watches, Jewellery and Eyewear divisions have started recruiting PwDs in customer service roles and as cashiers in retail outlets. Business associates and franchisees spread over 200 towns across the country are also coming forward to employ PwDs in their retail stores. To support skilling, education and employability, Titan has partnered with several NGOs, including Enable India, V-Shesh and SERP (Wadhvani foundation). Technical training and computer literacy is one of the programmes under this initiative.

Common work areas and fortnightly meetings have sensitized the company about issues concerning the disabled and their families. Supervisors who communicate with the hearing-impaired employees are trained in sign language. The company has reached such a level of inclusion that today, it's nearly impossible in the strapping department, to distinguish the hearing impaired from the others, as everyone uses sign language. These HR practices has fostered an inclusive environment for the differently able within the company.

Case 10: Big Bazaar

Big Bazaar, one of the largest retail store in India , realized early on that PwD-enabling physical infrastructure was the easier thing to do, but overcoming the cultural stigma associated with disability needed more work. The project they undertook was internally code named as "Sabke Liye" to drive home the point that Big Bazaar stood for inclusivity and dignity for all shoppers and employees.

To help newly hired PwDs assimilate smoothly into the rigorous work environment of a retail organization, Big Bazaar has created a Buddy System. This support system allocates a person who has been specifically trained to take care of a PwD employee from a physical and mental support level. A buddy is the go-to person within the organization in case of any requirements that the PwD might have.

The HR department designed a generous leave policy for the PwD employees in seeking medical treatment, or therapy lasting from a few days to months. Empathetic Training has been at the heart of the Big Bazaar way of making PwDs feel included. The emphasis has always been to avoid sympathy and deliver empathy. Every employee is sensitized and conscious that PwDs need respect and to be treated equally. It is reiterated and reinforced in every training session that new and existing employees undergo under the Avesha (Empowerment) training.

Big Bazaar's HR Department is closely connected with various NGOs that work with PwDs. These NGOs become the recruitment pools from which Big Bazaar hires. Any PwD having cleared Class 12 examinations can apply to Big Bazaar for retail positions. They are invited to Big Bazaar stores to take a site tour in order to clearly understand the work environment before they accept any job offers that may be made. During the interview process, it is mandatory for interviewers of PwDs to not ask anything questioning the person's ability to do a particular job. When the candidate has been found to be suitable in all other respects, the interviewer informs the person of the profile, and asks if he or she would like to take up the offer. HR at Big Bazaar strongly believes that this is the best way to get acceptance.

The organization is proud of the higher productivity levels and a lower margin of error in most of the activities assigned to PwDs. The emphasis of the HR department has been to create pathways for PwDs to rise as much as possible based on merit and a supportive environment.

Band 1	Physical Disability		Speech & Hearing Impaired		Vision Impaired	
	Mild	Severe	Mild	Severe	Mild	Severe
Profile						
Cashier	*	*	*			
Warehouse	*	*	*			
CSD	*	*	*			
TM Replenisher						
* Fashion	*		*	*	*	
* Food	*		*	*		
* GM	*		*	*	*	
Mild Disability - It is an impairment of cognitive skills, adaptive life skills, social skills and low IQ skills.						
Severe Disability - It is a physical or mental impairment which seriously limits one or more functional capabilities such as mobility, communication, self-care, self-direction, interpersonal skills and work skills.						
Source: Big Bazaar/Future Group						

Disability Type Based Work Option Grid in Big Bazaar

Analysis

Leadership style plays a very important role as a driver of disability inclusion and its sponsorship is critical in underlining the importance of the inclusion at all levels, providing an unambiguous guidepost. In addition to this, the HR department also plays a key role in including differently abled in the organizational workforce as these are the people who take complete responsibility of recruiting, on-boarding and settling the PwDs in the organization.

Based on the case discussions, I will try to analyze the role of HR and the HR practices that has helped in building an inclusive environment for the differently abled people in these Indian organizations. In order to build an inclusive and conducive environment for PwDs, organizations need to

consider their specific needs, preferences and motivational factors, and design suitable HR practices to attract them.

Analyzing the findings of business cases of the organizations, who did commendable jobs in employing the differently abled, I have tried to identify the key factors responsible for catalyzing the disability inclusion in these organizations.

1. **Equal Opportunity Policy for the PwDs** : These organisations who have successfully included and retained differently abled people usually have a Equal Opportunity Policy for the PwDs in some form. This provides them with a set of standards and the guidelines to develop an equal opportunity environment and provide a guidance framework to adopt inclusion practices at workplace.
2. **Creating Disability Inclusive Environment**: Raising awareness and challenging the negative attitudes are some the important tasks taken up by the HR department of these organisations. They have successfully created the right organisational climate for disability inclusion and inclusivity has become a part of their organizational culture and DNA.
3. **Sensitization programs**: Sensitization programs are critical for building a suitable workplace. As can be seen in the cases, HR managers often arrange workshops, presentations and seminars to sensitise the fellow abled employees and managers about the inclusive employment practices. The programs include demonstrating videos and profiles of the differently abled people successfully working at the organisations so that they can learn to empathise instead of sympathising.
4. **Eliminating Communication Barriers**: Most of these organisations have introduced Sign Language as a part of their training program to eliminate the communication barriers between the abled and disable employees.
5. **Workplace adaptations**: These organisations have adopted required infrastructural changes to extend the required support for the disabled employees like introducing Brails and use of whistles. In addition to physical infrastructure and modifications, these organisations have also ensured that PwDs can voice their concerns easily, without the fear of any type through explicit communication channels.
6. **Specialized recruitment and training**: Recruiting processes adopted by these companies for recruiting the differently abled are slightly specialized approach as they look for the potential ability to deliver. Most of the times as can be seen in the cases, the organisations tied up with the NGOs for recruiting

the right candidates. Companies also arrange for extensive trainings depending on the type of disability involved.

Conclusion

The business cases that have been considered for our study tell that some of the Indian organizations are recognizing the importance and embracing the Disability-Inclusion Agenda and there is no doubt that the HR policies and practices play a pivotal role in this regard.

The findings indicate that these organizations followed the three broad HR practices : first, harnessing diversity (viewing disabled employees as a critical resource and as a talent pool); second, multi-stakeholder engagement (involving both the top management team as well as the HR department to increase disability inclusion efforts); and finally, engagement with the external ecosystem (using the help available in their ecosystem such as NGOs to build internal human resource capabilities).

After analyzing the findings from the case studies, it can be concluded that despite of fear of social stigma and perception about the competency level of employees with disabilities, these organizations established a benchmark in employing these persons. Discussions on the findings indicate that focus on human resource activities build an important foundation for inclusion of the differently abled persons.

Recommendations

To accelerate the inclusion movement, it is recommended for the organizations to seed-in HR professionals as the diversity-leaders who can champion inclusion within their work environment. The key would be to equip and build capacities of the existing workforce to have an inclusive mindset through learning & training.

The progressive firms thinking of embarking on the journey of disability inclusion should implement disability-friendly human resource systems to unleash employees' full working potential. The Human Resource policies and practices should concretely design inclusive activities, anchored in beliefs systems, organizations should strive for disability-inclusive rather than disability-specific human resource systems. In other words, human resource beliefs and activities should fulfil the needs of all employee groups, including those with special needs such as employees with disabilities.

Offerings such as job flexibility provisions and integration programs are important pillars of social inclusion and should be complemented by barrier-free recruiting, fair performance

appraisal and promotion systems, and access to training for all employee groups including the differently abled employees. By doing so, ability-inclusive human resource systems are likely to foster positive diversity perceptions within the whole organization, enabling productivity and well-being for disabled employees and contributing to organizational performance in the long run.

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