

Mastering Management



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The best HR practice: how to follow

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BIPLOB Banerjee, an Indian consultant, boasts a career in various HR roles that gave him both national and international exposure. He worked for Pepsico, GE and Nokia Siemens Networks in areas of talent management, culture building, compensation and benefit, engagement and retention, and leadership development.

A man with more than 18 years of experience in different fields, Banerjee also served Reuters as head of HR for Southeast Asia, Anandabazar Patrika Group as vice-president for HR and Dainik Bhaskar as chief human resources officer.

He has a degree in mechanical engineering and specialised in human resources from XLRI, Jamshedpur in India. Currently, he is dealing with some Indian and multinational companies as a consultant. He is also associated with Indian Institute of Management.

Banerjee is expected to take part in an international HR Summit in Dhaka as a keynote speaker next Saturday. He has recently shared his views with The Daily Star on the strategies of talent development, importance and challenges of best HR practice in media industry in an email interview.

What challenges do companies face in HR practices?

In my view, the main challenge is to have a clear understanding on how human resources can help build businesses successfully beyond the personnel and recruitment domain. In most cases of good HR practices, promoters or entrepreneurs are asked to show the Return on Investment (RoI).

After achieving some sort of moderate fame, entrepreneurs lose their focus on the employees. Plenty of such stories could be found in India where from medium to large conglomerates lose their achievements after reaching great heights due to ethical issues or to maintain the image of so-called "Lala Culture".

In Lala Culture, professionals avoid the process of human capital development. Only a certain kind of people thrive, and for which, in the long run, the participating companies start losing the edge in terms of ROI, profitability, brand and good governance.

If we go through the recent telecom scam, before that the Satyam scam, or the sheer vanishing of some great institutions in the early



Biplob Banerjee

days such as GKW, Metal Box, all point out to two things: poor people and business leadership.

What's your observation on HR practices in Bangladesh?

I am yet to closely watch Bangladesh's HR practices to comment, but as far as evolution of HR practices is concerned I guess most countries undergo three phases: A) early entrepreneurial zeal and great early promise, B) difficult second phase of putting professionalism in place in terms of structure, culture, people practice and tools to reach a potential winning proposition, and C) the final phase of global presence in terms of a few practices and a niche market outside the immediate boundary.

What strategy a country like Bangladesh should pursue to develop its talent pool?

One significant requirement for appropriate talent development in any country is mixing the local cultural ethos with global best practices. For this, the challenge remains in the depth of entrepreneur's vision, experiment with outside talent and cultural and philosophical tolerance, and overall economic liberalisation. For example, Manmohan Singh's policies in 1991 opened a window of opportunities for many young entrepreneurs in India.

The economic liberalisation led the young entrepreneurs to create a number of successful

business ventures such as 'Make My Trip', 'Subex' and 'PVR Multiplexes' in India. The Volvo Bus Service from Kolkata to Shiliguri alone attracted a couple of dozens of small entrepreneurs. These talents just grabbed the opportunity and played with utmost risk to groom other talents. So, a mix of government and environmental factors are critical for talent development.

What are the areas corporate Bangladesh needs to focus on to improve human resources?

I have seen a simple model that works wonderfully - PIE that is Performance, Image and Exposure. I guess all the three elements need to be pushed with a balance on local culture and complexities. So it means local promoters should allow expatriates to work for some time and drive some time-bound projects. They need to send own resources regularly to expatriate projects outside Bangladesh, and finally they should attend some events in and outside of Bangladesh to experience some great success stories. "I change because I have seen it works, and I believe it will work here also" should be the motto.

Describe the key issues of people management and capacity development in Bangladesh perspective.

The key issues in people management would be clarity of knowledge and perspective, taking risk with a long-term horizon, tolerance of pain

and a vision to take the nation to next level. Bangladesh's history is a good teacher in this regard because the great freedom fighters of the country sacrificed their lives to give what today the young generation is enjoying.

Finally, values of entrepreneurs are keys to people management, as they especially balance greed with sacrifice. Many good organisations stumble because of greed and ego, not for money. Capacity development could be a little bit easier if the government and the private sector work together.

Why should the media industry focus on best HR practices?

I have seen here in India that all good media houses have some unique HR practices, which, I think, is the contribution of some chief editors or promoters with vast and magnanimous hearts. However, the challenge is the next generation as most of them neither believe in their parent's values nor follow a good acceptable alternative because of their foreign or some obscure education.

As a result, many second or third generation media promoters now suffer in a few specific areas like passion and some other core values. The Statesman is a live case. Another area where many media companies suffer is "keeping with times" in terms of presentation and choice of news.

Finally, the salaries that many media houses have been paying over the years range from sheer invisible exploitation to encouragement of unethical paid news practice.

What is the most challenging issue for managing media houses and their human capital?

The recent gruesome murder of J Dey, Mid Day's crime reporter in Mumbai, gives an indication, I guess, that creating "true journalists" who are fearless and committed to the bigger cause is the most challenging issue for media houses.

Today media have become so addictive that it is getting all kinds of talents, and many of them are slowly poisoning the media in one's own high. Who to recruit, how to groom, how to retain core values, how to fire, who to promote, and how to give a decent lifestyle to journalists are some of the real deep issues in my view. So multiple checks of greed in terms of fame, name and game is the real challenge. Of course, the top-notch journalists should be trained to help them protect their life from today's powerhouses.

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Experts' guide for Bangladesh

Bangladesh Society for Human Resource Management is set to organise an international summit, C-suite HR Summit 2011, in collaboration with Bangladesh Brand Forum on June 25. The summit will spotlight the challenges for HR practices. Some international HR experts will share their views there. Three of them have spoken to Suman Saha of The Daily Star in online interviews.

Arnfinn Groven, chief people officer of Grameenphone, has developed expertise in human resource management and career counseling in different reputable organisations in Norway.

What do you think about HR practice in Bangladesh?

The good thing of HR practice in Bangladesh is that most of the employees are engaged to their work and high ambitious. I am working together with a young team who are eager to learn and develop their career as HR professionals.

The challenge is still to provide the understanding, competencies and self confidence among HR professionals to involve themselves in the core business as an important business partner for the line function. HR is here for the business, not for human resource.

What differences do you see the talent development of Bangladesh compared to global practice?

I see a lot of eagerness and hard work among our (Grameenphone) talents. On the other hand I see an excessive zeal in them to get a new and higher title, and too much focus on the next step. Many are too shortsighted and impatient. You should patiently build your career for life, not for tomorrow.

A higher title does not make a career and being only focused on that you will soon "hit the roof" and loose your competitiveness.

If you continuously focus on your own performance, steadily improve yourself, work hard to broaden and improve your competencies, someone will see you and your career will come by itself.

What are the areas corporate Bangladesh needs to focus more to improve human resources?

You should focus on building an exciting working environment and a lot of opportunities to attract the best talents. The working environment should be open and transparent.

What is the key issue of people development?

Attracting and retaining talents should be the main focus. To attract the best talents, an exciting work environment with excellent leaders should be ensured.



Rashmi Sharma, director for HR of American Express Banking Corporation in India, provides HR partnership and consultancy support to the bank.

Corporate houses face many challenges in HR practices. What are they?

For most organisations, the challenge lies in creating the right linkage between human resource practices and business success. For this, they need to work closely with the business to adopt the right people and talent management practices to attract talent who delivers high performance. Next, the focus should be on the continued performance, engagement and retention of the talent.

Another challenge is to deliver a good employee experience at each stage of the employee life cycle -- from joining to separation. And last, but not the least, HR needs to help the organisation create an adaptive, change embracing culture which allows flexibility to meet business demands and drive the best results.

Why is employee engagement vital for a company?

At American Express, we define "engaged employees" as those who are consistently motivated to go above and beyond expectations and who are committed to the company, its customers, and brand.

Employee engagement should be an area of focus not only for the HR department but for the whole organisation. The discretionary effort of engaged employees gives the organisations an edge over competitors.

How could an organisation engage its employees effectively?

Today, employees want inspiring leaders, an energising work environment, recognition and rewards as well as career development opportunities to remain engaged. A good start to build an engagement mindset would be to create 'listening posts' for employees to share their experiences. This could be done through an annual engagement survey as well as through meetings with leaders.



David Weller, a strategic HR consultant of New Zealand, has experience in merger and acquisition, remuneration planning, outsourcing, leadership, succession planning, and organisation development.

What would you suggest to take a quantum leap for Bangladesh?

If I had to make a statement it would be about the need for an educated workforce. In the early days of its development, China allowed over 50,000 students a year to go to western countries for university studies.

For a communist country this was a major challenge, as the educated students could be a threat for the country's established orders.

However even with that risk, China believed the educated workforce could drive the country's development at a pace that is impossible for a self developed workforce. So, the country did try it, and leverage access to intellectual property with companies eager to do business in China.

Bangladesh has to ensure that there are few barriers to workforce participation by ensuring that red tape is reduced. China went through high staff turnover amongst management that is caused by high salary inflation. Acceptance of this level of activity may be necessary but good HR may be able to reduce its affects.

What is the best way of people management?

One of the ongoing issues in large corporations is that the HR department and its management may not necessarily be 'business aware'. Awareness of the nature of business, business vocabulary and how the specific business operates are the fundamentals to the success of the employee, the business and for Bangladesh.

For instance if Bangladesh decides to develop a vibrant IT-based manufacturing industry, it needs a workforce capable of meeting that challenge. If it does not have one then the question will be how it develops one at a speed where it can meet business targets. Logically it would not be appropriate for the HR department to sit back and wait for candidates to arrive at the door. Rather it would be important to have plans in place to meet recruiting targets; both in the short and long term.

