

Ancient Vedic Philosophy: A Key to Manage Heterogeneous Teams of Indian Employees

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ABSTRACT:

Indian Society showcases different cultures. Multiculturalism has been the most significant factor in inhibiting FDI as compared to other developing countries. The main reason for this, according to experts is that the expatriate managers face difficulties in adapting to different cultures and do business. But the very fact is, though superficially many cultures are found across the length and breadth of this country; core cultural values based on ancient Vedic Philosophy remain same throughout.

This paper tries to extract Human Resource Development Practices from Ancient Vedic Philosophy and following literature which can help expatriate managers in dealing with Indian employees and ultimately help India in increasing FDI.

Key words: Multiculturalism, FDI, Expatriate Managers, Ancient Vedic Philosophy, Human Resource Development Practices.

INTRODUCTION:

Globalization has opened Indian markets to many multinational companies. (Henceforth regarded as MNCs) India is a lucrative destination for many foreign investors for mainly two reasons:

- 1) Availability of high volumes of English speaking skilled workforce,
- 2) Growing affluence that has resulted into improved spending habits of Indians.

Despite these, FDI in India has been abysmally low as compared to other developing countries like China and Brazil.

One of the reasons, according the 2002 report (India, 2002) of planning commission is 'Multiculturalism' in India.

A Boston Consulting Group representative: while presenting his report before the planning commission, quoted as

"India is moreover, a multicultural society and most of the MNCs do not understand the diversity and multi-plural nature of the society and the different stakeholders in this country."

Pondering over this quote, this research paper tries to study the mentality of Indian employees and identify some HRD practices specific to the Indian employees that will help the expatriate managers to deal with them better.

‘Unity in Diversity’ has been one of the specialties of India since ages. We have been living happily in this multicultural society for last many centuries. People came to India from other lands, brought their cultures along with them and over a period of time became one with the culture here. The Indian society accommodated these different cultures to evolve as one big multicultural society. But this multiculturalism is affecting the FDI adversely. (Feng, Yuan, & Yang). The main reasons identified by the researcher are as under:

- Problem in apprehending different cultures.
- Difficulties in dealing with people with varied beliefs and value system.

To overcome the situation, (Zeng, Shenkar, Lee, & Song, 2013) suggested that “it is important for multinational enterprises (MNEs) to learn foreign cultures, especially when they are at an early stage of expansion in a dissimilar culture.”

Thinking about it in the Indian context, the expatriate managers working for MNCs shall understand that even though the Indian subcontinent is inhabited with people of different cultural background, tracing back their root, one can understand that they descend from the same culture. Thus they broadly follow philosophies preached in Vedas. The core cultural values of Indian dwellers are analogous. If the expatriate managers understand the Ancient Vedic Philosophy broadly, it will be far easier for them to work with Indian employees.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

Goal of the Study:

To list down standard Human Resource Development Practices for managing Indian Employees.

Objectives of the Study:

1. To study Ancient Vedic Philosophy.
2. To understand the psychology of Indian Workers
3. To understand the psychology of Expatriate Managers.
4. To jot-down Human Resource Development Practices for Indian Employees.

Universe:

All items in any field of enquiry constitute a universe or population. For this research work the universe is ‘**Expatriate Managers of different nationalities working in India, leading teams of Indian Employees.**’

Sampling Frame:

As this survey had to be an all-inclusive survey, the sampling frame comprised of expatriate managers from different backgrounds like IT Professionals, Visiting Faculties (Area Leaders), Professionals from Manufacturing sector and Service Industry.

Sampling Units:

The sampling units comprised of expatriate managers who have spent not more than three years in India working with Indian employees.

Sampling methods:

As stated above, all expatriate managers are considered as samples. So the sample is not a homogeneous group. For this reason, a **random sampling** is used.

Sample Size:

The sample size for this survey is 100 expatriates from countries like USA, UK, Germany, France and Japan. Basic criterion for selection was, the respondents had to be leading a team of Indian Employees for not less than three years.

Research design:

A research design is a conceptual structure within which research is conducted. A research design speaks about the sources and type of information relevant to the research problem. It also speaks about the research approach; the researcher should follow for conducting the research. A good research design minimizes efforts, time and money as it gives an advance idea of methods of data collection, techniques of data analysis etc.

The data collection will primarily be with the help of personal interviews of the samples selected. Thus it will be a **descriptive research**. The surveys will be useful in finding out the difficulties faced by the expatriates while working with Indian employees. Thus with the help of a descriptive research design, the researcher hopes to gather complete and accurate information about the expatriates' orientation about working in India.

The research will be a **conceptual study** as the researcher will study various concepts of Ancient Vedic Philosophy and Human Resource Development.

Data Collection Instrument (Interviews):

This study is conducted to know about 1) Differences felt by the expatriates in the working style back home and in India, 2) Difficulties faced by expatriates while working in India, and 3) Difficulties faced by expatriates while working with Indian employees.

The researcher expects the respondents to discuss the issues faced by them at length. This won't be possible with the help of a questionnaire, so the data collection instrument to be used is interview. The interviews will be formal and the responses will be recorded.

Methods of Data Collection:

Secondary data: through books, web sites, research papers, annual reports etc.

Primary data: Personal interviews.

FINDINGS:**The main Issues Faced by Expatriate Managers:**

Because of cultural differences between India and other countries, the expatriate managers faced following difficulties.

1. In western countries children become independent at an early age. This pushes them to develop the habit of analyzing and decision making from early ages. On the contrary, in India till the child completes his graduation and gets a job, his parents bare his expenses. All the decisions are made on his behalf by his parents. As a result of this kind of upbringing, Indian employees are more comfortable when they are closely supervised as against their western counterparts. 93% of the respondents hence found it difficult to lead and manage Indian employees as they were not used to such Micro-Management.
2. In western countries, every job is respected and social status is not associated with the jobs. Hence the westerners don't strive for higher achievements in a short span of time. An employee spends considerable number of years in one cadre, learning and mastering all the skills required for upper cadre. He is promoted to the next cadre only upon successful completion of the tenure of current cadre. E.g. A tenure track assistant professor working at western universities has to complete six years of tenure before he is promoted as Associate professor and another six years to be a Professor. Similarly, a software engineer from the US requires more number of years to be a manager as compared to his Indian counterpart. As this is true for every job, the western employees don't hop between jobs. As against this Indian employee strive for achievements in shorter span of time. Also there's ambiguity about tenure and job responsibilities of every position in Indian enterprises. An employee can be promoted even if he doesn't possess necessary skills and qualifications, if he is hardworking and proactive. Hence in case if Indian employees are not promoted regularly, they tend to switch jobs. 95% of the respondents found it difficult to deal with this problem of Job hoppers.
3. Last but not the least, the teams these managers led teams comprised of members belonging to different Indian states and following different cultures. All most 100% of the respondents stated that this adds up to their difficulties as different people follow different religions and celebrate different festivals.

Based on the findings of the survey it was analyzed that if MNCs want to take advantage of geographical location of India and skills and capacity of her people, they must first develop a positive attitude about this country and next adopt certain HRD practices for further developing and managing Indian Human Resources. A quote by Sumantra Ghoshal¹, “You cannot have faith in people unless you take action to improve and develop them.” confirms researcher’s point.

SUGGESTIONS:

Though India is a multicultural society superficially, core cultural values that are based on Ancient Vedic Philosophy remain the same throughout the country. So the primary objective of this study was to introduce the expatriate managers to core cultural values of India.

After in depth discussions with the expatriate managers, the researcher wants to suggest following points.

The expatriate managers and the MNCs as a whole shall

1. Have knowledge of Ancient Vedic Philosophy and Core Cultural Values of India.
2. Have sound knowledge of Indian Business Model
3. Have to understand that the HRD practices for Indian Employees are different.

The researcher briefly describes the philosophy stated in Vedas and following literatures, The Indian Business Model and suggests some HRD practices applicable to Indian Employees.

Ancient Vedic Philosophy and Core Cultural Values:

Retrospection of Indian History makes one realise the immense material development Ancient Indian society had achieved. So much so that it was called ‘सोने की चिडीया’. How was it made possible? Did the people who existed during that time play any role in that? If yes, how were they trained and developed?

Certainly, there were no management terminologies coined at that point of time, neither there were any schools which taught management. Still society of that time period showed enormous growth and development.

One possible reason for this development can be; it was not only the development of skills and knowledge but more importantly the development of character. The ancient Indian literature is full of teachings where development of character and self is central to everything else.

Presented Below are glimpses of Vedic Philosophy.

1. Sa VidyaYaVimuktaye: *The main teaching from Veda is the Union of Aatman (Soul) with Brahman (The Devine), which in terms of modern management means Self Actualisation by converting strengths into unbeatable competencies.* This teaching from Vedas was very neatly

¹ www.azquotes.com/author/36018-Sumantra-Ghoshal

interwoven in ancient Indian education system. The education system was divided into Traditional- Teachings about living an ideal (spiritually) life and Vocational- Teachings for earning a living (Master craftsmen taught their skills to apprentice) education.

It mainly focused on understanding of teachings from the Vedas and passing the same on to the next generations. Thus the main characteristics of the education system from the Vedic period are:

1. Self-Control
2. Development of character
3. Creation of social awareness.
4. Integral development of personality.
5. Propagation of purity. &
6. Preservation of knowledge and culture²(Quora)

From these points it can be noticed that the ultimate aim of the traditional education since the Vedic period was “*Mukti*” (Union of soul with the Devine – Getting ultimate knowledge as Brahman as explained by Stephen Knapp(Knapp) is all-pervading, self-existent power) hence the important highlight of the traditional education was **Development of Values**. Such a development which taught the beings to love and respect not only their parents, elders and other members of the family, but also fellow human beings, all the living beings present in the nature, and every living and nonliving thing of the universe.

Thus development of a strong character was the most notable outcome of traditional education of ancient Indian education system.

The vocational education on the contrary focused on **Development of Skills** that helped people in living a fuller life through material progress and ultimately take up “*Vanaprastha*” for seeking “*Moksha*”.

2. No Discrimination based on Caste: Vedas teach that every soul living incarnated on the Earth in any form (Plants, Animals or Human Beings) is a replica of the Devine. Hence it doesn't discriminate between any human being based on the caste he/ she is born in. The Varna Vyavastha (system) as explained by Jain (Jain, 2011) was originally created for maintaining social harmony and division of labour. Every person was assigned a Varna based on his abilities and aptitude and not by birth. This is explained by Shri Krishna in BhagwadGeeta too. Anyone and everyone were allowed to progress in this system based on the knowledge he possessed and acts he performed. ApastambaDharmasutra(Wikimedia, 2017) reveals that ‘a person is always born as Sudra; he becomes Dwija (Twice Born) by education and upbringing.’

3. No Discrimination Based on Sex: In Vedic Philosophy women are treated with respect. They shared equal rights as men and had equal opportunities. They performed rituals and offered sacrifices. Unlike today where women are considered subordinate to men; the Vedas worshiped women as goddesses and gave them highest respect.

4. Developing a sense of Equanimity: Vedic Philosophy stresses on the quality of being unbiased and treating every subordinate equally. (Mahadevan, 2008), (Jeste & Vahia, 2008).

² www.quora.com/How-was-the-gurukul-education-system-in-ancient-india

5. Karmanyewadhikaraste: Vedic Philosophy insists that the doer must concentrate on his work or duties, without being bothered about end results. And a doer must not refrain from his duties with a fear of getting negative results.

A clear analysis of these important teachings from Vedas reveals following facts about Indian Employees

1. In India, people may belong to different religions but they like to be given equal treatment.
2. Indian women are no less than Indian men in any field of life and so they demand and deserve equal rights and respect.
3. By and large virtues hold an important place in the hearts of common Indians belonging to any religion.

In continuation with the Ancient Vedic Philosophy the teachings from Bhagwat Geeta which talks about self-management (Rajani) is also something the expatriate managers shall study beforehand. Next there are the teachings of Goutam Buddha based on five principles (Panch Sutri) Nonviolence, truth, non-stealing, celibacy, and non-intoxication are the need of time to change the entire system for a brighter future (Govindrajan, 2008)

In addition to understanding of Vedic Philosophy, the expatriate managers must understand the Indian Business Model. Indian Business Model is quite different than other business models.

Indian Business Model (IBM):

For an expatriate manager to understand the philosophy of Indian employees, he must first understand the IBM. The IBM adopts the Top Down approach which is largely based on the mentality of Indian society. In the Indian society, the elders of the family make decisions and the decisions are conveyed down to the youngsters of the family. The youngsters don't have any say in the decision making process. They are not allowed to ask questions but they are supposed to follow the instructions. The same attitude reflects among the employees. The Indian employees to a large extent are used to following instructions and they need close monitoring.

The task of expatriate managers will be even more convenient if they implement certain HRD practices that are applicable specially to Indian employees.

Human Resource Development Practices Applicable to Indian Employees:

Generally, when people speak about HRD practice, the things that pop up in one's mind are Performance Appraisal, MBO, Training, Organizational Development, Career Development etc. As explained by Rao et al,³(Rao, Rao, & Yadav, 2001) these are the mechanisms or sub systems which facilitate the process of HRD in an organization. But people misinterpret them as HRD practices. One can initiate the HRD process by implementing either one or as many mechanisms as required. But by using these mechanisms one can't be sure of the desired changes in the skills of the employees. Hence the researcher opines that, apart from these

³HRD Audit, Rao TV

mechanisms something exists which if used successfully can be helpful in bringing the desired changes in employee skills and the organization as a whole. This something the researcher views as an HRD Practice. There are enormous guiding principles for living an ideal life stated in Vedic literature that helped in creating ideal human beings, leaders and employees. These the researcher refers to as HRD practices of ancient Indian Society. To make her point clear the researcher here defines Human Resource Development Practices as

HRD Practices are the vital guidelines for effective implementation of HRD subsystems to bring desired change in skills of people or group under consideration.

Once we come to the above definition of HRD we can clearly understand the difference between a Supplementary Process and an HRD practice.

HRD practices have a personal touch. They are sometimes even voluntary activities like formation of quality circles. Here employees come together voluntarily and discuss about the improvement of the quality of various processes. They help each other in every problem faced and thus it results in the wholesome development of the members of the group. Every member of the group participates, contributes by giving suggestions so the actual development of skills takes place here. This is true essence of an HRD practice according to the researcher. *An HRD Practice unlike an HRD Subsystem or Supplementary Process makes sure that the Desired Change in the Skills of the Employee is achieved.*

Elements of HRD Practices:

- “Regular learning need assessment
- Availability of a range of learning opportunities both formal and informal; in a varied format and at a range of learning levels
- Organizational commitment to HRD and leadership in advancing
- Wide dissemination of HRD opportunities and resources described
- Alignment of HRD with identified needs: organizational and individual
- Recognition of individual participation in HRD Budget allotted for HRD
- Time allotted for participation in HRD activities
- Evaluation of HRD practice
- Research into HRD with a particular focus on efficacy and outcome of HRD”

Characteristics of Effective HRD Practice:

- “Integrates eclectic theoretical discipline.
- Is based on satisfying stakeholder’s need and expectation
- Is responsive and responsible
- Uses evolution as a continuous evaluation process.
- Is designed to improve organizational effectiveness.
- Is linked to organization’s strategic business goals and objectives
- Promotes diversity and equity among the workplace.”

List of HRD Practices Specific to Indian Employees:

1. Having associations on the principles of craft's guilds.
2. Providing of apprenticeship training by the seniors to juniors.
3. Having specially designed development centers on the principles of corporation schools.
4. Having properly defined organizational structure.
5. Providing support to the employees by means of institutions working on the principles of trade unions.
6. Performing SWOT analysis before undertaking a task.
7. Blending theoretical and practical knowledge.
8. Performing environmental scanning to identify changes.
9. Being adaptive to changes and learning and developing continuously.
10. Working in teams for increasing strengths and sharing responsibilities.
11. Sharing information and knowledge with everyone concerned.
12. During the times of slow down developing efficiency, for making effective use of available resources during peak period.
13. Understanding opportunities and converting those into strengths.
14. Division of work by sharing responsibilities.
15. Setting quality circles for quality improvement and protection of trade.
16. Splitting job into different tasks at different levels and developing skills required at every level.
17. Taking care of employee needs, understanding and solving employee problems to develop a sense of belongingness among the employees.
18. Developing understanding of different cultures and religions being followed.
19. Making an employee aware of his strengths and weaknesses
20. Preparing job analysis for every job.
21. Increasing industry-institute-interaction for research and development.
22. Matching right skills with right job
23. Listening to the views of every team member and accepting them if useful.
24. Making every employee clearly understand organization's vision and mission.
25. Decentralizing the authority.
26. Having clear understanding of responsibility and authority at every level of hierarchy.
27. Succession Planning- Identifying successors and developing future leadership.
28. Preparing and displaying HR policy to avoid confusion and misunderstanding. (Maintaining transparency)
29. Allowing cross functional working to make every task all inclusive.
30. Strategic planning based on SWOT analysis and environmental scanning.
31. Encouraging in house and out sourced research.

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