



The Workplace of Tomorrow

The Chaotic Organization or Organized Chaos?

Rajiv Raghunandan

“Change has no constituency — and a perceived revolution has even less.” – Jack Welch

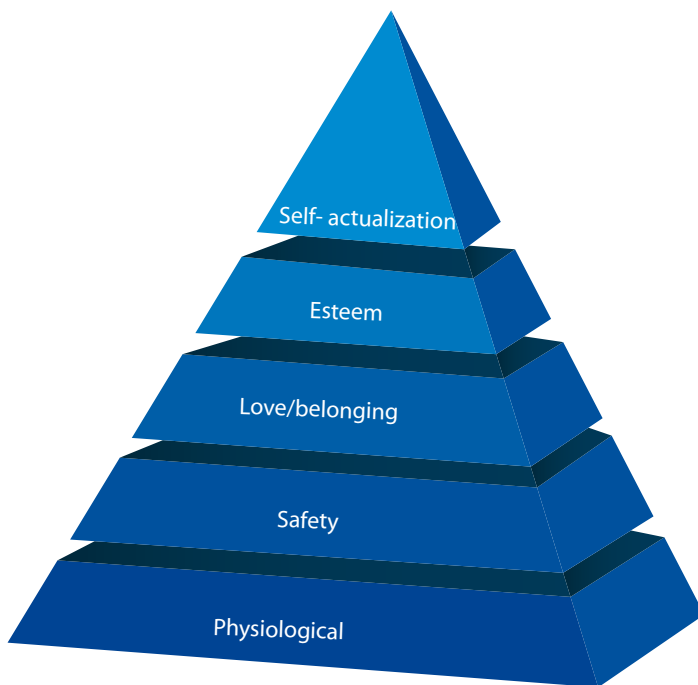
Just as the old gives way to the new, so will the workplace of today evolve. Rigid structures will give way to an environment where self-actualization is a basic need, and where collaboration is the order of the day. In this workplace, boundaries are replaced by freedom and scale of information access, distance gives way to camaraderie, and control is replaced by trust. Here, employees are given wider canvases to paint not just their success stories, but also that of their organization. In fact, ‘employees’ are no longer employees — they are business partners, multi-dimensional stakeholders each, in a multi-polar global workforce. This is the workplace of tomorrow — built around the needs of new-age talent.

In many ways, the change is already in effect. Today, disruptive socio-cultural inclinations and technology forces are reshaping the way we work. For some senior managers and heads of human resources (HR) organizations, the pace of change may seem to be a whirlwind of chaos — too dizzying to keep pace with. But many among the C-suite and HR are embracing the chaos and reorienting their organizations to create ‘the workplace of tomorrow’. How? By recognizing and acting on trends that will serve as gridlines in the HR blueprint for tomorrow’s workplace — which is the focus of this view point.

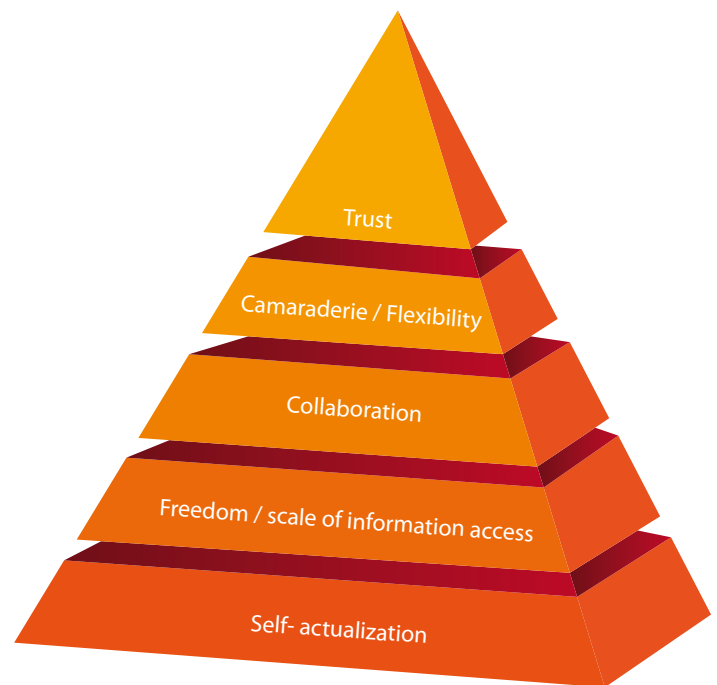
Is there a method to the madness?

Change mandates the revisiting of theories that are accepted truths. One such theory is the oft-debated but universally-acknowledged Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, which outlines an individual’s goals at the workplace — from the very basic to the ultimate. Maslow’s ‘pyramid’ arranges needs in this order: physiological, safety, love/belonging, esteem, and self-actualization. However, for tomorrow’s workforce, self-actualization may trump all needs and find its way at the bottom of the pyramid. The disruptive trends that shape our lives and work will stack up to form a new pyramid — the hierarchy of needs in tomorrow’s workplace.

That was then, this is tomorrow: the new pyramid



Maslow's hierarchy of needs



The hierarchy of needs in tomorrow's workplace

Addressing these new needs will require HR managers to make the shift from being focused on compliance and engagement — to being enablers. HR will have to reinvent itself as the function that helps drive change in an organization and also creates mechanisms that enables talent to move up this new hierarchy of needs.

It may seem like a big leap to make, but one could make an attempt to define imperatives for HR based on the new hierarchy of needs.

1 Self-actualization in 2020

The new normal driven by
a changing workforce



Today, attrition is often attributed to talent leaving for greener pastures, where they can explore their true potential. Tomorrow, retention will be an outcome of helping talent realize this potential faster, and rewarding it in ways we may not have thought of yet.

Meeting great expectations with greater opportunities

Tomorrow, the lack of opportunity to work on exciting new initiatives could make talent look elsewhere. They will join enterprises where their needs are met, or actualize their entrepreneurial zest by way of a start-up. Paramount to retention both now and in the future is a sense of purpose: to keep talent interested, you have to make them believe they are part of something big, and something that matters. In the future, this sense of purpose will be more critical than compensation and designation. Many might argue that the sense of purpose has always been very important; maybe the explicit emphasis on the same needs to be a lot more accentuated in the future.

Growth is an upward curve, not a straight line

Tomorrow's talent will expect a non-linear career path with cross-functional exposure. People will not value vertical upward movement as much as they did in the past. Given the thirst for creative liberty that tomorrow's talent will possess, every organization must assess whether they are giving their talent a wider canvas. Most global organizations are armed with diverse capability across disciplines — they must give talent access to this multi-disciplinary learning, and the freedom to work in varied roles.

Working towards equal wage for equal work

As standards of living and resources increase, they will fulfill the basic needs of talent. When it comes to the global workforce, economic equality will be much more of a need than it is today. Whether they are working in Hangzhou or New York, Bangalore or Belo Horizonte, talent will demand an equally-rewarding experience — in terms of quality of work, and their compensation.

Innovation in compensation will be imperative

Today, a linear variable compensation model limits talent to a certain extent. They are allowed to take a set number of risks. If they take too many risks, the potential of the compensation will get impacted. This strait-jacketed, performance-linked compensation and scorecard may not necessarily work in tomorrow's hypercompetitive environment, where success will come from a greater appetite for risk. But to encourage this risk, one must quell the fear of failure — which calls for new compensation models that incentivize performance and risk-taking in a more innovative manner.

2 Freedom and scale of information access

Coming to terms with the chaos



Today, information is controlled – a ‘tweet’ or an intranet portal discussion can be viewed as dangerous. Tomorrow, these very mediums may spawn winning ideas and facilitate smarter work.

The social media effect

People in the age bracket of 35 and 45 are used to a certain way of working — email, meetings, some forms of collaboration – online and offline – whichever is the preferred mode. But the younger generation is used to accessing and absorbing a lot of information across channels — be it Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Pinterest, or any other preferred information destination. In tomorrow’s workplace, there will be a lot of chaos owing to information explosion. To conventional heads of HR, this will seem like a chaotic organization with too many information channels to control.

The solution is to organize this chaos, and identify how to leverage these channels for performance and profit. Organizations such as Facebook and Google are in some sense, already creating the workplace of tomorrow. Their talent has relatively greater freedom and scale of information access — unlike other conventional organizations, where only a thin sliver of the new media exists.

How HR can come to terms with the change

Heads of HR will need to rethink conventional human resource policies, systems and related issues. Today, HR functions or HR heads largely focus on trying to control chaos or even eliminate chaos — adding more layers of structure and uniformity to an already complex workplace.

In the future, the HR function will be less about making sure employees comply with company policies. What it will be about, in fact, is a greater focus on collation and interpretation of feedback. HR will then play this back to the management, to ensure that there is no information asymmetry between management and talent. No longer will talent work in an environment where bad news takes the elevator, and a good idea takes the stairs. Owing to the explosion of information, all news will head straight to the top and will always be visible. HR professionals will need to get smart at analyzing information, correlating it with employee satisfaction and demographic trends and playing back meaningful analytics to the leadership of the organization that can drive focused action.

3 The urge to collaborate

Creating a connected enterprise



Today, silos limit organizations — teams work in pockets, information is lost from one function to another. Tomorrow, a connected enterprise will produce a well-rounded workforce, driven to perform — anytime, anywhere.

Consumerization, integration and diversity

Enterprises must capitalize on three major forces to further their collaboration agenda. One is the consumerization of technology — today’s talent prefer to make informed decisions not at their desk, but on the move, with smartphones and tablets. Second, is the blurring of industry lines and business portfolios, which has led to the rise of integrated offerings. Going beyond offerings, clients and consumers today prefer to interact with multi-skilled executives, which means tomorrow’s talent must possess varied skills — acquired in a collaborative environment. The third factor is diversity — multi-cultural global workforces complement each other’s strengths, demonstrating a more inventive approach to work. These factors require the C-Suite to promote the creation of enterprise-wide collaboration platforms, where talent can work faster and get multiple perspectives to solve business problems.

A case in point: moving beyond the help desk

In large multi-national companies, if someone has a problem with their laptop, they have been trained to go onto a particular intranet webpage and raise a service request. This request then goes to the relevant department; the technician then remotely resolves the issue or walks over to the desk. The problem may be solved, but it may take time depending on service level agreements. Tomorrow’s talent may not have such patience. They may just want to post their problem in a particular community which is still within the company’s corporate community, and get their queries resolved by peers who faced similar problems.

4 Reducing value of 'distance' in all cultures

Replace hierarchy with camaraderie and flexibility



Today, there are fine lines between management and reportees, between work-from-office and work-from-home — these lines are actually counterproductive. Tomorrow's workplace will not stand or ceremony or boundary — an informal work culture will promote a free-flow of thought, and greater productivity will come from beyond the four walls of the enterprise.

Blurring the distance to encourage collaboration

It is an unwritten law of management that one must keep a certain distance between themselves and their reportees. Otherwise it will be difficult to maintain a professional relationship. One might lose the hierarchical advantage. Yet, organizations will have to make way for a newer method of functioning. Various heads of functions already feel the difference.

Organizations will continue to get less hierarchical because of the trends in collaboration and information access outlined earlier. And because career paths are going to be shaped by quality of experience — the level of interaction talent has had with other cultures. Today, workforces in developed countries value cultural diversity and interaction. Working in a multicultural environment is greatly appreciated and highly-valued. It is increasingly discernable that bridging the gap in hierarchy and culture can produce better results, and HR must formulate ways to make this happen.

The multi-location workplace

From diverse cultures to heightened expectations of output, the workplace has evolved. It ceases to be the corporate setup of cubicles in brick and mortar. This has become possible because people work from home, people work on the move — the workplace is now fluid. With easy availability of the Internet and new devices, talent is always accessible — they can be on a beach, do a video conference with the customer, and still clinch a much-needed deal. Work patterns such as part-time working, work-from-home, hourly work, contract-based work will become the norm. Many organizations have adopted this pattern. But in the macrocosm, it is still a small percentage of the total.

5 The maturing of the new-age employee

Replace controls with trust



Today, HR works as a custodian of defined policies — closely monitoring talent on a variety of parameters. Tomorrow, this 'command-and-control' environment should give way to an 'own-and-deliver' attitude.

When 'employees' becomes 'entrepreneurs'

Armed with self-actualization, freedom of information access, and the power of collaboration, tomorrow's talent will come of age faster than yesterday's or today's. The new-age workforce will respond to trust at the workplace. A sense of ownership will be inherent to them. They will not need to be repeatedly taken through their roles and responsibilities. They will be proactive and driven by a need to see their tasks through. Because work will not be 'something that needs to get done'. Instead, they will approach work as entrepreneurs, where the onus of the success lies on them, and where everybody is aligned and working towards a seamless output. Which makes it imperative to choose the right people who will be a perfect organizational fit.

The exception becomes the rule

Today's alternative means of engaging with your organization as an employee will become tomorrow's normal. HR policies, systems and processes will have to be embedded with trust and accountability. The HR function itself will have to align with and accommodate a global and a diverse talent pool that wants to be engaged in various ways.



The way forward

The challenge before organizations is to tie in or bring together the many trends that are changing the workplace. Some of this change is already underway; many global organizations are already grappling with some of the imperatives outlined in this point of view. Because of the rapidity of change, one will need to identify how quickly the change is about to duplicate itself before it reaches critical mass in an organization. For large corporations, many of which are either still 'American' or 'Indian' or 'European', one can't clearly see a 'unified global work culture' coming through. And to achieve this, there needs to be a significant amount of decentralization, which is the way to go in terms of execution and decision making.

In the future, talent will respond to information in a way we have not. They will look at challenges with different perspectives, and versatility will be the watchword. The change is inevitable, and it is already happening. The question then, is will you get caught up in the chaos and become a chaotic organization, or will you address the needs of new-age employees to organize chaos and create the workplace of tomorrow?

About the author



Rajiv Raghunandan,
*Strategic Business Practice Head,
HRO and S&F, Infosys BPO*

Rajiv Raghunandan joined Infosys BPO in 2002 and currently heads the Human Resources Outsourcing (HRO) and Sales and Fulfillment (S&F) practices for the organization. The two practices span over 4,500 resources across five global delivery centers. Rajiv is part of the leadership team at Infosys BPO and has been integral to growing many different parts of the company's portfolio such as Enterprise Services (F&A, Sales & Fulfillment, HR Services), Industry Verticals (manufacturing), and Transformation capabilities.

Over the last ten years in the company, he has essayed a variety of roles across sales, solution design, transition, operations and transformation in multiple industry segments.

Prior to Infosys, Rajiv was with Andersen Consulting where he was engaged in new business planning, strategy design, process optimization and post-merger integration for industries such as healthcare, pharmaceuticals, telecom, manufacturing, financial services and tourism. He started his career in finance. Rajiv holds a post graduate diploma in management from the Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore, a graduate degree in cost and management accounting, and a bachelor's degree in accounting.



For more information, contact infosysbpo@infosys.com

About Infosys BPO

Global organizations depend on Infosys BPO Ltd, the business process outsourcing subsidiary of Infosys Limited (NASDAQ: INFY) to deliver measurable business value. Infosys BPO's strong focus on industry solutions, technology and a consulting based approach has created new engagement models to help clients build tomorrow's enterprise.

www.infosysbpo.com