

An Interview with Head - HR Shared Services Larsen Toubro Limited

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*Interviewed by **Prakasha R.M.**,
Head-HR, SOLIZE India Technologies Private Limited*

In order to build a rewarding employee experience, you need to understand what matters most to your people.



Vishwanathan Babu is a dynamic Senior HR Leader & Alumni of IIM Bangalore, credited with building & leading multiple award winning best-in-class HR initiatives in the areas of cultural transformations, organization change and employee development across sales, R&D & supply chain business.

He is a Career expertise in designing, creating & launching and leading innovative programs to enhance corporate culture, improve employee performance and support change. A pivotal contributor to business, with a flair for problem solving, strategic decision making, strong communication, mentoring & integrating diverse teams around a common vision.

Over 30 years' experience both India and abroad, he provided leadership to HR in many multinational organizations and contributed significantly top & bottom line through organizational transformation programmes after M&A situation, building High performance organizations, setting up HR excellence center, HR processes & system. He is passionate about environment health & safety.

*Leaders Talk-An initiative of **Niruta Publications**.*

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Tell us about your early career and what it was about HR that attracted you?

In fact my HR entry was an accident. In those days the concept of HR was limited to Personnel & Administration and Worker Management. Being young and dynamic, the Management probably thought me fit to do computerization of time office function. Imagine bringing computers inside the factory was strict NO for the unions. Having completed the project in time, there was an opportunity to implement ISO 9000 where Training becomes a part and I was entrusted with the job of Training Manager. That was the time when I started taking HR as a profession.

2

Recent experiences during the pandemic are bound to impact on operations going forward and technology is writing the future, what is your take on this?

I have seen many business disruption during the course of my career. To name a few 1990s globalization of economy; 2000 Y2K was a major disruptor; 2010s Digitization. Similarly in 2020, Covid Pandemic was top most disruptor as it had an impact on almost all businesses. Everyone was forced to look at their business processes in a much different manner. Technology changes over the last two decades have really come handy from of the point of process re-engineering. Except where labour intensive manufacturing and construction processes all other support functions have moved to do virtual operations to ONLINE. These changes are going to stay in the future as well subject to some tweeking by way of some hybrid models.

3

In the fast-paced world full of disruptions and challenges, what keeps you going?

CHALLENGES.

4

What's the most important step you are taking to prepare for tomorrow?

In my opinion HR fraternity is in the cusp of much more challenges in future where the solution given earlier can prove to be a problem. Ideally HR should get more oriented towards core business strategies and plan for long term.

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You lead many HR interventions? Would you share one of the key interventions that shaped the business?

I had the privilege of leading many of the HR interventions during my career. Specifically during my Kolkata days, there was a need to do Business Process Re-engineering to change the predominantly structured functional based organization to customer focused autonomous teams. HR being the process owner, I had involved various stakeholders taking inputs on possible risks and implemented it after proper risk mitigation in place. This had improved the productivity of the overall business by 40%.

Another major business intervention was creating a green field organization in a new location at Baroda and consolidating the manufacturing electrical equipments from various parts of India to Baroda without losing the critical skills & competency was in my opinion a commendable one. Project completed in time as per plan and result achieved as per plan. As an HR Head my key role was signing bi partite agreement with internal union and tripartite agreement with contract labour union keeping West Bengal Government as party to the agreement. This has ensured closure of Kolkata unit and seamless shifting of the same to the GFO at Baroda.

6

What are the business plans for the future and the key challenges ahead?

The businesses are becoming more global in nature with consolidation and improving the time & scale of operations. HR needs to be a real business partner and become an enabler & compliant rather than impediment. Risk taking abilities need to improve keeping business into confidence. Business acumen & Negotiation skills continue to rule the roost.

7

You have been driving HR shared service model. What is HR shared service, how would this model help to organizations?

Transactional HR jobs should get outsourced as much as possible using various digitization and automation tools using Artificial Intelligence & Machine Learning. In fact now we have created a global shared service center to take care of Recruitment to Retirement for all transactional touch points. It gives good business model and add value to across all businesses.

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Whether Great Resignation is Impacting your Business? What are your some of the plan to address this challenges?

The primary cause of the Great Resignation is likely intense competition for skilled workforce as reflected in a high number of job vacancies and a lower unemployment rate.

Pandemic experiences led some people to re-evaluate life priorities and reduce working hours or leave the labor force entirely. Harvard economist Jason Furman argued in June 2021 that the elevated rate of people leaving their jobs was in line with the rising number of job openings, suggesting competition among employers was driving resignations.

Key actions I would suggest retain employees who are burned out by giving them a break and more support, offer more accommodating work arrangements, including remote work, hybrid work and flexible schedules. However there is no 100% solution for attrition as people needs and priorities keep changing over time. Applying same rule for all might get diluted in future and different strategy for different type of people will become order of the day.

9

One new aspect/element that you will embed in your workforce?

Be candid, Open & enhance the TRUST. It's a two way process.....

10

What is the next stage in your HR plans?

Though I have hands on experience in all HR processes, my passion remains Learning & development and share my practical experience through the process of storytelling mode. Having implemented the HR Shared services project now I have returned back to Water & Waste Water Management business as Business HR Head having bigger expansion plans. I think I will be able to add value to the Water business.

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