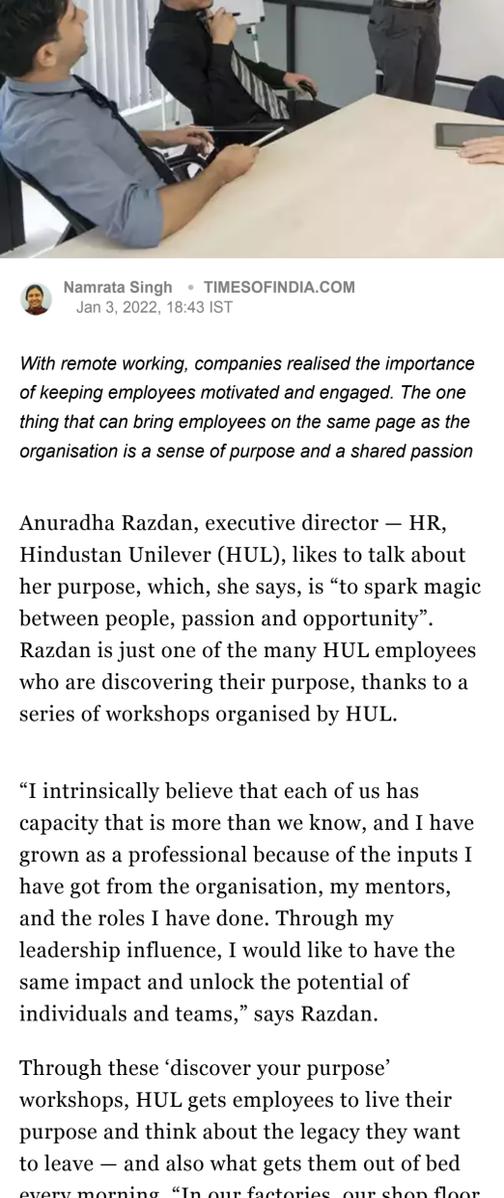


How a shared purpose can improve productivity



Namrata Singh • TIMESOFINDIA.COM
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With remote working, companies realised the importance of keeping employees motivated and engaged. The one thing that can bring employees on the same page as the organisation is a sense of purpose and a shared passion

Anuradha Razdan, executive director – HR, Hindustan Unilever (HUL), likes to talk about her purpose, which, she says, is “to spark magic between people, passion and opportunity”. Razdan is just one of the many HUL employees who are discovering their purpose, thanks to a series of workshops organised by HUL.

“I intrinsically believe that each of us has capacity that is more than we know, and I have grown as a professional because of the inputs I have got from the organisation, my mentors, and the roles I have done. Through my leadership influence, I would like to have the same impact and unlock the potential of individuals and teams,” says Razdan.

Through these ‘discover your purpose’ workshops, HUL gets employees to live their purpose and think about the legacy they want to leave – and also what gets them out of bed every morning. “In our factories, our shop floor employees spend time on their purpose, writing a letter to their future selves,” says Razdan.

That’s an interesting way of helping people think about aspects like ‘purpose’ and ‘passion’ in an otherwise robotic and mechanical work life, giving it a direction, a new zest.

Meanwhile, at IBM India, the organisation understands what employees feel is their purpose through open career conversations between the employee and the first-line managers. The objective is to create a sense of belonging.

Thirukkumaran Nagarajan, VP & HR head, IBM India/South Asia, terms purpose/passion as a collective behaviour and values of every employee regardless of whether they are working in office, from home or a client site. The discussions from such career conversations help employees understand how they matter to the organisation.

“The conversation is not about ‘when will I get promoted?’ It’s about the purpose and what they expect from their career. It would vary at different stages of one’s life. The responses we usually get from a Gen Z workforce is all about, ‘what’s my next adventure’ and those discussions always happen at the first-line manager level. We capture all that information and it’s actually data driven. As we’re a cognitive enterprise, we have talent profiles of everybody – their propensity to learn or change. Because we know so much about who you are and your expertise, the conversations are personalised. Something like ‘what drives you?’ For some people, it could just be career growth. For some others, it could be about getting a balance in life or managing family needs,” says Nagarajan.

Why does purpose matter?

Purpose is not just a buzzword that emerged out of the pandemic; it’s now a business imperative. By enabling individuals to pursue their own purpose alongside the organisation’s purpose, companies attract people who are likely to be far more engaged, leading to a high-performance culture.

Sujaya Banerjee, CEO, Capstone People Consulting, says that while organisational purpose, in its simplest form, is the organisation’s reason for being – a singular construct that communicates a collective vision – the challenge is to connect individual purpose with the collective organisational purpose.

“Often, this disconnect can play out when businesses publicly commits to a purpose-and-values-led approach to business. For example, they may commit to CSR or the environment assuming that it will be enough to attract the right people. It may not work out like that, hence organisations must be willing to reach beyond their purpose to consider the individuals who work to enact it,” says Banerjee.

A strong connection between individual and personal purpose is only possible by taking a personal approach, says Banerjee. “This requires a shift from seeing employees as an amorphous group – a mass market – and instead recognising that each employee has individual needs and shift the paradigm to lead the ‘workforce of one’,” she adds.

For doing this, organisations must ask whether it can be structured to align to the individual’s purpose. How can its recruitment practices be recast to attract talent whose intrinsic motivations can be supported by the organisation?

“It’s about knowing not just what the individual can do for the organisation but what the organisation can do to support and manifest the individual in realising their deepest aspirations. For some, this might mean a job-share arrangement that will allow them to care for a family member. For others, taking a sabbatical for education or going on an overseas assignment can become differentiators. When you bring an individual’s purpose into the equation, you need to consider the whole person and how they will interact with all aspects of the organisation, including the organisation’s structure, recruitment, rewards and opportunities for building capabilities. All these aspects must align to bring the organisational and individual purposes together,” says Banerjee.

Razdan says an organisation wants individuals to focus on “their inner game” – their purpose and mastery. “When they excel in their inner game, this helps them enhance their impact on people around them and the business,” Razdan says, adding: “I believe it is this pride that came to the fore during the pandemic, with our people living their purpose and demonstrating the spirit of contribution.”

It’s no different for other companies. “From an IBM point of view, we test the pulse of employees every year and we pick a theme, to test their belongingness, advocacy, the ability and appetite to learn; the appetite to change. We also ask for open feedback and we make some significant changes based on what we hear from our employees. Despite a very difficult COVID environment in India, employees have been very resilient,” says Nagarajan.

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Purpose can help employee retention

At a time of ‘the great resignation’, talent retention is an issue many organisations are struggling with. To keep the flock together, purpose can be the binding force, say experts. “Our workforce stays with us because they see value in their career and their personal self, and they see that they’re actually contributing and are driven by passion to solve the complex problems of the world; so there’s a sense of accomplishment. If we don’t use that to help people navigate their career and professional life, they’re going to leave,” says Nagarajan.

“Everybody who gets out of bed and comes to work for us, they want to make a little more money as they move along, and they want to be appreciated and they definitely want to be learning. Curiosity is the middle name of everything we do at IBM. Many people would check-out if they do not see purpose in their organisation,” he adds.

Banerjee agrees, saying that only when individual purpose gets aligned and supported by the organisation, will individuals be more likely to authentically bring their whole selves to work.

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