What can replace the bell curve?

Doing away with an ineffective system is often not as difficult as finding an alternative to it

NICOLAS DUMOULIN

October 2013, Microsoft did away with the Bell Curve method of measuring staff performance that assigned forced rankings based on which compensation and rewards were determined. This decision sparked intense debate. The bell curve method popularised by General Electric CEO Jack Welch during the 1980s forced team managers to grade their staff — only 10 per

cent could be "high performers", 80 per cent had to be ranked as "average to good", and the final 10 per cent were labelled "poor performers" and had to be fired. While this idea sounded good in theory, this forced "stack ranking" promoted fierce internal competition between teammates and discouraged the sharing of ideas or collaboration. Even in a team of high-performers, someone had to be singled out as "poor". Critics argued the bell curve system was too rigid and, especially within highpressure teams and organisations, deflated staff morale to such an extent it ultimately hurt company performance.

Alternative models

Since Microsoft's decision, others have followed suit. In November 2014, Cisco did away with the bell curve



Some of the major IT companies in India have moved away from the bell curve appraisal system. PHOTO USED FOR REPRESENTATIONAL PURPOSE ONLY

method during performance reviews. By 2015 major Indian IT companies like TCS, Infosys and Wipro also abandoned the system. The CEO of Better Works, Kris Duggan predicts that 50 per cent of Fortune 500 companies are going to abandon bell curve rankings and ratings by the

middle of 2017.A number of companies agree the bell curve system may not be the most effective workforce management tool, but continue to adhere to it because a comprehensive alternative framework has not emerged. Others have started to experiment with alternative models. And while the jury is still out on what will replace the bell curve, there are some emerging trends and challenges that CHROs need to consider as they devise new people management frameworks.

Elements of a new framework

Delegates at a recent Michael Page India roundtable discussed what some of these alternative models were. While agreeing solutions would have to be customised, a few common factors arose:

* Continuous feedback at shorter intervals through the work year as compared to annual reviews

* Constructing holistic accounts of employee performance, which include input from peers, customers and

* Capturing performance as

a journey of improvement rather than a destination or as, before, "a rank'

* Consciously including a diverse demographic at the workplace including baby boomers, Generation X and

the Millennial workforce * Changing the nature of learning and development

programmes, with employee wellbeing as the cornerstone * Identifying and nurturing employee evangelists to serve as culture advocates

Delegates also talked about the specific impact of external factors on performance including state of the economy, nature of industries, dominant workforce demographics (generation Xers or millennials) and their own position in their industry.

Back to the

drawing board The ultimate challenge for all CHROs is to create a highperforming work culture which is able to both differentiate and reward talent according to their ability to add value to the company's mission. While the bell curve system and stack rankings have been seen as too rigid, more qualitative assessments so far have been inconclusive or inactionable. Similarly, office culture takes time to change. Expectations of yearly performance reviews and annual raises are long-established norms. Within these constraints, serious design thinking will be required by today's CHROs to develop individual frameworks. CHROs must now accept the merging of social and mobile applications has created a hyper-connected world of employees, who

will constantly be in dialogue,

sharing competing

portunities, work cultures, and of course, the ongoing dearound work-life bate integration.

CHENNA

In particular, social platforms have given voice to employees, disrupting a culture of silence or top-down management. In a world where companies are crowd-sourcing HR policies from employees, a rigid framework does not apply. CHROs have an unenviable task ahead. To start things on the right foot, they must communicate with management and obtain buyin that change is upon them. The next step would be to provide the rationale for this change and prepare the groundwork to address concerns of all relevant stakeholders.

(Nicolas Dumoulin is managing director at Michael Page India)

Manufacturing sector acutely hit by skill gap

R. Anandakrishnan

kill gap is a reality for companies across sectors in India. Around 30 lakh graduates join the Indian job market every year but only about 5 lakh of them are considered 'employable'. According to National Skill Development Corporation, the growing skill gap in India will be more than 25 crore workers by 2022.Skill gap is acutely felt by companies in the Indian manufacturing sector, as they are unable to find qualified candidates for open positions. Skill development of the enormous talent pool will act as one of the critical levers of growth.

There is a gap in supply and demand of manpower due to lack of requisite technical and soft skills. Despite degrees and diplomas, young graduates entering work life are not equipped with the right professional skills, thereby highlighting the wide gap existent between our education system and industry requirements. Engineering requires a combination of understanding and application.



Many corporates are now investing heavily in training programmes to prepare old employees and upskill new

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The current education system is responsible for producing engineers who are of incapable applying knowledge in practical areas. Out of the 15 lakh engineering graduates India produces every year, 20-30 per cent of them do not find jobs and many others get jobs well below their technical qualification. There is a huge gap between engineering curricula and actual industry requirements, which causes companies to spend significant time on training and unlearning/retraining new talent. The 'Skill India' initiative launched by the Government of India is a step in the right direction and

will provide industry with

Needs 7.0 to land

employees. PHOTO: REUTERS (USED FOR REPRESENTATIONAL PURPOSE ONLY) skilled workforce in the long run. The initiative is expected to train over 500 million young people by 2020 to make them more employable. In addition to Government initiatives, corporates are also undertaking several measures to help build a stronger talent pipeline. Companies are increasingly viewing investments in skill development as core to business growth and sustenance. Addressing skill gap concern, corporates are investing heavily in training programmes/modules to prepare new employees and upskill existing employees. Organisations are collaborating with in-

stitutions and academia to

prepare role-ready, employ-

IT Professional

Writing score: 6.0

Needs 8.0 to secure

Veena

Housewife

Listenina score: 4.0

Needs 6.0 to teach

her son

have started structured 'Collaborative Education Programmes' to create tailormade curriculum with on-thejob training for skilling

Automobile industry

The Indian automobile industry is poised to grow steadily and emerge as the world's third largest by 2020, but the biggest pothole in its path of progress is the significant gap in skilled manpower. By 2022, it is expected to create 15 million direct jobs. To emerge as a global hub for the automobile industry, India needs to acknowledge the skill gap issue and take collective measures by involving all relevant stakeholders. Since corporates are most attuned to the changing market dynamics, they should lead industry-led skill development programmes and channelise funds allocated for CSR into funding and supporting community skill development initiatives.

(R. Anandakrishnan is Senior Vice President - HR at TVS Motor Company)

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