EMPOWERING TIMES

THINKING ALOUD
From the 'Great Resignation'
to the 'Great Culling'
Jay

PODIUM
Dr. Amit Singh
AVP & Head - Corporate HR
Aster DM Healthcare, Dubai

WE RECOMMEND
Beyond Everywhere
Greg Ennis

Dear Reader,

In the ever-evolving business landscape, managing talent stands as a critical imperative, particularly within the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) market where the demand for skilled professionals outpaces supply. Key highlights of this market include the need for comprehensive strategies, the integration of technology, the intricacies of AI adoption, and the evolving dynamics of work. Amidst this flux, organisations must embrace innovation, technology, and adaptable cultures to thrive in the dynamic landscape of talent within the GCC.

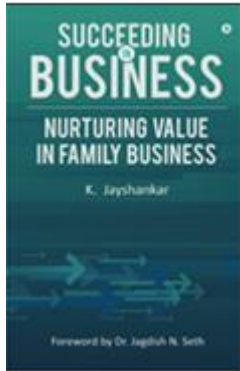**ET** this month examines *'Managing Talent in the GCC Market: Some Insights.'*

In the **Thinking Aloud** section, **Jay** explains that the post-covid era has brought significant disruption to businesses, particularly impacting the HR function, with potential reductions in HR roles due to automation and specialization challenges. On the **Podium**, **Dr. Amit Singh**, AVP & Head of Corporate HR at Aster DM Healthcare, Dubai, highlights the evolution of the GCC's talent landscape towards productivity-driven diversity, leveraging cultural diversity for organisational advantage, and differentiates talent management in healthcare from other sectors. In the **We Recommend** section, we review **Beyond Everywhere** by **Greg Ennis**, who explores the ubiquitous Wi-Fi - its history, impact, and cultural phenomenon - offering insights into its development, battles against competing technologies, and global connectivity.

In **Figures of Speech**, **Vikram's** toon defines hiring trends in the GCC!

Please also **Click Here** to check out our Special issue of ET, which is a collation of selected themes that were featured over the years highlighting the changing landscape of the business world. This special edition has been well received and can be **Downloaded Here** for easy reading and is a collector's item.

FIGURES OF SPEECH

GCC HR LIVING IN THE INSTANT

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THINKING ALOUD

From the 'Great Resignation' to the 'Great Culling'
Jay

Business is in a great flux in the post-covid era that we are now in. And, no function has been as impacted as the Human Resources function in an organisation.

First, managing the fall-out of covid took its toll on the HR professional. Suddenly shackled at home, with businesses in panic, and employees struggling with an unseen powerful enemy, firms looked at the HR function for guidance. While everyone struggled to find answers, large organisations, with greater access to resources, were quick to adapt to a new 'work from home' model. Quickly deploying computers and providing internet access became the task of the IT function with the support of the HR/Administration, and after early mishaps, things began to fall in place. The business world discovered that there is an alternate model for work - a virtual one - and new patterns began to evolve. Soon enough, apart from the regular task of recruitment, on-boarding, etc., HR functionaries began in earnest to tackle other challenges of online learning and development models, managing talent, and figuring out ways of engaging with, and motivating, a workforce which was dis-connected. Coupled with all this was a new dimension: an upsurge in mental health issues, be it covid related or the anxiety arising with lack of skills to adapt to a virtual world. In retrospect, we now look back to the turbulence of 2020 & 2021 as a nightmare that we have escaped from.

The 'new normal', a lovely turn of phrase to describe a new era that the survivors of covid created, has offered novel challenges to the HR specialists. One heard of 'the Great Resignation' as many employees in the US felt a strong lethargy to return to their workplace. This phenomenon was singularly visible in the information technology sector, where the large giants had prospered during covid with the world having resorted to the virtual medium to escape the dreaded virus. Having resisted the call for vaccination, many refused to venture back to the physical

workplace citing various excuses including commuting challenges and productivity gains. The murmurs of dissent became louder when some CEOs threatened to insist on everyone's return to the workplace, concerned about the long-term damage to organisation's culture. While the manufacturing businesses had fewer challenges (to produce an automobile, you have to show up at the plant, after all), it is the IT domain and the services sector (banking, etc.) where resistance was at its peak. Business leaders were willing to compromise and prepared to allow a hybrid model (a mix of office and home) in the face of active defiance when resignations arose in some sectors. But the worst fears of industry leaders came true when inflation rocketed, productivity fell, and recessionary signals became stronger with the stimulus funded covid economy floundering. Adding fuel to the fire, as it were, was the unexpected Ukrainian conflict with global repercussions. Cut to 2022 and 2023, and the pendulum has swung to the other end, and estimates are that over 3.60 Lakh employees have been let go in the tech sector globally.

Borrowing heavily from the western world, as is the wont of many Indian business managers, some in the HR world in India too parroted the 'great resignation theory'. While individual firms may have had their challenges in bringing employees back to their office desks, the macro truth of the Indian economy is simple: there is huge head room for growth in all fields. Instead of imitating notions and models from overseas, it is time that Human Resources managers in India won the confidence of their senior leadership colleagues and convinced them to innovate with policies that suit their firm's business prerequisites. Whether it be the safety concerns of the growing numbers of gig workers, or the half-trained technical talent streaming from polytechnic or college campuses, investments in skills at the firm level is vital for building stronger companies. There is a hungry bunch of youngsters out there who are crying out to be led by managers who can genuinely connect with them. Is this sufficiently understood by the people specialists, is the moot question.

It is important to consider new forms of employment too. Yes, the pandemic has changed the world in many ways, some of which we are still grasping to comprehend. The hallowed tech sector has culled numbers in India too, some because of the decisions taken by overseas headquarters, and others due to the unicorns going belly up. The half-baked human resources executive who was busy organising 'fun at work' events, has also been shown the door. The double whammy is due to the automation power that AI has unleashed at the workplace. It will take a while for the impact to be felt but it is no surprise that those with routine, bureaucratic and standardised activities (and there are many such floaters in the HR function) are staring at their functional expiry date. I would hazard a prediction that the numbers in the HR department will be halved soon, and some firms may prefer to use gig consultants to buttress their HR function. The holistic and business nature of the HR function has been forgotten in the recent decades, with the role getting splintered into sub-functions masquerading as specialists (comp & ben,

DEI, recruiters, etc.). If value contribution is invisible, there is no reason to keep full-time members in a firm. The challenge for the HR manager is evident: reinvent yourself and remain a contributor in the inside, or operate from home as a gig contributor, a portfolio careerist. What is your pick?

Podium

Dr. Amit Singh

AVP & Head - Corporate HR - Aster DM Healthcare, Dubai

Dr. Amit Singh is the Associate Vice President and Head of Corporate Human Resources for Aster DM Healthcare which has presence in over 7 countries. Dr. Amit leads the Corporate HR function and Aster Retail which includes working with the functional CXOs to advise on Organisational Design & Interventions while continuing to lead the Human Resource centers of excellence including Talent Acquisition and Engagement, Compensation and Rewards, Succession Learning and Leadership Development, HR Tech and Digital for over 30,000 employees across the Group. He also supports the Digital and Business transformation and new initiatives for Aster as a part of his HR Partner role.

Dr. Amit brings in over 18 years of experience across distinct phases of business from growth and ramping up, Mergers, Acquisitions and Integration with Global organisations like Pearson (the world's largest Education Company), to working

with large scale manufacturing organisations like Moser Baer to R Systems in the IT space. He has worked across both regional and global roles and has had exposure in facilitating change efforts for businesses across South East Asia, Middle East and Africa, while collaborating with global teams and businesses across UK, Europe and the Americas.

Dr. Amit is a Dental Surgeon by qualification, has completed his Executive Management Program from IIM-Kolkata and has various international certifications for areas in Talent and Leadership Development. He is also an alumni of Rotterdam School of Management, Netherlands.

Dr. Amit is an Accredited Results Certified Coach by the Neuro Leadership Group. In the last few years, he has invested considerable time in building capabilities and personal credibility as a leadership coach and has been a performance consultant for senior leaders and teams.

In 2013, Dr. Amit was recognized as India's Best Learning and Development Professionals by the World HRD Congress and as one of the 100 most influential Global HR Leaders in 2017.

ET: How has the talent landscape in the GCC market evolved over the past decade?

AS: The talent landscape in the GCC market has evolved significantly over the past decade, reflecting the region's dynamic economic growth and changing priorities. These changes have reshaped the way companies approach talent leading to a shift from a purely compensation-driven market to a talent-driven one with a greater emphasis on productivity. The perception of the GCC as a transient job destination has changed over the past decade. While expatriate workers still play a crucial role in the workforce, an increasing number of professionals now view the region as a long-term career destination, especially with the improvement of work-life balance, quality of life, and opportunities for professional growth.

The pandemic has also brought about a paradigm shift in the way work is conducted, accelerating the trend of remote work in the GCC market. As businesses adapted to remote work arrangements during the pandemic, they realized the potential benefits of this model, including increased flexibility and access to a wider talent pool. As a result, companies are now more open to hiring remote workers from different parts of the world, allowing them to tap into specialized skills and expertise beyond their geographical boundaries. Employers also recognize the

increasing significance of soft skills such as communication, teamwork, adaptability, and problem-solving which are vital for success in the region's increasingly complex and fast-paced business environment.

At Aster, over 12,000+ employees which represents 50% of our employee strength are current based out of GCC. As an integrated healthcare provider, we have been able to attract talent across regions such as India, Egypt, Kazakhstan, Philippines, Kyrgyzstan, etc. and created career pathways for our frontline employees such as nurses, pharmacists, CSEs and clinicians. This has helped us develop curated employee experiences and growth stories within Aster and retain key talent amongst our hi-potentials and hi-performers who aspire to grow with us.

ET: How does the GCC market's cultural diversity impact talent management practices, and how can organisations leverage this diversity to their advantage?

AS: The GCC market is a melting pot of cultures, with people from all over the world living and working together. The growing importance of diversity & culture has had a profound impact on the GCC job market where companies aim to build a diverse workforce through inclusive hiring practices and diversity initiatives. As businesses in the region expand their global reach and operations, they have embraced diversity as a strategic advantage. Companies now actively seek employees from various cultural backgrounds and with diverse skill sets and perspectives. This focus on diversity not only enriches organisational culture but also enhances creativity and innovation within companies.

As a global healthcare provider with a presence in multiple countries, Aster DM operates in diverse cultural environments, including the Middle East & India. Our talent workforce comprises of over 71+ nationalities across diverse communities, experience, generations & industries. Our culturally competent workforce can better understand and meet the needs of the diverse patient base. Additionally, the inclusive work environment enhances teamwork, productivity, and employee morale, making Aster DM an employer of choice for healthcare professionals from different cultural backgrounds. Ultimately, this approach to talent management allows us at Aster DM Healthcare to deliver high-quality care and expand its reach in the global healthcare market.

ET: Given your varied experience in different sectors, please share your thoughts on how managing talent in the healthcare business is different from other sectors?

AS: Healthcare is a purposeful job where professionals are entrusted with the critical responsibility of safeguarding lives and promoting well-being, carrying high expectations to deliver quality care and compassion to patients in need. Managing talent in the healthcare business presents unique opportunities that distinguish it from talent management in other sectors. The healthcare industry is characterized by its critical nature, high level of regulation, constant technological advancements, demand-supply imbalances, 24/7 operations, significant training requirements, burnout and stress and public perception impact.

Healthcare professionals deal with matters of life and death, making the stakes much higher than in many other industries. This is also a heavily regulated industry with strict compliance requirements, which make it imperative for talent managers to navigate complex legal and ethical considerations when hiring, on boarding, and managing healthcare professionals to ensure adherence to healthcare standards and regulations. The private healthcare industry also places a significant emphasis on productivity and operating margins because of which investment becomes a dichotomous choice. The dichotomy arises from the competing demands between improving patient care and managing costs. On one hand, increasing investment in healthcare can lead to advancements in medical technology, better facilities, enhanced patient care, and improved outcomes. It can attract and retain skilled professionals, promote research and innovation, and enhance the overall quality of healthcare services. On the other hand, healthcare investment decisions must also consider cost containment, especially in the face of rising healthcare expenditures and insurance regulations.

Overall, managing talent in the healthcare business is complex and challenging. However, by understanding the unique needs of the healthcare industry, organisations can develop talent management practices that are effective and sustainable and thereby create a compassionate workforce, ensuring exceptional patient care in the dynamic healthcare landscape.

The healthcare challenges are also amplified when globally there's a shortage of frontline workers. At Aster, we have been able to address this ever evolving dynamic by partnering with both, private & public healthcare organisations such as DHA, NHS to ensure availability of key nursing workforce through shared resources. In terms of retention, the Aster Health Academy and flagship talent development programs such as Aster EDGE, GROW (Get Ready for Opportunities at Work with Aster) constantly up skill our frontliners. In addition to clear career pathways,

mental health initiatives through well-being champions and competitive pay structure, has helped us to develop a steady talent pipeline.

ET: What role does technology play in talent management in the GCC market, and what emerging trends or tools should organisations be aware of?

AS: Technology plays a crucial role in talent management in the GCC market, enabling organisations to streamline processes, enhance efficiency, and make data-driven decisions. HR software and talent management platforms are widely used for recruitment, applicant tracking, performance management, learning and development, and employee engagement.

A notable trend is the increasing adoption of data analytics in talent management. Organisations are leveraging data to gain insights into employee performance, engagement, and retention. Predictive analytics helps forecast future talent needs, enabling proactive talent planning and development strategies. This also rings true for our patients as data has been the centre of Wellness. Technology allows us to harness patient data, enabling a more proactive approach to delivering quality care and ensuring their well-being.

Furthermore, the pandemic led to the rise of technology at workplaces. Remote work and virtual collaboration tools have become essential due to the pandemic and organisations are now incorporating remote work policies and digital collaboration platforms to attract and retain talent from various locations.

In conclusion, technology has revolutionized talent management in the GCC market, offering improved efficiency and data-driven decision-making. Organisations should be aware of emerging trends such as AI-driven candidate sourcing, data analytics, and remote work tools to stay competitive in attracting, developing, and retaining top talent in the dynamic and evolving business landscape of the GCC region.

At Aster, we take pride in digitizing the entire employee hire to retire life cycle through an integrated digital platform. This enables career mobility through increased visibility of key roles, transparent performance & development based conversations, data driven 360 insights that aid in leadership growth and pulse surveys that help us understand overall employee experience of key people processes. The rapid adoption of technology has helped us create a foundation for superior employee experience.

ET: Please tell us what makes Aster Healthcare special and a unique force in the healthcare industry in the region.

AS: Aster DM Healthcare is a leading healthcare provider with a global presence and a strong footprint in the GCC & India region. Committed to delivering patient-centric care, we offer a comprehensive range of medical specialties, cutting-edge technology, and a skilled workforce, making it a trusted and unique force in the healthcare industry. What sets Aster DM Healthcare apart is that we are an integrated healthcare provider with 30,000+ employees committed to the vision of serving the world with Accessible and Affordable Quality Healthcare. We have got a full spectrum of care ranging from pharmacies, clinics, hospitals, labs & wellness centres. We are also one amongst the very few healthcare providers to have a completely unified ERP system that cover the entire realm of the employee life cycle.
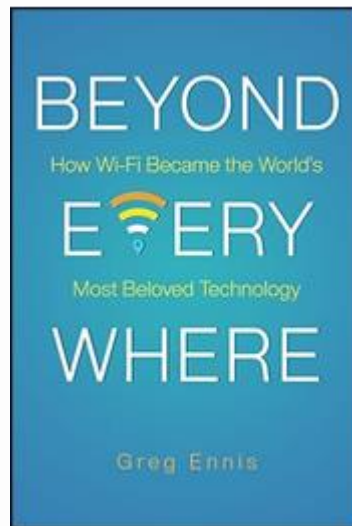
The brand promise of Aster is 'We'll treat you well'. We stand by this statement and truly believe that people are at the crux of everything we do. Our people centric approach has helped us build better talent practices across various segments and we're proud to be recognized as one among the top 5 preferred employers in the UAE by LinkedIn.

Wi-Fi – a term that is a quintessential part of our lives. The chaos that would ensue if the network went down is merely another evidence of our reliance on this technology. Greg Ennis in his seminal work Beyond Everywhere takes readers through a journey of how the W-Fi came to be.

The Wi-Fi was developed based on various contributions and technological advancements by multiple researchers and engineers including David Boggs who spoke of ALOHAnet, which is akin to the ancestor of Wi-Fi; Bob Metcalfe who introduced Ethernet; and Vinton Cerf who helped shaped the internet.

In the 1980s, researchers at Xerox PARC (Palo Alto Research Center Incorporated) succeeded in creating the foundational technologies such as Ethernet networking and the graphical user interface (GUI), which formed the bedrock to the field of networking and had an indirect influence on the development of the Wi-Fi. The early 1990s witnessed the formation of the Wi-Fi Alliance, which played a pivotal role in creating defined standards to regulate Wi-Fi technology. The author is the keynote speaker at several technical conferences; for years, in his role as Vice President, Technology for the Wi-Fi Alliance he served as a primary technical spokesperson for the Wi-Fi industry.

The author does not shy away from discussing the difficulties that the Wi-Fi had endured. The environment against which Wi-Fi emerged is depicted from competing wireless technologies to regulatory impediments imposed by governments. However, the Wi-Fi triumphed against all impediments especially from other wireless technologies

such as Bluetooth. Technical complexity, such as coordinating data transmission over several frequencies and providing strong network security, are addressed in a way that readers of all backgrounds can understand. Augmented reality, virtual reality, and the Internet of Things are applications where we can see the Wi-Fi's application in the foreseeable future.

Today, the Wireless Broadband Alliance celebrates World Wi-Fi Day on 20th June each year to mark the many ways that this technology has brought the world more closer and connected. Wi-Fi technology has bridged the digital divide of developed and developing countries, improved their social mobility and computer literacy as well.

A well-written and informative book, it does make for an interesting read for those interested in all things technology. Readers will definitely find new appreciation for the Wi-Fi that we use every day.

THROUGH THE LENS

Nature enthusiast, **Rupesh Balsara** spots the Blue-capped Rock Thrush, known for its distinct blue cap and chestnut body. This species breeds in the Himalayan foothills and migrates to southern India's hill forests for the winter. It is also found in the Western Ghats region of India during winter, sometimes passing through Bangladesh, parts of Myanmar and in Pakistan. In terms of sustenance, this bird primarily feeds on insects and small invertebrates found in its rocky and forest habitats. The Blue-capped Rock Thrush is categorized as a species of "Least Concern" on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species.

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