

HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT CHALLENGES OF A GROWING ORGANISATION: A CASE STUDY

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Abstract *Human resource policies play an important role in shaping the culture and type of psychological contract in a growing organisation. These policies can be formulated either in coherence with the developing organisational culture and psychological contract or can act as an instrument to mould the organisational culture and psychological contract.*

ABCEL - A growing energy generation firm in India is facing the dilemma of deciding on the direction in which human resource policies should be formulated. ABCEL could formulate its policies in line with the demand of the business environment or in line with the current culture and relationship with the employees (psychological contract). The present paper describes this dilemma and suggests that further research is warranted in an emerging economy to provide managerial directions in this context. While studies in western context have reported diminishing role of relational psychological contract, the paper identifies the need for further research in this context within developing economies, considering the cultural difference between west and east.

Keywords: *Culture, Psychological Contract, Human Resource Policies, Competing Value Framework*

INTRODUCTION

Human Resource Policies and Organisational Culture

Human resource policies such as selection, performance appraisal, training & development have been well researched, understood, and have proven their importance in the field of management. These policies are critical to help create and maintain relationships between employees and the organisation (Denise & Martin, 1994; Guest & Conway, 2002). These policies generate major strategic competence for the firm (Miles & Snow, 1984; Collins & Clark, 2003) and are themselves strategic decisions which help the organisation survive in a competitive environment. For a growing organisation, human resource policies are even more critical, as human capital is one of the most important resources for the success of such an organisation (Collins & Clark, 2003).

As human resource policies play an important role not only in the strategic decision making but also in implementation of day-to-day organisational functions, it is very important that it should be in harmony with the culture of the organisation.

Culture can influence human resource policies at three different levels (Aycan *et al.*, 2000). The initial level is the organisational work culture which is formulated through shared values & beliefs, underlying assumptions, and observable artefacts (Schein, 1990) that directly influence the human resource policies. At this level, human resource policies are influenced in two ways by the work culture i.e. the task and the employees. Managerial beliefs and assumptions related to the task are concerned with the nature of the task and how best it can be accomplished, whereas, managerial beliefs and assumptions related to the employees are with regard to employees' nature and behaviour. The formulations of these managerial assumptions which play a crucial role in formulation of human resource policies are themselves affected by two other levels of cultural forces.

Managerial task-related assumptions are influenced by the institutional level culture. Institutional level culture of an organisation is based upon various factors like ownership status (private versus public sector), industry (service or manufacturing etc.), market competitiveness and resource availability (technological resources, human resource etc.). For example, focus of manufacturing industry is on the process whereas that of service industry is on the results. Market conditions and resource availability defines -to a

large extent - whether an organisation can adopt a pragmatic or a normative approach (Hofstead, 1991).

Managerial beliefs and assumptions related to the employees (i.e. how an employee is and how will she/he behave) are influenced by socio-cultural environment which is reflected as society level culture (Aycan *et al.*, 2000; Erez, 2000). There are various dimensions which define the society level culture like individualism-collectivism, power distance, perceived paternalism, and attachment to the community etc. Aycan *et al.* (2000) have established through a study across ten countries that managerial beliefs and assumptions related to the employees influence the application of human resource policies and therefore the culture and these policies need to be in coherence for effective implementation.

Human Resource Policies and Psychological Contract

Many researches (Rousseau, 1995; Adam, 1965; Vroom, 1964) have suggested that human resource policies shape the type of contractual relationship between the employees and the employer. As cited in Aggarwal and Bhargava (2009), various human resource policies like recruitment (Sims, 1994; Rousseau & Greller, 1994), compensation plans (Denise & Martin, 1994), and training (Sims, 1994) impact psychological contract by providing continuous signals in the way firm considers their employee and therefore employees reciprocate accordingly.

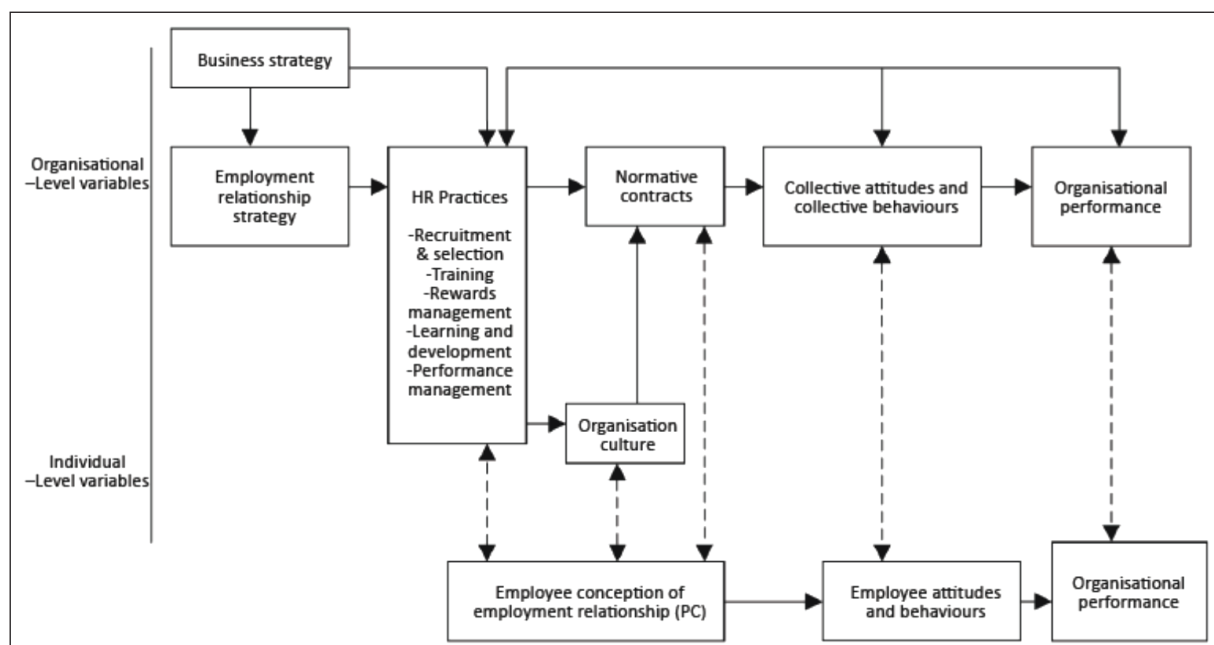
Therefore, for a growing firm, operating in a challenging environment with lots of opportunities, human resource policies need to be consistent with the existing psychological contract. For such firms, people are key resources and as they may not have a very robust knowledge management system for retaining the knowledge within the firm, retention of people is very critical for the growth of the organisation. People function as the knowledge repository and the firm would like to create minimal discord between the existing psychological contract and the signal sent by the human resource policies (Aggarwal & Bhargava, 2009). Agrawal and Bhargava (2009) have proposed a model relating human resource practices with psychological contract and organisational performance (Figure 1). The study suggested that psychological contract can influence and get influenced from the HR practices.

Psychological Contract and Organisational Culture

The relationship between psychological contract and culture has been studied extensively (Rousseau, 1990; Raja *et al.*, 2004; De Meuse & Tornow, 1990). While, these studies vary from each other in terms of their definition of culture and psychological contract, these differences have not been discussed in this case as the same is not central to our study.

The Competing Values Framework (CVF) has been named as one of the fifty most important models in the history of

Figure 1: A Model of the Relationship between Human Resource (HR) Practices, Psychological Contracts and their Effects on Employee Attitudes and Behaviours



Source: Aggarwal, U. & Bhargava, S. (2009)

business. It originally emerged from empirical research on the question of what makes organisations effective (Quinn & Rohrbaugh, 1983). It has since been extended as a framework that makes sense of high performance in regards to numerous topics in the social sciences and organisations. The CVF can be applied to understand various features at different levels in organisations. For example, it can be applied to assess personal style, communication, leadership, organisational culture, core competencies, decision making, motivation, human resources practices, quality, employee selection, organisational capabilities, organisational change patterns, strategy, financial performance and many others. It classifies organisational culture into four different culture types: clan, hierarchy, adhocracy and market. CVF has been found to be a useful tool in differentiating organisations based on culture (Richard *et al.*, 2009).

Adhocracy culture is where an organisation concentrates on external positioning with a high degree of flexibility and individuality. In market culture an organisation focuses on creating external partnership with a need for stability and control. Clan culture focuses on cohesiveness, participation, and team work (Berrio, 2003; Deshpande & Webster, 1989). It allows room for horizontal communication. On the other hand, hierarchical culture can be identified as the one based on formal rules and policies and emphasize on procedure and structure (Berrio, 2003; Deshpande & Webster, 1989).

An extensive study of the effect of culture on psychological contract has been carried out by Richard *et al.* (2009). The model proposed by Richard *et al.* (2009) is shown in Figure 2. The researchers concluded that hierarchical organisational cultures are positively related to transactional psychological contracts while negatively related to relational psychological contracts. They also concluded that clan organisational cultures are positively related to relational psychological contracts while negatively related to transactional psychological contracts.

Diminishing Importance of Psychological Contracts and Clan Culture

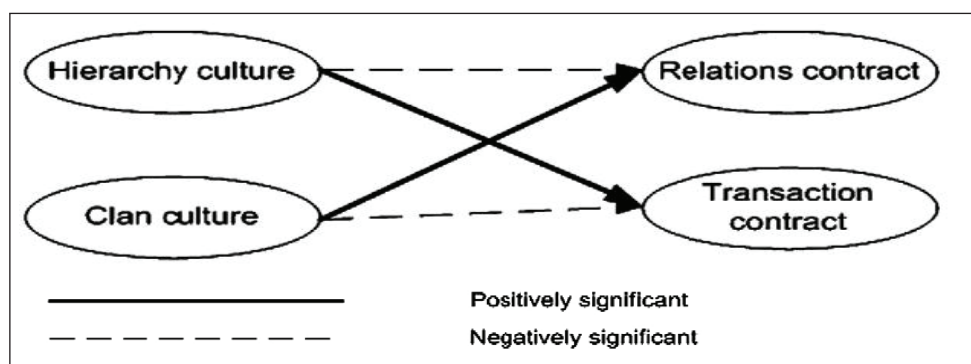
Over the last couple of decades, researchers have been suggesting that psychological contracts and clan culture are diminishing and giving away to new contracts. De Meuse & Tornow (1990), Burack (1993), Burack and Singh (1995), Rousseau (1994), Hiltrop (1995), and Spindler (1996) identified that organisations may not be living up to their end of this reciprocal obligation and they are going through a change in the way they conduct business leading to a change in the nature of psychological contract between the employees and the employer.

Maguire (2003) has provided a snapshot of the brief findings from various research studies which are reproduced here to emphasise on the fact that psychological contracts are diminishing in their importance.

- ‘The old cradle-to-grave psychological contract...is gone’ (Waxler & Higginson, 1993)
- ‘The bond between employer and employee has significantly changed, if not weakened’ (DeMeuse & Tornow, 1990)
- ‘The traditional bond between employers and employees rested upon a premise that has been revealed as unworkable’ (Soroan, 1994)
- ‘Loyalty to the company has given way to looking out for oneself’ (Kanter & Mirvis, 1989)
- ‘The psychological contract between employer and employee in terms of reasonably permanent employment for work well done is truly being undermined’ (Sparrow & Cooper, 1998)

Maguire (2002) has stated “*Commitment, previously the cornerstone of many psychological contracts, is diminishing in importance as organisations pursue increasingly transactional relationships with employees and as employees move towards ‘protean’ careers.*” Herriot and

Figure 2: Relationship between Culture and Psychological Contract



Source: Richard *et al.* (2009)

Table 1: Difference between Old and New Psychological Contracts

Change Dimension	Old contract	New contract
Relationship	Organisation is 'parent' to employee 'child'	Organisation and employee enter into 'adult' contracts focused on mutually beneficial work
Culture	Paternalism, time served, exchange security for commitment	Those who perform get rewarded and have contract developed
Rewards	Paid on level, position and status	Paid on contribution
Motivational currency	Promotion	Job enrichment, competency development
Promotion basis	Expected, time served, technical competence	Less opportunity, new criteria, for those who deserve it
Mobility expectations	Infrequent and on employee's terms	Horizontal, used to rejuvenate organisation, managed process
Redundancy/tenure guarantee	Job for life if perform	Lucky to have a job, no guarantees
Responsibility	Instrumental, employees exchange promotion for more responsibility	To be encouraged, balanced with more accountability, linked to innovation
Status and identity	Very important Identity defined by organisation	To be earned by competence and credibility Identity defined by employees
Personal development	The organisation's responsibility	Individual's responsibility to improve employability
Trust	High trust possible	Desirable, but expect employees to be more committed to project or profession

Source: Sparrow (1996); Kissler (1994); Maguire (2003)

Pemberton (1995) also identified reduction in commitment of the employees in their empirical study of finance sector employees. Similar trend is also shown in a study by Faliang (2011) who examined influence of psychological contract violations on customer complaint behaviour. Customers were found to be more concerned about transactional psychological contract violations, but less concerned about relational psychological contract violations. Studies by Hallier and James (1997) and Turnley and Feldman (1998) have also echoed similar results. Table 1 summarises the changes in the psychological contract over the last two decades based on the review of literature.

Therefore, old psychological contracts (which primarily can be represented as relational psychological contracts) are diminishing in value and are being replaced by new contracts (which primarily can be represented as explicit transactional contracts) as the studies cited above suggest. However, it must be noted that all these studies are in the Western context. This observation is important because of the socio-cultural difference between Asian and Western countries (Aycan *et al.*, 1999).

RESEARCH CONTEXT: ABCEL

ABCEL operates in the energy sector in India. India had the fifth largest electricity generation capacity in the world while the third largest network for transmission and distribution network together (www.knowindia.net/infraindia2.html). The power sector was experiencing deregulation - as per the Electricity Act (2003) and the Electricity Policy (2005)

-separating generation, transmission, and distribution. The deregulation provided an opportunity of developing a competitive market in generation and distribution to attract large private sector investments.

The planned investment in power sector during 11th five year plan (2007-2012) was Rs 5,432 billion (Planning Commission, 2008). This investment was primarily focused on electricity generation. During the 12th five year plan (2012-2017), the estimated investment was Rs 7,000 billion (Planning Commission, 2008). It was expected that with the investments during 12th five year plan, the energy deficit would be substantially reduced. This investment was expected to create more than 250,000 MW of electricity through hydro and thermal power plants (Chatterjee, 2009).

The electricity reforms driven through trifurcation of generation, transmission, and distribution also brought efficiency in transmission and distribution. The Transmission & Distribution (T&D) losses reduced substantially from 25-30% to 10-15%, making the sector further lucrative for private investments.

About ABCEL

ABCEL was incorporated in March 2007 in Delhi with ABC Infra Private Limited (head office in Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh) and XYG Private Limited (head office in Delhi) as stakeholders. In September 2007, MNP Finance Limited (head office in Mumbai) also joined ABC Energy Limited as an equity partner. ABC Infra Limited was a power and

energy sector focused project development enterprise. XYG Private Limited had been working in the domain of infrastructure construction for nearly 10 years. XYG Private Limited was the pioneer in developing and implementing the concept of power trading in India and had successfully demonstrated its efficacy in optimally utilizing the existing infrastructure within the country to the benefit of all. MNP Finance Limited was an infrastructure financing firm and provided long term finance to large infrastructure projects. As of June 30, 2010, ABCEL had 12 employees distributed over four management ranks including the director, as shown in Table 2.

The company started with a vision to become world class energy major with operations in India and neighbouring countries. Since its incorporation, ABCEL had grown both by investing in greenfield projects and by acquiring existing operations. Currently, ABCEL focuses on electricity generation through investments in hydro and thermal power plants and wants to diversify into transmission and distribution. In the last three years, major projects executed by ABCEL included 1,500 MW Ganges Hydroelectric Project, 3,140 MW Everest Thermal Power Project, 1,200 MW Hillrock Thermal Power Project, 1,200 MW Hillside Thermal Power Project, 1,450 MW Nile Hydroelectric Project, and 1,665 MW Thames Hydroelectric Project. These projects were executed through Special Purpose Vehicles (SPV). SPVs are companies formed for specific projects to create limited liabilities on the firms promoting the project. ABCEL functioned as a holding firm for the project SPVs. The primary function of ABCEL was to monitor the working and development of SPVs and project timelines.

Growth Opportunities & Key Human Resource Policies Challenges at ABCEL

With the announcement by the Prime Minister about the target investment in infrastructure sector during 12th five year plan, the promoters of ABCEL set a target of achieving a project portfolio of 30,000 MW by 2015 nearly triple of the current level. The expected organisational strength to manage this portfolio was forty or more employees. The promoters were considering having clearly defined human resource policies for meeting the envisaged growth path.

METHODOLOGY

Considering the nature of enquiry, qualitative method was identified as the most suitable research method for this study. The choice was based on the suitability of the research method to be considered as adequate to attain deep understanding of an observed phenomenon and highlight meaningful insights from the complex data (Yin, 2003).

Data were collected through primary and secondary sources. The primary data were collected through in-depth interviews, direct observations, and cognitive mapping exercises. The first author tried to get an access to all the twelve employees in the organisation but finally nine employees (seven male employees and two female employees) across managerial levels participated in the interview and cognitive mapping exercise. Secondary data were collected from the company website, internal documents shared by the company, and publications in print and electronic media. Data collected

Table 2: Number of Employees at ABCEL

Description / Grade Nomenclature	Management/ Decision Making Band	Remarks	Number of Employees
Executive / Engineer / Analyst	M1	Entry level; mainly transaction level work	04
Sr.Executive / Sr.Engineer / Sr. Analyst			
Assistant Manager			
Deputy Manager	M2	Middle Management; Operational Management levels	03
Manager			
Senior Manager / Asstt.GM			
Dy. General Manager	M3	Senior Management; Management Control related levels	02
Addl.General Manager			
General Manager			
Vice President	M4	Senior tending to Top Management; Management Control plus Strategic management levels	02
Sr.Vice President			
President/ Executive Director			
Director/ Board Level Positions	--	Top Management positions	01
Total			12

Source: ABCEL's Internal Records

from secondary sources were not only helpful in providing additional information but also enriched information collected from the primary sources. Collection of data through both primary and secondary sources also provided an opportunity for triangulation of data and was useful in improving the validity of collected data.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Culture at ABCEL

The organisational culture of ABCEL was assessed through observations, interviews, and cognitive mapping exercise. The observations and interviews were analyzed to identify the culture of the organisation using the framework presented by Cameron and Quinn (2006). The cognitive mapping exercise (employees were asked to draw a picture which they feel will express the culture of ABCEL and the relationship which they share with the organisation) was used to triangulate the inferences of the analysis. Mishra and Gupta (2010) provide the details of the analysis.

We classified the culture of ABCEL as clan culture (Figure 3). The organisation exhibited family type cohesion and a sense of we-ness, participative-ness, teamwork, commitment, and loyalty. It also has a shade of adhocracy culture as innovations are welcomed, leadership is visionary, and organisation’s long term emphasis is on rapid growth and acquiring new resources.

The above finding means that the organisation is collaborative and creative. ABCEL’s value drivers include commitment, communication, development, innovation, and agility. ABCEL’s leadership is innovative, mentoring, and visionary. The organisational effectiveness is driven by using new resources, innovation, human development, and vision. ABCEL would be able to anticipate the needs, create new standards, strive for continuous improvement, work towards empowerment of the employees, and open communication.

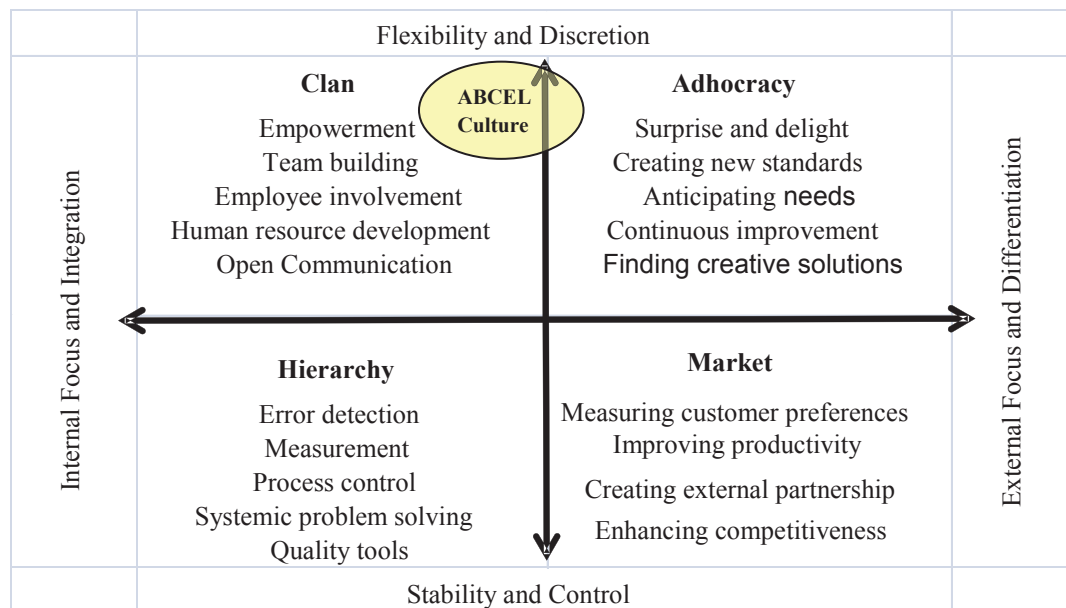
Therefore, it appears that ABCEL’s culture is rightly poised for its business and growth expectations. The HR policies and practices need to reinforce the clan culture further to retain employees and conserve knowledge created in the organisation.

Relational Contract at ABCEL

During the interactions with the employees, following sentences appear to suggest that the employees share a relational psychological contract.

- “We are treated like family members” (Sr. Analyst, 27 years, Male)
- “We are like a team” (Sr. Vice President, 33 years, Male)
- “Employees share information/data among themselves without any reluctance except for confidential stuffs like disclosure of bidding amount etc” (Manager, 38 years, Male)

Figure 3: ABCEL’s Culture on Competing Value Framework



Source: Author’s Assessment of ABCEL’s culture

- “We discuss various possible solutions for any problem in a team” (Deputy Manager, 36, Female)
- “Superiors are caring. They generally do not superimpose things. Logic and explanations are given for the decisions” (Engineer, 25 years, Male)
- “The company has planned training sessions and individuals are also free to plan their own personal development” (Asst Manager, 31 years, Female)
- “Management takes our view while making decision and gives due importance to them” (Sr. Engineer, 30 years, Male)

Similarly, it was observed during the visit and inferred from other interviews (not cited here) that the firm respected individuals. Unlike peer organisations in the power sector, the signature style of the promoters/top managers was viewed as ‘affinitive’, ‘empowering’, and ‘humane’. Employees joining or leaving the organisation experienced a smooth transition and the organisation was friendly to them. Also, there were no instances of going back on the obligations even during the recession period (financial years 2008-09 and 2009-10), whether it was on salary or promotion or anything else. The above sentences and inferences point towards relational contract with the employees.

Discussion: Way Forward for ABCEL

For developing economies like India, primary focus is on growth. Power, information technology, health, and other infrastructure are playing crucial role in attaining the desired growth in the economy. Consequently, these sectors are faced with changing market conditions, increasing competition and rapid technological advancements, requiring the organisations operating in these spaces to quickly deal with the need for transformation. For survival and success of these organisations, it has become important that such HR policies and practices be adopted which can prepare them for rapid growth in the dynamic and evolving environment. This study brings out the challenges and dilemma faced by a growing organisation in power sector while modifying its HR policies and practices. Few studies have explored these challenges and dilemma faced by a growing firm in a dynamically evolving sector in an emerging economy. In this study, we attempt to fill this gap by examining the HR issue and challenges faced by high growth organisations in the power sector in India, which is rapidly growing as well as evolving. The study reviews complex interplay of HR policies, organisational culture and psychological contract which takes place in a dynamic business environment.

Based on the studies presented in earlier section (Psychological Contract and Organisational Culture), Clan culture has positive relation with relational contracts while negative relationship with hierarchy culture. Therefore, the

human resource policies which are under consideration of the promoters may be directed towards retaining the relational psychological contract and reinforcing the Clan culture.

However, ABCEL may miss out on consistency and uniformity in processes and decisions while following clan culture. Also, goal achievement and market share may not be the most critical focus for the organisation as it is driven by Clan culture. The organisation may get relaxed on quality beyond a point as the processes may not be the focus in Clan culture. Therefore, following clan culture and relational contract, the promoters may miss on their goal to facilitate the increase in the firm size to 50 employees by 2015.

If ABCEL decides to move towards Hierarchy and Market culture, it would mean more accountability, more of process focus, use of quality tools, improving productivity, preparedness and enhancing competitiveness. The challenge will be to make the shift from the current Clan culture, and employees’ expectations in order to be able to meet the business requirements. The formulation of HR policies and practices will play a crucial role in successfully incorporating such changes.

Given the current level of industry maturity and competition, ABCEL has been well placed with Clan culture with a shade of Adhocracy culture. The shades of adhocracy provide enough scope for improvements and creative solution in the changing regulatory and industry competition environment. However, with the growth in the business and size of the organisation it is also the right time for the organisation to formulate policies and procedures which can increase accountability, ownership and clarity of expectations from the employees. The international trends also reflect diminishing role of relational psychological contract.

Therefore, the promoters of this organisation are faced with a dilemma: whether to follow the findings on reduction in the role of relational psychological contract and move towards developing hierarchy and market culture in the organisation using human resource policies as an instrument or to develop human resource policies which is in coherence with the clan culture and relational psychological contract.

CONCLUSION

For any growing organisation, formulation of human resource policies is very critical. ABCEL is faced with a dilemma of whether to follow the research findings in the western world and therefore move towards human resource policies which undermine the importance of relational psychological contract or not. It is well understood that for the growth of the organisation it is important to adopt practices which can deal with competitive, global business environment. But, the cultural difference between west and east also demands a need to understand that there may be a difference

in the employees' preference for the work culture and psychological contract. It is important to find out solutions which can help top management achieve its goal and at the same time be able to build an organisational culture which is appreciated by the employees. In a contemporary business environment, an informed and well-conceived decision on human resource policies will be instrumental not only for the survival but also for the growth of a young organisation like ABCEL.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The present study is a cross-sectional study. A longitudinal study can help understand the findings on how organisations evolve their HR policies and seek a balance between their prevailing and changing culture in different timeframes. Future research can also explore other specific HR challenges that an organisation may face due to increasing competition like attraction and retention of workforce etc. Though this study provides a comprehensive picture of a growing organisation in the power sector, future researchers may provide insights by drawing comparisons of similar studies on a number of organisations across sectors.

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