Journal of Entrepreneurship and Management
13 (3) 2024, 25-33
http://publishingindia.com/jem/

Talent Management in CPSEs: A Strategic Approach

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Abstract

Central Public Sector Enterprises (CPSEs) are operating in a competitive world. The competition is severe and challenging. CPSEs can overcome the talent deficit by transforming their HR. While redrawing their strategies on board, the new age classification of industry known as Industry 4.0 and Industry 4.5 must be considered. The latest generation of employees and gender diversity could be the focal point of attention. While the government has taken several steps to improve the level of governance in the CPSEs, there have been few initiatives to improve the HR function, resulting in Talent Management (TM). To address this thorny problem, CPSEs have introduced Performance-Related Pay (PRP) based on the recommendation of the Second Pay Committee appointed by the Government of India but with little gain. PRP provides a partial solution to the problem. Except for the introduction of incentives in the form of PRP, the other aspects of TM are yet to receive due attention in CPSEs.

Keywords: CPSEs, Talent Management, Significance, Process, Performance Management System, Critical Challenges

Introduction and Need of Research

Central Public Sector Enterprises (CPSEs) have played a key role in the Indian economy since independence by way of providing industrial growth and fulfilling social responsibilities such as implementing the government's flagship programs and providing last-mile connectivity and public utilities even in the hinterlands. CPSEs also generate employment opportunities and act as a vital extension of the central government in implementing critical infrastructure and development projects. CPSEs play an important role in the growth of the Indian economy. Apart from the direct contribution to the economic output of the country, the products and services offered by the CPSEs help create a significant downstream impact in the form of generating growth opportunities for small and medium enterprises, creating direct/indirect employment, driving the government's strategic agenda, contributing to the Central Exchequer, technological progress and innovation. These enterprises are under fierce competition both inside and outside of India. They are dealing with a severe talent shortage as well as the issue of talent retention. This research aims to provide insight into the causes of this issue and potential solutions.

Literature Review

The literature on Talent Management (TM) has expanded to encompass not only the attraction, development and retention of high-potential employees but also the adaptation of these practices in a globalised and technologically evolving workplace. The future of TM likely involves a broader, more inclusive approach that leverages data and technology to enhance decision-making and adapt to an increasingly diverse workforce.

The field of TM has evolved from workforce planning to a more strategic focus on identifying, developing and retaining high-potential employees. Lewis and Heckman (2006) first challenged the ambiguity in TM definitions, which led to more focused frameworks, such as Collings and Mellahi's (2009) influential "strategic talent management" model. This model highlights TM as a deliberate practice aimed at a competitive advantage by identifying pivotal talent positions within

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the organisation. Attracting top talent has become a core TM function, especially given global labour market competition. Michaels et al. (2001) introduced the "war for talent" concept, asserting the importance of building a strong employer brand to attract the best talent. Research by Vaiman and Collings (2013) emphasises the need for customised approaches in global TM, given varying cultural, economic and legal contexts that impact recruitment strategies. Development is central to TM, as it enhances employee skills and organisational knowledge. McDonnell et al. (2010) discuss talent development as a systematic process, including mentoring, training, and leadership programs. Garavan et al. (2012) highlight the importance of career development, continuous learning and succession planning as essential components for sustaining a talent pipeline, especially within leadership roles. Retaining top talent is a significant challenge due to high mobility and competitive job markets. Stahl et al. (2012) propose that retention strategies should align with the organisation's culture, values and practices to foster loyalty and engagement. De Vos and Dries (2013) further advocate for clear career paths, development opportunities and recognition as ways to enhance employee retention. As organisations globalise, TM strategies must adapt to international contexts. Farndale et al. (2010) explore the challenges multinational corporations (MNCs) face in implementing TM policies across different cultural and institutional settings. Tarique and Schuler (2010) propose a model of global TM that incorporates cross-cultural competencies, global leadership development and expatriate management to address unique challenges in a global workforce. Recent research highlights trends such as the use of technology and analytics in TM, the growing role of artificial intelligence and a shift towards a more inclusive approach to talent (i.e., managing all employees as talent rather than a select few). Cappelli and Keller (2014) explore the role of data analytics in optimising TM decisions, while Gallardo-Gallardo et al. (2015) suggest that TM's future will include a blend of strategic alignment, diversity and adaptability in a dynamic business environment.

Data Profile of CPSEs

Most CPSEs were set up after independence when the private sector was neither forthcoming nor had the capacity for large capital-intensive enterprises. There were only five CPSEs in 1951 but by 1969, the number grew to 84. The number of CPSEs trebled to 260 in 2011–12 and increased to 389 in 2021–22. In 2021–22, the gross turnover of these enterprises was ₹31.95 lakh crore and the total financial investment stood at ₹22.81 lakh crore.

Table 1 provides a peep into the Cognate group-wise employment data relating to CPSEs in 2020–21.

Table 1 shows the composition of personnel in CPSEs in 21 cognate groups. The managerial and supervisory personnel comprised 23 percent of the total workforce in CPSEs. The managerial and supervisory personnel lead CPSEs from the front as they represent the central talent pool. Not only that such personnel have to be retained to sustain these enterprises, but fresh recruitments have to be undertaken to fill up the vacancies caused by retirees. Manning the posts of the chief executives is a challenging task. So is the case with finding suitable executives at the below-board level. Viewed from the industry angle, it can be surmised that attracting talent for energy, IT, banking, financial services and insurance sectors is a herculean task.

Analysis, Discussions and Implications

TM has always been a critical area for driving rapid industrial growth, achieving competitive advantage and providing accelerated benefits from a business model to shareholders. New-age digital corporations related to Information Technology and Information technology-enabled services (IT & ITES) are leading the pack to roll out innovative tools for managing talent and reinventing employee performance evaluation systems by doing away with the bell curve methodology and adopting a more continuous 360-degree feedback system. More than 76 percent of private corporates have changed processes, 59 percent of the corporates have brought in alignment to corporate strategy in performance management systems, and 30 percent of corporates have relooked at HR structures and capabilities, amongst other factors (People Matters, 2018).

Empirically, TM in an organisation was considered as a deliberate approach to attract, retain, motivate and develop and succession plan for people with the aptitude

Table 1: Cognate Group-Wise Employment in CPSEs on 31st March 2021

S. No.	*Category*	*Managerial Executive*	*Supervisory*		*Non-Executive*		*Casual/ Contractual Daily Rated*		*Total*	*% w.r.t. Total Employees in all CPSEs*
			Unionized	*Non-Unionized*	*Skilled*	*Unskilled*	*Workers*	*Employees*		
1	Agro-Based Industries	233	0	121	1,187	491	122	313	2,467	0.18%
2	Coal	14,410	31,831	368	1,03,078	1,06,261	2	61,017	3,16,967	23.10%
3	Crude Oil	20,896	2,391	0	10,633	2,789	232	27,194	64,135	4.67%
4	Other Minerals & Metals	4,897	499	539	11,939	8,256	103	34,479	60,712	4.42%
5	Steel	16,743	5,741	47	55,573	5,688	484	15,189	99,465	7.25%
6	Petroleum (Refinery & Marketing)	31,897	5,057	0	16,838	1,661	23	1,59,419	2,14,895	15.66%
7	Fertilisers	3,702	776	617	3,390	382	282	6,558	15,707	1.14%
8	Chemicals & Pharmaceuticals	1,250	117	493	1,334	502	330	1,049	5,075	0.37%
9	Heavy & Medium Engineering	31,741	753	7,134	44,430	4,522	13,019	40,948	1,42,547	10.39%
10	Transportation Vehicles & Equipment	2,021	2,022	0	2,005	5	0	4,608	10,661	0.78%
11	Industrial & Consumer Goods	1,459	864	938	3,914	17,758	1,294	5,044	31,271	2.28%
12	Textiles	1,637	259	122	3,295	954	4,527	1,624	12,418	0.91%
13	Power Generation	26,066	256	2,942	21,272	1,791	0	54,282	1,06,609	7.77%
14	Power Transmission	5,017	0	2,399	1,983	72	0	1,532	11,003	0.80%
15	Trading & Marketing	6,636	15,633	74	2,760	32,913	792	682	59,490	4.34%
16	Transport & Logistic Services	22,110	5,152	269	9,534	5,497	1,763	37,076	81,401	5.93%
17	Contract & Construction and Technical Consultancy Services	10,983	4,351	2,030	4,726	1,933	697	9,234	33,954	2.47%
18	Hotels & Tourist Services	476	12	618	1,269	246	645	576	3,842	0.28%
19	Financial Services	2,092	339	99	149	159	51	261	3,150	0.23%
20	Telecommunications & Information Technology	32,415	277	20	36,151	984	4,978	14,879	89,704	6.54%
21	Enterprises Under Construction	760	7	106	232	31	29	5,431	6,596	0.48%
	Grand total	**2,37,441**	**76,337**	**18,936**	**3,35,692**	**1,92,895**	**29,373**	**4,81,395**	**13,72,069**	**100.00**

Source: (Department of Public Enterprises, Ministry of Finance, Government of India, Annual Survey of Public Enterprises 2020-21, Vol 1, pp 118-119).

and abilities to meet not only the current requirements but also future organisational needs. In the talent-hungry market scenario, one of the greatest challenges that organisations face is to successfully attract, assess, train and retain talented employees. TM encompasses in itself the entire process of Planning, Recruiting, Developing, Managing and Compensating employees throughout the organisation. However, TM and the tools associated with it are undergoing a transformational shift from being a reactive process to being a real-time proactive process with strategies to keep pace with the neck-breaking speed required for business growth and expansion.

Conceptual Background

TM can be defined as 'the systematic attraction, identification, development, engagement/retention, and deployment of those individuals with high potential who are of particular value to an organisation'. Ulrich (2006) takes a more holistic view to define *talent* as a combination of competence, commitment and contribution. TM is an interconnected process, which is linked with various other Human Resources (HR) functions and is very difficult to handle. The major concern is to align the employees with organisational goals and retain them for the long run to gain a competitive advantage in the market. Fig. 1 shows that TM is an interconnected process.

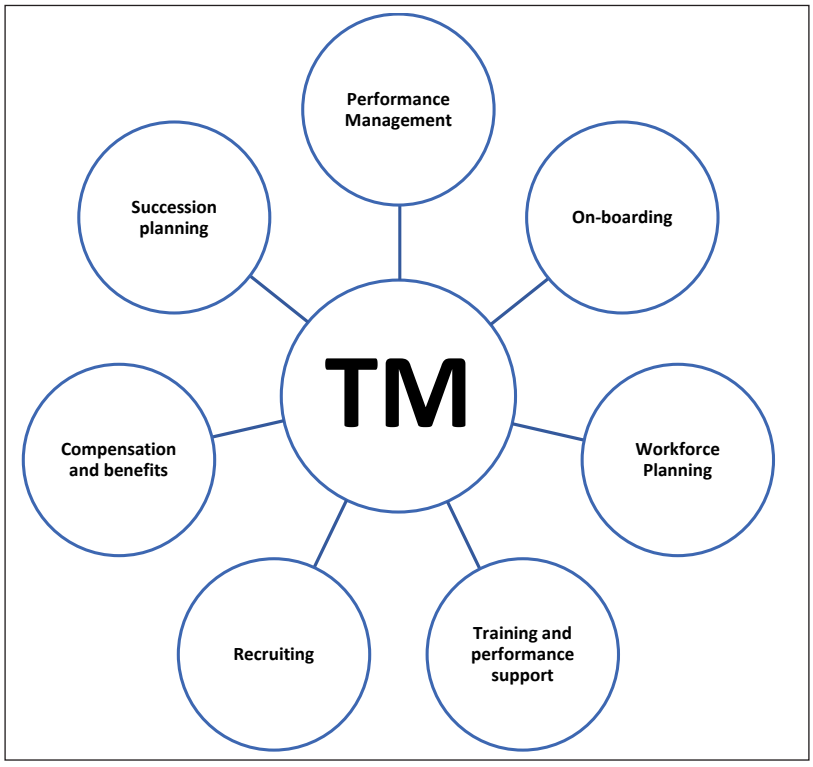

Fig. 1: Talent Management Process

TM has become the essence of not only service-based industries but other industrial sectors too because it revolves around the development of the skills and competencies of the employees, which is of prime importance to organisational performance. Many scholars have tried to analyse and study TM strategies in various sectors.

Maya and Thamilselvanm (2012) related TM to employ perception and various demographic variables. Alternative Work Schedule (AWS), Employee Engagement Program, Mentoring/Coaching, Rewards and recognition system are considered as other elements of TM. Vanka and Pinapati (2013) examined competency management as a tool for

TM in terms of talent acquisition, training development and retention. From the senior management perspective, talent development, talent acquisition and talent retention are perceived to be important TM areas. Both senior management and employees consider culture-challenging assignments and work environments as enabling factors of TM.

The strategic perspectives on TM distinguish between TM and HR. Table 1 shows that the perspectives differ widely and are also divergent.

Table 2: Strategic Perspective on TM

	Perspective Devine and Powell (2008)	*Talent Based Initiatives*	*HR Perspective*
1	Competitive perspective	Give what talented people want otherwise they will be poached;	Pay for performance, Competitive pay, Career management
2	Process perspective	Managing talent is part of the everyday organizational life;	Employee engagement initiatives
3	HR perspective	Match the right people with the right job, strong ownership of the HR team	Talent acquisition
4	Developmental perspective	Accelerated development paths for talented people;	Learning and Development initiative, Career planning
5	Cultural perspective	TM as a mindset	Diversity management, Managing organizational culture initiatives
6	Change management perspective	TM is a driver of change	Organizational Change, Organizational development initiatives

Source: Devine, M., & Powell, M. (2008). Talent Management in the Public Sector. The Ashridge Journal, 360, 1-6.

Successful organisations proactively and systematically take action to ensure that they have the human resource capability to meet their current and future business requirements (Berger & Berger, 2011). TM implies recognising a person's inherent skills, traits and personality and offering him a matching job. The issue with many companies today is that their organisations put tremendous effort into attracting employees to their company but spend little time in retaining and developing talent. A wrong fit will result in further hiring, re-training and other wasteful activities. TM as a system must be worked into the business strategy and implemented in daily processes throughout the company as a whole. It should not be left solely to the human resources department to attract and retain employees but rather must be practiced at all levels of the organisation. From the TM standpoint, employee evolutions concern two major areas of measurement; performance and potential. Current employee performance within a specific job has always been a standard evaluation measurement tool of the profitability of an employee. However, TM also seeks to focus on an employee's potential, meaning an employee's future performance, if given the proper development of skills and increased responsibility.

Significance of TM in CPSEs

When India achieved independence in 1947, it had a very weak industrial base. The major consideration for the setting up of CPSEs was to accelerate the growth of core sectors of the economy, to serve the equipment needs of strategically important sectors and to generate employment and income. Over the years after attaining independence, CPSEs have grown in numbers and also in the range of activities such as manufacturing, engineering, steel, heavy machinery, textiles, pharmaceuticals, petrochemicals etc. CPSEs encounter several problems concerning the management of human resources. These enterprises continue to struggle with various essential human resource issues such as getting employees at low rates of compensation, providing growth opportunities for employees within the organisation, retaining talent and providing clearly defined roles and tasks to employees. Of these, compensation has been a dominant issue. Inadequate levels of remuneration have not only hampered attracting talent in executive positions but have also induced a high turnover of employees. This has benefited the private sector and MNCs, as CPSEs have become the victims of the flight of their personnel to the

private sector and MNCs. For a long time, the Indian public sector has been the best reservoir of engineering and managerial talent for the private sector companies and MNCs to 'poach' at the junior management levels. For many bright engineering graduates, CPSEs have been excellent training schools and were coveted destinations in the sixties and early seventies of the last century. They are no longer so, for the past 10 years or more, because of the better remunerations and career growth opportunities available in the private sector and MNC enterprises. This is one of the reasons for the apparent low attrition rates at the junior levels of CPSEs as the talent in demand is going elsewhere.

The attraction of India, for talent, is owing to the availability of human resources needed for intellectually intensive jobs. Several MNCs are setting up their R&D centres in India and aggressively mopping up the scarce talent. In a particular year, the Oil and Natural Gas Corporation Limited lost several top management personnel to its counterparts in India. The public sector enterprises in India are well thought-out as 'model employers. Best of talents across the country joined CPSEs as the most preferred job. Working in the public sector was considered a matter of pride and privilege for the brightest talent. But over time, things have changed drastically; the situations are very different today than they were a decade ago. With the opening of the economy, the best talents have found an inclination towards the private sector and MNCs for obvious reasons regarding the quality of work life and career advancement prospects apart from handsome pay packages. We are also witnessing an exodus of talent from CPSEs. Public enterprises are today facing a tremendous challenge in terms of attracting and retaining talent. There is an urgent need for adopting a correct suitable approach towards the employees, considering them as a strategic resource. These issues lead to high attrition and increase the cost of acquiring and training new employees. It thus becomes critical for public enterprises to think out of the box and try a variety of innovative strategies to overcome these problems.

Struggles for talent, attrition rates and workforce retention have become serious issues for CPSEs. There are also additional challenges of managing and encouraging diversity in the workforce – be it in the inclusion of more women, the integration of people of different age groups with different styles of working and learning, or in making workplaces accessible to leverage the abilities of differently-abled persons. The multipronged challenge ahead for the HR community is to facilitate the creation of an inclusive workplace and leverage this inclusively to build organisational agility in times of advancing technology and economic uncertainty.

Some of the serious challenges that have acted as serious bottlenecks in CPSEs over the years include heavy losses, overstaffing, poor leadership pipeline, unsatisfactory industrial relations, lack of motivation and political interference. However, of late, CPSEs are going through exciting changes in their environment, with a range of new opportunities and challenges as the Indian economy integrates with the global markets. Profitability has emerged as their most important goal, and that is only possible through good performance. It is the people who drive the organisations through performance, and they need to be highly skilled and engaged with the organisation.

Capability and skill building, along with access to opportunities and recognition, is what the young generation workforce wants more than anything else. Certainly, the salary package and job security aspect still hold importance but are far from sufficient in building loyalty or engagement. The organisation's commitment to providing exposure, training and developing its employees is indeed the key differentiator for personnel.

Engagement of the young generation is a challenge for many CPSEs, especially when they have to compete with private sector companies, particularly startups that offer attractive growth opportunities and compensation to the best of the talent in the market. The young generation wants their opinion to be taken into account, which has always been done in the CPSEs with a command-and-control legacy. They seek to have upward, downward and lateral communication channels open for them and have fewer hierarchies.

Investments in human capital have become the key priority for most of these enterprises. However, employing the right talent is just one part of the story. Training employees regularly to keep their skills equipped at all times is of equal importance. Barring some honourable exceptions, the current state of HR in most CPSEs can be put under a culture of precedence, standardisation and

industry practice. In many CPSEs, including Navratna and Maharatna companies, HR Management, policies, practices and systems have remained stagnated and have only shown incremental or marginal changes. In many Maharatna companies, the promotion policies have not been revised for the last several years, resulting in a junior executive getting promoted to the ED without the process of an interview. The current tendency in many CPSEs to hire consultants for HR to design new systems of appraisal or training is a positive step, but in the absence of an internal culture to improve the human processes, much of the output gets wasted. Most CPSEs have not aligned their HR to the needs of the new industrial order, impeding the development of younger talent, developing open communication systems, diversity management, fairness in promotions, administrative excellence and investment in training and development. According to a research study by the Great Places to Work Institute (2012-13) despite many good features of the CPSEs, such as a high level of pride and respectability employer brands of CPSEs have been diminishing over the last couple of years. CPSEs figure poorly on the Trust Index such as communication and credibility, fairness and camaraderie. The research also concludes that CPSEs figure low on communication, grievance redressal, hiring, rewarding and listening. Any reform process in CPSEs can be facilitated by emphasising and putting at centre stage its people process. Reforms in HR are a vital prerequisite for any CPSE to continuously improve its positioning in a competitive marketplace and respond with greater responsiveness to a wider range of stakeholders. A good feature of some CPSEs is that the HR function is represented at the director level. As directors generally come from the line function, it is important that they are inducted into professional HR through a formal training program. There is a need to induct people specialists in CPSEs. People issues are increasingly complex and require suitable academic orientation in psychology, methodologies of appraisal, learning and assessment. CPSEs in some sectors, like oil and gas, are also rapidly expanding and are increasingly eyeing acquiring assets abroad. Maharatna and Navratna companies have been delegated certain powers by the government for investments in capacity expansion. It is an indisputable fact that many of the new aspirations and diversification into new business areas can be met only through the availability of a continuous pipeline of talent and leadership in such companies. The Panel of Experts on Reforms in CPSEs (2011) has also pointed out that CPSE management is confronted with the need for ever-changing skill sets, higher efficiency standards due to increased competition and the need to retain talent in the face of attrition. A performance culture, nevertheless, needs to be inculcated in CPSEs. The productivity of resources, both manpower and materials, is going to play a major role in determining the success of CPSEs in the future.

Performance Management System: A Case Study of BHEL in CPSEs

An important dimension of TM is a well-established Performance Management System (PMS). We describe below how BHEL is deploying PMS to manage its TM and the need for its revamp.

'Moving Ahead through Performance' (MAP) is the popular name assigned to PMS in BHEL. BHEL is attaching utmost importance to its PMS, which has been continuously revising its formats and features and moved over to online updating of these records. It had developed a 'User's Manual' clearly describing the role overview of the Appraisee, Appraiser, Reviewer, HOD, Intermediary and Accepting Authority.

- *Performance Planning:* Key Result Areas (KRA) are identified, an action plan for the achievement of each KRA is developed, and weightages are assigned for each KRA. These are critical achievements required to deliver the company's desired business results. Typically, these are outcomes that directly contribute to the company's Memorandum of Understanding or Strategic Objectives and Balanced Scorecard of the Unit and Department.
- *Mid-Year and Final Review:* Self-appraisal is conducted to track the progress of performance on KRAs and finalise with the appraiser the actual achievement against targets.
- *Role Overview of Appraisee:* The appraiser in direct contact with the appraisee critically examines the role and provides continuous feedback and coaching.
- *Role Overview of Reviewer:* The Reviewer has the role of validating performance plans and final ratings to ensure consistency and objectivity across the teams reporting to his/her appraisees.

- *Role Overview of HOD:* HOD is the final approving authority of KRAs earlier agreed upon and can add or delete some KRAs as requested by the appraisee.
- *Role Overview of Intermediary:* The Intermediary is the person who falls in the direct line of reporting between the Reviewer and the Accepting Authority. He is senior to the reviewer and junior to theccepting authority. His role comes only during the final review.
- *Competencies & Development Plan:* Competencies are skills and abilities described in terms of behaviours that are coachable, observable, measurable and critical to individual performance skills. Competencies form the foundation of "what" capabilities are required for the successful execution of roles and responsibilities, thereby driving functional, unit and organisational performance.
- *Normalisation:* Normalisation is the process of assigning final ratings to individuals based on the performance level of the company, unit and product group/department in a defined performance cycle. Business sectors are treated as units for normalisation.

The entire process of performance appraisal is to motivate and reward employees feeding into the TM system. BHEL has been able to attract the requisite talent for its diverse and complex engineering requirements.

The desired research for an effective PMS has to be perpetual and professional. This has been hardly attended to, resulting in a flight of personnel. Adequacy of rewards is another lacuna. A paltry reward amounts to offering no reward. Identifying high flyers is another miss.

Conclusion

The profile of CPSEs in India is described in this article, along with the necessity of TM, its contextual relevance, its current condition and a case study outlining the performance management system in these businesses. The article outlines the difficulties TM faces and offers solutions. According to the publication, these businesses' current TM practices are outdated and need to be updated to match those of their competitors. These businesses would become much more inventive, enterprising and competitive with a strong TM.

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