



THE HUMAN FACTOR

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When Patni Computers started surveying its organisational work flows to get out of the conventional mindset on assessing employees and drawing career paths, the results surprised the top management. There were 173 different types of roles that its 13,000 employees performed, but the top management was only vaguely aware of quite a few of them. Not an ideal state of affairs for a company that was operating in the highly competitive IT services space and was already suffering from a 20 per cent attrition rate.

Patni, of course, is not alone in facing the high attrition rate.

Though Nasscom figures indicate that supply could meet a doubling of demand for IT talent through 2008 (from the industry's one million employees today to over 2.1 million), almost all IT companies feel that demand will far outstrip supply soon.

But what did Patni do to meet the problem? "We took a LEAP," jokes Milind Jadhav, senior vice president and HR head, referring to the company's hugely successful Leadership Excellence at Patni (LEAP) programme, which is an end-to-end HR solution devised in-house with some help from McKinsey on benchmarking the scheme with global best practices. The greatest advantage of LEAP is that it has helped in defining role profiles and aims to find the sweet spot between organisational needs, employee aspirations and their capabilities.

LEAP, which also gives employees the option of choosing a career path from different streams, features

a six-point strategy that emphasises the development of leadership abilities, entrepreneurial skills and strategic vision. The objective is to make Patni employees better prepared to pursue various career tracks within the organisation. Jadhav says LEAP also helps handhold promising employees all the way to well-defined leadership roles.

The results are showing. Though the attrition rate for people in the experience band of three to five years continues to be around the industry average, the comforting thought for Patni is that just one senior management person has left in the recent past. "As long as people stay on

in critical slots, the rest can be managed," says Jadhav.

But LEAP also seeks to take care of people at the junior levels. One of these initiatives is the Fast Track programme under which the company first shortlists 200 people every year. A rigorous selection process identifies 25-20 candidates for the programme and each of them is given a mentor to guide them and give them a clear growth path within the company. The selection process doesn't involve any interviews since they are highly subjective, and no recommendation from any departmental head is encouraged. Patni has devised its

own "assessment center", which chooses these candidates with minimum human interventions. The biggest satisfaction for Jadhav is that Fast Track has become an aspirational tool even for those who haven't been successful.

Patni has also embarked on another initiative called the "non-IT to IT" programme under which the focus has shifted from recruiting people from premier engineering institutes to bright young graduates from non-technical colleges in Tier II and III towns and take them through a rigorous training process. Around 20 per cent of the company's employees are

Patni's LEAP

The IT services firm is tackling attrition through e-care and elaborate definition of role profiles

from these colleges. The logic is obvious: apart from the fact they don't jump ship just for a few thousand rupees more, the cultural milieu and the family bonding in the Tier II and III towns are still very strong and this helps in developing a strong bonding with a caring employer.

Jadhav says his biggest challenge is to tackle the four-year barrier, as the company's records show that people who have stayed on for four years with Patni don't usually leave after that. One way of making juniors stay back for four years has been the company's agreement with the Birla Institute of Technology & Sciences (BITS), Pilani. Under the scheme, BITS runs off-campus distance learning and collaborative programmes exclusively for Patni employees. These are long-term courses and non-transferable, which means once a person leaves Patni, the portion of the course he has attended becomes infructuous.

Jadhav also takes great pride

in the company's fully automated e-care programme under which employees at all levels are encouraged to post any queries or problems that they may have. Any entry is automatically escalated to the next level and the matter is expected to be resolved within four working days. In case it's not resolved, the complaint/query automatically goes right up to the level of the management council or even the CEO. In case employees are not satisfied with the way their problem was handled, they can also manually escalate it to the next higher level. The transparency and the four-day time limit ensure that people at all levels are proactive in solving their colleagues' problems.

At a time when people are your greatest assets, Jadhav says soft skills are something that every leader has to learn. LEAP and e-care are valuable tools to make sure that soft skills are never in short supply in Patni's senior management team.