How to Prepare for Digitisation at Work

Cos will have to create a sense of trust among employees while coaxing them to reskill to adapt to the new world

Nandini Piramal

The workplace ecosystem in India has witnessed unforeseen changes over the last few years. While some of the key drivers have been the changing workforce demographics and evolving global economic and political equations, probably the single most critical driver has been the proliferation of digitisation at the workplace. With some of these underlying drivers becoming more pronounced in 2019, workplaces in India will witness a continued momentum in change. Some of these include:

Customisation of Employee Experience while Retaining the Organisation's Ethos: Diversity in context of the Indian workplace will take on a whole new meaning with a multi-generational, multinational workforce that is complemented by bots. This will require organisations to appreciate and address the diverging employee needs while retaining a consistent value system and work ethos across the organisation.

Emerging Capability Needs and Widening Skill Gap: With increased digitisation, a new set of capability requirements will emerge that may not be catered to by the established education system in our country. This will call upon organisations to build newer engines, to develop these skills inhouse and at the same time, create avenues for widening the funnel through industry-academia partnerships.

Ushering in New Organisation Models: Hyper-specialisation will continue to gain momentum. This, along with the improving entrepreneurial culture in the country, will mean that an increasing number of people, who would have earlier continued in regular employment, will be setting up boutique outfits to address niche requirements. Organisation models will need to be tweaked to capitalise on this trend, and harness the power of this extended workforce. More importantly, the career needs of people who are hyper-specialised will need to be fulfilled.

Changing Contours of Leadership: Probably the biggest demand will be made from the leadership. Not only will they be required to make sense of this VUCA world, but also lead their teams to embrace and capitalise on the changing dynamics. The fact that a majority of these leaders may have themselves groomed in a more stable, analogue (read non-digital) environment, will add to the challenge. Organisations will need to modulate their leadership development architecture to address these emerging leadership gaps.

Employee Anxiety and Building Trust: While digitisation may put some jobs at risk (and create many new ones), it is expected to increase employee anxiety associated with the prospect of job loss. Organisations will have to create a sense of trust among employees while simultaneously coaxing them to reskill to adapt to the new world. This will be one of the trickiest issues that employers will have to grapple with from time to time. One way to deal with this issue is to create and foster a culture of learning. When employees turn lifelong learners, it helps them deal with anxiety.

Like all other functions, human capital management, too, will need to adapt and embrace this change. But more importantly, it will be entrusted with the critical role of enabling and prepping the workforce and leaders in particular to ensure that their organisation will continue to retain its competitive edge, as the ecosystem continues to evolve. How the HR fraternity views this new world order, as an opportunity or as a threat, will determine whether the agenda of the people will retain its rightful place as the cornerstone of businesses.

The writer is Executive Director, Piramal Enterprises