

Rightsizing Manpower With a Human Face

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Today momentous events are taking place all over the world. The world has become more competitive, uncertain and volatile than ever (Kobrin,1992). To face the challenges of competition, Guha (1996) in his classic study, Voluntary Retirement-problems and perspectives, has rightly pointed out that to achieve the cost effectiveness , downsizing of manpower has to be taken up as indispensable exercise. It is reported that the most humane technique of rightsizing the workforce is VRS which has virtually become corporate India's only option for shedding manpower (The Economic Times,4 December, 2000). The present article is a modest attempt by the authors to discuss issues relating to rightsizing manpower in organizations but with a human face.

Before the real beginning of the globalisation movement in our country, all growth, expansion and diversification activities in organizations were carried out through the employment of additional manpower in organizations. While one of the reasons for additional employment of manpower was the requirement of the technology (less capacity and more time to produce), in several other cases it was due to regional, local, caste, creed, religion and several other considerations. Many employers used to consider giving employment was like giving food and shelter to people- an important religious duty in the life of an individual. As a result, over manning had crept into almost all types of organizations. In the last two decades, because of global competition on the one hand, and fast changes in technologies, socio-economic and political situations marked by now the global recession, on the other hand; world wide business organizations are adopting varied cost cutting mechanisms to face the threats of their very survival. Paradoxically, the very employees, who are store houses of knowledge and experience and used to bring competitive advantage to organizations, are suddenly becoming burden on them. As organizations are trying to squeeze out inefficiencies, their axes inevitable falls on people who are bloating their wages bills, lowering productivity and hurting profits. Guha (1996) rightly observes that with a view to achieving the desired cost effectiveness, downsizing of manpower has to be taken up as an indispensable exercise. According to Fisher, Schoenfeldt and Shaw, (2004, P. 744), a strong trend since the mid -1980s has been called

restructuring ,down sizing or more euphemistically, rightsizing in which organizations cut their labour by reducing the size of their permanent full-time staff. In the above backdrop, as how much downsizing of manpower is adequate and appropriate (viz., rightsizing) and how long it will continue is some times seems to be hidden agenda of the organisations adopting this strategy but, no doubt, the current recession has further added fuel to the on going fire so much that even the job seekers are ready to work without pay, sparks debate on ethical issues (Economic Times, 14 July, 2009, P. 7). The present paper is a modest attempt to bring out and analyse some issues relating to rightsizing of manpower in the organizations but with a human face.

Rightsizing-What it is?

Rightsizing is a global phenomenon today. In fact, organizations throughout the world are resorting to this strategy. More than 75% of the Fortune 1,000 firms have implemented downsizing programme since the year 2000((Benardin,2007). According to Sumantra Ghoshal, Professor of Strategic Leadership, London Business School(2002), every gardener knows if he has to maintain a good garden, the need is to do some pruning. It is an essential part of the HR role and in this respect human resource planning is one of the most critical functions. It is the process by which an organization ensures that it has the right number and the right kind of people at right place at the right time capable of effectively and efficiently completing those tasks that will help

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the organisation to achieve its overall objectives. It translates the organization objectives and plans into number of workers needed to meet the objectives (DeCenzo and Robins, 1989). In rightsizing, we are just strongly reinforcing and conforming the outcome of the human resource planning in terms of optimum number of manpower required for the smooth functioning of the activities of organizations without any disruption in the activities. It is to be ensured that the number of people so calculated should not go above it and below it.

Though there exist differences in opinions about the term but according to Luthans, (1995, P.28) rightsizing is a more humanistic term used in place of downsizing. It is a process of reducing the number of employees in the organization to optimum number. It is the best fit or matching of the number of employees with requirements of jobs in order to reduce the workforce (Saiyadain, 2001, P.99). According to Rao (2009), right size of work force refers to employing and maintaining exact number of employees with required skills, abilities, and knowledge to perform the existing number of jobs in an organization.

The most humane technique of rightsizing the workforce, the voluntary retirement scheme is virtually corporate India's only option today for shedding manpower. (Economic Times 4, Dec. 2000, P. 11). According to H.Das (1995), notwithstanding the fact that the scheme is voluntary in nature, because of circumstantial transformation, it has virtually emerged as a situational compulsion for the basic survival of the industrial organizations in India. It is a permanent elimination of workers in an organization. In fact, it is a process of internal consolidation to improve the productivity and reduce the cost. On the other hand, downsizing is the term to designate a reduction in a company's workforce (Ivancevich, 1998, P.60). A reduction in the size of the workforce, such as downsizing, may affect older workers or the entire firm. As a result of downsizing, jobs may be eliminated and, for the employees, it is a permanent separation from the organization. While layoff is the temporary loss of job for an employee, in downsizing he permanently loses the job. Thus, downsizing is not right sizing, rather it is one of the mechanisms adopted by the organizations for achieving rightsizing. In an era

of rightsizing and pink slips, many organizations admit that it is not the money but the people who are a critical resource. However, because of the rightsizing, many companies are working with fewer people and those who survive after the downsizing process. A few case examples both from India and abroad may give picture of the real state of affairs with respect to rightsizing programmes in organisations

A Few Indian Case Examples

Today it seems as if rightsizing has emerged to become an essential and indispensable requirement for every type of organization, everywhere in the world. In order to achieve rightsizing, voluntary retirement schemes and golden handshake schemes are quite popular in the Indian industry, particularly in the public sector enterprises, banks, large private companies, and other over-manned organizations (Kazmi,2007, P.303).For example, during 1991-2008, due to disinvestment, in 64 public sector undertakings, 5.94 lakh employees have taken VRS(Times of India, 2009, P.16.). Jet Airways , the country's largest private airline currently employing 12,000 is looking forward to bringing it below 10,000 in a phased manner and the company management is of the opinion that it is in the process of rightsizing the personnel requirements in sales organization (The Economic Times, August, 6, 2009, P.18). Specially in the beginning of this decade, in three years, six top PSUs like SAIL, ONGC and NTPC have trimmed staff by over 1,20,000 while over 99,000 public sector bank employees have taken VRS. It has been seen roughly 10,000 jobs vanished within a period of one year. In advertising, 40 top agencies, employing around 9000 people, had a plan to hack staff by between 12% and 15%. It was reported that as the numbers mount, those with jobs are anxious about what tomorrow will bring. There is always a fear that you could be the next, and that was the truth. Yet there were many, many jobs were going out (Business World, February 11, 2002, P. 24).

KG Khosla Compressors Ltd. had taken a tough stand with its employees in which 69 senior executives were fired and 100 workers had opted for VRS. The company official claimed that this is the cost cutting exercise which will not affect either

the business or the turnover of the company (Human Capital, February, 2001,P.4). In the year 2000, LIC introduced VRS to reduce the staff strength from 1,24,385 to 1,22 867. Finding the scheme not giving the desired result, the Corporation introduced a revised wage structure with a productivity linked lump sum incentive scheme (Human Capital, February, 2001 P.4). Similarly, VRS was a grand success in PS banks. While Canara Bank was offering 100% cash payment to VRS applicants, SBI and BOB were paying 50% in cash and the rest in bonds. The Syndicate Bank had reserved the right to reject the offers of officers opting for the scheme (Human Capital, February, 2001, P.5).TVS group resorted to VRS as a route to cut costs and beat recession (Human Capital, January, 1999, P.4). The company such as Compaq Corporation reduced 12% of the workforce in early 2001 to save \$900 million annually from the total reduction. HFCL in India cut staff by 350 to reduce the cost as much as Rs. 8-10 crore (Human Capital , August, 2001, P.4-5). Siemens India in cost cutting exercise has announced 20% cut in 7100 strong all India work forces through VRS. Although the offer was opened to all employees who had put in at least 10 years of service (Human Capital, August, 1997, P.5). TISCO reduced its manpower from 75,000 to 55,000 through the golden handshake. In 1996-97, the company provided RS. 78 crore for the employee separation (Human Capital, Aug, 1997, P.5). The company has recently reduced its manpower size to 48,000 and management believes that 42,000 will be the right size to match with its sophisticated modernization programme. Eastman Kodak has cut more than 12,500 jobs and has undergone five restructuring exercises since 1985. The companies like Philips, ITC, BILT, Ranbaxy, Modilift, Blue Star and Sterling Resorts also joined the downsize band wagon during this period (Human Capital, August, 1997, P.18). Like this, there a large number of case examples in India in the past two decades. Similarly, a few case examples from abroad could provide a glimpse of the situation outside India in which organizations have opted this mechanism to face the challenges of their prevailing competitive business environment.

Cases From Aboard

The on going recession has, no doubt, more complicated the situation of managing manpower in foreign organizations. It was reported that employers have eliminated 6 million jobs since the recession began in December 2007, the most of any economic slump in the post- World War-II era(Economic Times, 29 June, 2009, P.10). Nearly 10,000 jobs are under threat as Tata Steel's European arm Corus is mulling closing one of its mills in England after a group of buyers terminated a contract to buy the units 80% produce for 10 years (Business Harvard, May,13, 2009, P.11). However, one of the earliest examples of the companies that managed their rightsizing process well, is GE Corporation. Between 1981-86, the US head quarter of the company let 1,30,000 employees go. But what GE did was to create good terms for the people who left and arranging for their outplacement services (Strategist, Business Standard, March, 12, 2002). No company is immune to eliminating jobs. Some of the pillars of the business world such as AT & T , Monsanto, American Airlines, Sear Roebuck & Co. and ITT, had already gone to lay off the people. Motorola reduced 2% of its total manpower. The company intends to reduce the cost and out source cellular phones. Similarly, Hundai Electronics, reduced its total workforce to 17000 by 25% downsizing(Human Capital, February 2001, P.5).German's largest bank, Deutsch Bank AG, retrenched more than 10% of its 76,000 strong global workforce, which forms a strategic element of bank's 2.5 billion restructuring programme(Human Capital, March, 1998 P.5). Johnson and Johnson, maker of Brand Aid Bandages, which eliminated 4,100 jobs, or 3.5% of its workforce, to trim costs and stabilize profits because of slowing sales in Asia (Human Capital, March, 1998,P.5).

All the above case examples both from India and abroad reveal various factors which lead to manpower rationalization programmes in organizations

Hidden Agenda in Rightsizing

In fact there are a large number of factors which influence the rightsizing process. Some of them, which influence organizations in their rightsizing decision, are as follows:

- i) The rightsizing activity will increase with the

increased competition, excessive costs, and interest in improving the value of the share. Therefore, it will be the fact of life for the thousands of the firms and millions of workers every year (HR Focus, July, 1998, P. 9-10)

- ii) The advocates insist that rightsizing results in lower overhead, less bureaucracy, faster decision-making and increased productivity.
- iii) The information technology revolution is also one of the major contributing factors for the rightsizing. For example, e-mail has prompted organizations to replace people with technology.
- iv) Due to global competition and fast development in technology, many companies are going bankrupt, diverting their holding, eliminating unprofitable product lines, which led to downsize or rightsize their work force.
- v) As human resource cost has become a fixed one, many organizations are reducing the size of their core workforce (permanent employees) and utilizing more contingent human resource. The dramatic growth in contingent workforce is an international phenomenon. A decade ago, 29% of the workforce was employed full time by the Fortune 500 companies. It has now shrunk to 10% as per the Conference Board Estimate. Contingent human resource includes casual, seasonal, project based, temporary and part time employees (Human Capital, February, 2001, P.22)
- vii) The very growth of outsourcing agencies for almost all activities is also one of important attraction for the organizations to go for hiring less and less permanent staff to avoid the recurring manpower expenditure and make the organization free from trade problems.

Mode of Rightsizing

There are different ways through which organizations go for rightsizing of their workforce. Following are some of the important routes being followed by organizations to achieve their targets:

- To meet varying labour needs , rightsized firms may hire temporary workers or outsource work to smaller firms and consultants(DeLuca,1988).
- It is accomplished through implementation of new automated and advance technology that

replaces the labor-intensive operations.

- It is also achieved through closing down unproductive and loss making plants to reduce the burden of salary bill of the organization.
- The organizations can achieve the rightsizing through reengineering (business process reengineering), which is the fundamental rethinking and radical redesign of business process to achieve dramatic gains in the areas such as cost, quality, service and speed (Hammer and Champy,1995)
- Through delayering, the organizations can reduce the number of levels in organizational hierarchy, which ultimately necessitate less manpower to facilitate rightsizing process for better control and communication in the organization.
- Through vitality index .For instance GE has to rank its employees. The top 25% employees qualify for stock options and the bottom one is constantly weeded out. Weeding out non-performance is not because the employee is bad but the person company fit is not right, says Ghoshal, (2002)
- Organisations are gradually becoming lean and thin through virtual structure. As a result, except a few core activities, more and more of them are now relying upon outsourcing agencies for several activities without establishing plant, facilities and employing people.
- The organizations offering VRS/CRS which are intended to reduce the surplus manpower and overcome the financial burden on the organisation.

Negative Outcomes of Rightsizing

The major objective behind the rightsizing has been reducing the cost by reducing surplus manpower so that organization can fight the ongoing price war in the market and meet the challenges of the competition. However, following are the major negative outcomes of the rightsizing process:

- Gary Hamel and C.K. Prahallad opined that this obsession merely reflects a lack of imagination, being the easiest way to cut costs in the short term. The right sizing process brings insecurity and loss of faith not only among the employees who lose their jobs, but also noticeable ripples in

the minds of the survivors as well. Moreover, the tactless and vicious remarks from the colleagues will have a devastating effect on outplacement programme. According to Ivancevich (1998, P.60), when people are laid off, friends and colleagues are given new job responsibilities and organizations work goes on but it develops distrust and people feel that their job security is being threatened.

- According to Bernardin (2007), over 1,00,000 IBM employees have taken early retirement since their first major downsizing efforts in 1998. While the programme helped IBM maintain its company policy of never laying off a single full time employee, IBM lost some of its best employees who opted for one of the attractive termination programme. Similar was the development in large number of PSUs and nationalized banks once the VRS was floated by these organizations.
- Recently it was reported that as business cut back on spending and reduce manpower, an increasing number of unemployed are falling back on PF to tide over the misfortune ... This has raised concerns among PF consultants about the fund sufficiency at the PF office (Economic Times, Mumbai, February, 24, 2009, P.15).
- Like a disaster, the rightsizing creates despair, anger, bitterness, tears, distress, sorrow, sense of failure, feeling of rejection, humiliation and guilt at being without a job despair, hopelessness, depression and a fear of aging. Steel workers attacked Arcelor Mittal's Luxembourg head quarters, setting off smoke bombs and trying to break through the front door to protest temporary layoffs during the economic slump (Business Harvard, May 13, 2009, P.11).
- Seniority is the criteria most commonly used in determining who will be laid off which ultimately throw away the people at such an age that they cannot find an appropriate engagement to earn their livelihood elsewhere. Maniben Kara Institute in a research study in the year 1994 found that 57% of the workers opting for the VRS could not find any attractive employment and of the remaining 43% who could, most of them were in contract or casual jobs which paid very poorly. Most of those interviewed reported that the bulk of the money received from VRS was spent in paying loans or was lost in business

which never materialized.

- It has eliminated millions of permanent jobs. Now an increasing number of openings are for the part-time contract and other forms of temporary workers.
- Unemployment due to job loss has been associated with higher level of social disorders first admission to the mental hospitals and suicides (Brenner, 1973).
- The emotional impact of being laid off or of having a colleague laid off can result in stress-related health problem. (Fortune, April 15, 1996, PP. 140-141).
- For day to day smooth functioning of an organization it requires a few specialists and more generalists. As a result, when an organization is in need of a specialist it may not find the one who could be the best fit with the requirement of organization needs and culture.
- Employee morale often plummets, resulting in lower organisatioal commitment, lower job satisfaction, increased anxiety and feeling of job insecurity, increased job stress, voluntary turnover of high performers and lower overall productivity (Fisher, Schoenfeldt & Shaw, 2004, P.779)

Thus when we look at these ugly outcomes of rightsizing of manpower in organizations it raises several ethical, inhumane and non professional issues in the minds of innocent people who for no reasons are shown the door at mid age of their career and life. It seriously affects the image and goodwill of the organization to attract and retain the star employees. Therefore, it is high time before management of organizations either to stop this inhuman and unethical HR practices or if it is the last option, then it should be always with a human face.

Rightsizing With A Human Face

Downsizing and rightsizing has come to the country and may be here to stay. Cutting costs continues to be a hot favourite among companies in the midst of mergers, collaborations, or plain and simple restructuring. However, following are some of the measures, which companies can adopt to minimize the inhuman side of the programme and to build

a favourable image for the organization despite untimely and permanent separation of the people from the pay roll of the company.

- i) **Outplacement Programme-** When labour becomes surplus, some organizations seek to provide them training in marketable skills and actively assist them in finding job elsewhere, is called out-placement(Venkat Ratnam and Srivastava, 1997, P.95). According to Sweet (1989), outplacement is an HR programme evolved to help separated employees to deal with the emotional stress of job loss and provide them support in finding a new job. It is a support given to the employees in transitional phase between job loss and resettlement. It consists of a variety of job placement services that an organization offers to people who are being asked to leave. The outplacement facility consists of job coaching, resume preparation, placement services and interview training (Bernardin,2007, P.130). It also covers using the company telephone to call potential employer, letter of introduction, payment of placement fee, etc. The company creates outplacement services within the HR department or hire outside consultants to look after the task. The outplaced employees sometimes form support group so that they can exchange information about job opening elsewhere and also share each others feelings. It also reduces the probability of law suits, such as claim of age discrimination.
- ii) **Efficient Performance Appraisal System -** Performance appraisal of employees has been one of the major criticisms with respect to giving shelter to non-performers in the organizations. Despite availability of varied objective measures to evaluate the accurate performance of real performers, many a time victims of rightsizing happens to be the best performers of the organization. It is, no doubt, a great loss to any and every organization. Attempt may be made to evolve and apply transparent criteria for identifying the people who must desert the organization (Dwivedi, 2007, P.173) Therefore , an efficient performance appraisal system should provide enough useful data to take performance based action and can help management to pin point poor performance

and initiate corrective actions.

- iii) **Retraining -** Employees are developing the view that their only job security in future must be based on their ability and their competence and not on keeping a job at some particular company (Uchitelle, 2001). The organizations should arrange training and retraining of the employees in the organization for the redeployment and/or self-employment. The bearing of expenses by the organizations to prepare the person to learn the skills necessary to begin a career again somewhere in the same or different trades and profession will enable the employees to develop self confidence and minimize the demoralization effect of rightsizing in the organisation.
- iv) **Rewrite and Reshape the Psychological Contract-** According to Wilhelm(1994), in general, it is safe to say that for many employees, the “psychological contract” they have with their employer has changed from “if you do your job well, we’ll employ you until you retire” to we’ll employ you as long as we need your contribution to help us succeed in business. Patterson(2001) has rightly pointed out that the emerging employment relationship of employability removes job security , so these older employees are feeling betrayed because their psychological contract has been violated. The old psychological contract is crushed today. It is due to sudden VRS/CRS programmes offered by the organization. The long standing psychological contact is breaking in the organizations. The need of the hour is to rewrite and reshape the psychological contract so that once a good employee joins the organization, he should have long drawn plan to continue in the organisation for long with the expectation that the employer will take care of his/her remaining part of life without throwing on the road at their whims.
- v) **Redefining the Role of HR Managers-** Today job security is the concern for every employee. But HR manager should not have the role conflict that their role is to be the protector of the feel good factor than making the enterprise competitive by attractive, developing, motivating and retaining best talents. If the

company is competitive, then the jobs will be stable. In a competitive economy, no manager can give guarantee of employment stability, only market can give. Therefore, every efforts should be made by HR managers to strengthen HR planning and staffing programme as scientific and transparent as possible so that there should be neither wrong assessment of manpower needs nor entry of incompetent people at the entry point.

- vi) Counseling Programme - Rightsizing programme** has tremendous impact on the survivors . They remain under stress and anxiety that any time the rightsizing word may fall upon them. In the era of globalization survival of the fittest is no more important rather it is the survival of the best. Every attempt should be made by the organizations to prepare the employees to be the best performers to improve their performance and make them feel that the success and survival of the organization depends upon effectiveness of the organization and efficiency of its employees. According to Dwivedi(2007), whatever be the level of personnel being replaced/retrrenched, attempt should be made to counsel them to help them to accept the decision. Therefore, conselling programme should be arranged for those employees so that they will not lose their self-confidence and self esteem.
- vii) Severance Pay -** It should be attractive in the line of what TISCO, Jamshedpur did to the employees who become surplus because of the restructuring exercise were offered a monthly pension equivalent to the basic and DA of the last drawn salary, up to the age of 60 years (Saiyadain, IJIR, July, 2001, P.99). Similarly, one of the earliest examples of the companies managed their rightsizing process was GE corporation. Between 1981-86, the US head quarter of the company let 1, 30,000 employees to go. But what GE did was to create good terms for the people who left and arranging for their out placement services.
- viii) Evolve Performance Oriented Retrenchment System.-** Dubey and Parthasarathi (Business Today, Jan. 7-12, 1996, P.284-87) suggest that the best practice for the purpose is not to make

fresh recruitment (Rationing) of workers. It will give the right message to the trade unions.

To conclude, employees are like flowers. Like flowers, some employee's blossom and others have to be cut out. The HR executive have to understand that some employees have to leave and the management has to give them the best possible separation terms, which the company can afford. It should take care of the dignity of the employees as individual and the ex-employee of the company. It will save company from the bad publicity and keep the moral of the survivors high.

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