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Research Paper HRM

Business Sustainability in Indian Context-Need of the Hour

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ABSTRACT

All the successful organisations have one thing common i.e. they all have had creativity and innovation as their shield during their struggle for survival. It is noteworthy that irrespective of the quality or the pricing of the product or service, a company has to adopt certain creative and innovative measure to capture and retain its market share which is greatly influenced by the customers' perception and values.

Whatever be the stage of a business, creativity and innovation are essential for its sustainability. These are nothing but HR Skills and they pervade through all other fields such as production, finance, marketing and sales too. As the society evolves the taste and expectations of the customers change and the companies have to match up to it.

This paper is an attempt to highlight the significance of business sustainability in Indian context with emphasis on the steps to achieve it. This would enable the entrepreneurs to realign their plans and achieve success in their respective fields. The underlining fact is that the success lies in effectively harnessing the human resources as being done in the military organisations.

KEYWORDS : Business Sustainability, Indian Industry, Traditional Knowledge, Marketing, Innovative Technology, Creativity, HR Skills, military.

INTRODUCTION

Post liberalisation period has witnessed a steady growth of Indian industry. While many of the Indian companies vanished few were taken over by or merged with MNCs. Nevertheless, the country has also witnessed stellar performance of a few companies including start-up ones which took on the giants in the industry by creating a niche in the global arena.

All these companies survived because they could match up the changing expectations and demands of the customers but even these companies are facing bigger challenge in terms of ensuring sustainability of business. In the recent past, there have been many episodes of social activism wherein the business prospects of big corporate houses were marred. Even the government projects have been halted due to the environmental concerns.

There are numerous reasons for the failure of a few public and private projects. But, one aspect which is common to all the failed projects is support of the public which points towards 'lack of social and environmental concerns'. While development is an essential ingredient of modern day life, it cannot infringe onto the vital aspect of sustainability.

METHODOLOGY

This paper is an exploratory study dealing with the issues and concepts related to business sustainability in the Indian context. The discussions are based on observations, literature review and domain expertise besides the first hand experiences of the authors.

DATA ANALYSIS

The data related to the sustainable business concepts are based on the secondary data collated from journals, books, news articles and the analyses and the suggestions related to the strategy for achieving business sustainability in India are based on the lessons learnt from global trend and on the expertise and personal experiences of the author(s) in the fields of HR and military.

Impact Assessment (IA), Triple Bottom Line (TBL), Triple Top Line (TTL)

These concerns have been echoed throughout the history by various social scholars and thinkers. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Social Impact Assessment (SIA), Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), TBL are a few of the terminologies related to these concerns. Out of these, the term TBL popularised by Mr. John Elkington (1997) is one of the most widely used concept in the business world besides the concept of TTL propounded by William McDonough and Michael Braungart (2002).

While the effectiveness and universality of TBL vis-a-vis the Impact Assessment is being questioned by scholars like Frank Vanclay (2004), Waseem Bahadur (2013) claims 'Triple bottom line will be a base in studying CSR for a sustainable business and the importance of TBL will be highlighted towards conducting sustainable businesses' in his article published in Journal of Sustainable Society. On the other hand William McDonough and Michael Braungart (2002) discourage the concept of downcycling technique and encourage upcycling technique.

Indian Context

In India many of the MNCs such as Tata, Aditya Birla, Infosys, RIL and ITC have embarked onto the journey towards achieving business sustainability. The Indian Companies Act 2013 also makes CSR compulsory for big companies. The socio-economic imbalances combined with environmental degradation indicate that the CSR activities are aimed to fulfil the legal requirements rather than out of concern for the people. It is an unpalatable fact that India with almost all the resources needed for development is still struggling to become a developed nation.

There are numerous projects that are being opposed or shelved. There have been many reports and complaints against companies which have flouted the regulations. The ongoing controversies about 2G spectrum auction scam and illegal mining across the nation besides unethical disproportionate asset cases exhibit the attitudes and insensitivity of the people and organisations. Just to name a few, 'Bopal Gas Tragedy' 'Narmada Dam Project', 'Methane Project in Tamil Nadu ', and 'Tata Nano Project in West Bengal'.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Vs Sustainable Business

Often these two terminologies are interchanged in India. For example, almost all the big corporate houses in India are involved in various philanthropic activities which include education, women empowerment, child care, health care etc. While these initiatives help the needy and support the government in various projects, these are only contributory factors towards achieving business sustainability and are

not a synonym. For example, if a company funds a cancer foundation with the income generated from selling of tobacco and cigarettes, can we call it a Sustainable Business?

HRM and Business Sustainability

In order to achieve Business Sustainability through HRM, we need to be creative in thinking and innovative in implementing ideas. As on date, India is the richest nation in the world in terms of employable and skilled human resources. Hence, it is not totally wrong to assume that HRM holds the key for achieving business sustainability in the Indian context.

When we discuss HR, one cannot ignore its significance to armed forces. In the Indian context, armed forces are considered to be the finest organisations with refined culture nurtured by strong value system and ethics which enable the soldiers to be observe the good old traditions while mastering the state of the art technologies. This rare blend holds the key for the success of sustainable business in India.

Why Military?

It is the first question that would cross anyone's mind is 'What is there in the military to relate to the business?' If we analyse the basic precepts of TTL, TBL or IA techniques, the major emphasis is on social and environmental aspects rather than mere profit orientation. Similarly, military deals with abstract concepts like patriotism, honour code, supreme sacrifice etc which can be neither quantified nor compensated. This rare feat achieved only through proper grooming and indoctrination which are nothing but HRD. It is not enough to groom but there should also be measures instituted for correcting defaulters which again point towards the swift way of dispensing justice in the military.

No single Panacea!

One of the features of modern Indian society is to ape the West, be it in education or in business. And we look for equivalence and recognition from the so called developed nations. Whatever name we call the technique, the concept and effect would be the same. Hence, the need of the hour is to synergise our traditional wisdom with the modern scientific knowledge. Since, there are no readymade solutions for any problem, the concepts derived from the military may be combined with the business concepts such as green initiative, cradle to cradle, upcycling, biomimicry etc.

Simple Steps for Sustainability in India

Any task is simple if we are well equipped with the knowhow and adequate resources. But the very idea of management emerged due to the shortage of resources and knowledge. Hence, it is to be clearly understood that mere capital or raw material or the market share would not ensure sustainability and only the business ethics and culture that prevails within the organisation would decide its sustainability. Few of the key ingredients that would help in achieving this objective have been discussed in the succeeding paragraphs.

Leadership. Indian society is known for its hero(ine) worship. Hence, Leadership would be the first and foremost aspect to be addressed. The present style of nurturing managers to groom them into leaders may be suitably modified by selecting the leaders to look after the management. Another difference between business managers and the military officers is that while the former guides his subordinates towards profit and growth the military leader leads them to achieve the unthinkable in the face of danger which encompasses the ability to handle unforeseen challenges, crisis management and collective will to succeed. Lee Froschheiser in his article also observes that 'When it comes to sustainable businesses, great leadership plays a crucial role...'

Objective. It is the raison d'être for any organisation. It is needless to emphasis the significance of selection and maintenance of aim in an organisation. Hence, any company which wants to ensure that all its plans and activities revolve around the core activity within the framework envisaged by its founders. As evinced by the proponents of TTL concept all three pillars (social, economical and environmental) are equally important and are to be factored in at the designing stage itself. It means that the product or the business as a whole should be meeting all these criteria to be called as sustainable.

People First Mission Always. It is the vision statement of the Indian Air Force which stands for its commitment towards the People on whom it depends on to achieve its goal. Similarly, all the businesses are carried out by people (investors, employees) for the people (customers) under the guidance and supervision of the people (suppliers, dealers, bankers, auditors, regulators, government officials). Hence, it is the people who matter in any organisation but the mission of any business is to make profit. Hence, the strategy of a sustainable business should take care of the people's interest without deviating from the path to achieve its objective.

Inclusive Management.The armed forces are pioneers in the field of HRM and HRD since they understand the fact that men/women behind the machine are the most potent and reliable weapons in any war. It is equally applicable for any company whether it is automated or not. Hence, it is very essential that the employee oriented programs are designed to empower them which in turn would enable them to contribute better through collective vision.

Promote Creativity & Innovation. Nikhil Arora (2013) in his article advocates that innovation and creativity should be made a culture of its own. It is applicable to any type of business and organisation. This also entails that there should exist free communication which should be from/to all directions. This will enable the feedback system to be effective.

Collective Responsibility. One of the most striking features of military is the ability to function in unison as single body. This has the advantage of synergetic effort which can produce coordinated and coherent impact. It is equally applicable to any business venture, wherein the last man in the line must be aware of significance of his role in the whole gambit. This sense of accomplishment can be enhanced by employing other HR tools such as multiskilling, performance counselling, retraining, incentive measures etc.

Adhering to Ethical Behaviours. These days, the companies resort to any extent to capture and/or retain their customer base. Hence, they spend crore per annum towards advertising and marketing. If this amount also is spent towards R&D and improving quality of the product, it would endear the company/product to the people. In this regards, it is essential that the surrogate advertisements are replaced with genuine ones.

Back to Basics. It is a well known fact that any complex issue in this world tend to have a simplest solution. Similarly, the problems related to socio-economic-environmental issues in India can be addressed effectively, if we get back to our roots. For example, the use of fertilisers to increase the productive has the side effect of spoiling the land whereas the traditional method of farming will ensure eco-friendly operations besides being organic in nature which is advocated by the western scholars.

Native Wisdom. India is very rich in terms of traditional knowledge and rustic wisdom besides natural remedies for any problem which include business issues. Irrespective of the scale of business is lager and complex, the principles and end products are the same. Hence, there is a need to look into the wealth of our collective wisdom which hitherto had been masked by the new modern education system. The idea is not to undermine the value of present education system, but definitely we will be benefitted by amalgamating both the knowledge banks.

Invest in Laboratories and Attract Talent Invest more in R&D rather than mere procurements, marketing, buildings and other visible infrastructure. Employ academicians and professionals with good track record or at least groom them once they join the company. The quality of the employees would greatly depend upon the culture rather than their qualification or facilities available in the organisation. One satisfied employee is worth thousand machines because the power of HR is such. This measure will also yield a benefit to the company in terms of getting brand ambassadors in the form of satisfied employee.

CONCLUSION

The business sustainability is not merely about meeting the deadlines of the customers and guidelines of the government. It is all about being a responsible corporate citizen of the nation while accomplishing the objectives of the organisation without affecting the so-

cio-economical balance and ecological system. In India, the concepts of social responsibility and collective responsibility are yet to find the foothold in the psyche of the common man. Till then the sustainable business would only be legal requirement rather than commitment of any business venture. However, the simple but firm steps based on the military principles discussed in this paper would pave the way ahead for ensuring business sustainability in India.

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