DESIGN THINKING: REINVENT HR

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Abstract

With the growing need for human capital management, human resources are identified as important capital for any business. What makes employees happy, how they can deliver more are the important points to debate in knowledge forums and learning platforms. But, there always existed a gap between employer perception and employee perception. This gap has been major because of lack of empathy from the employer front and employee involvement from the employee front in the problem-solving process. Lately employee engagement and organizational commitment have been much spoken and strategies have been in place to increase employee involvement. Responding to the need of the hour, customer satisfaction leading to employee satisfaction, and business results, design thinking is one such concept that has brought a paradigm shift in organizations. Thinking from the perspective of the customers by way of interaction, feedback, and knowing the need to deliver the service or product has been a breakthrough idea that changed the game of business altogether. Deloitte Global Human Capital Trends 2017 report revealed that nearly 80 percent of executives rated employee experience very important (42 percent) or important (38 percent), but only 22 percent reported that their companies were excellent at building a differentiated employee experience. Especially HR functions have a major role to play in the organization which is responsible for managing human resources. Present paper is an attempt to present the facts on how design thinking can change the HR role from managing HR to reinventing the HR role.

Key words: Design thinking, employee engagement, productivity

Introduction

Every organization is responding to major business and workforce disruptions, managing changes focussing on customer delight to drive the growth. There is a critical linkage between the employee experience, company business strategy and customer service. Design thinking is one such technique which will help in reimagining and crafting the employee experience to help generate higher engagement, satisfaction among customers, brand building and growth. Research has clear evidences that increase in front-line-engagement increases customer service and revenues. For sustainable business performance applying design thinking to achieve customer satisfaction is inevitable in current competitive world.

Design Thinking in HR

Changing expectation, the challenge to attract and retain talent and shifting to an agile form of organization requires break through thinking about people and people management strategies. Design thinking is one such path breaking approach focussing on human centric approach. In HR design thinking helps change HR at its core. It helps to develop human centric mindset that focussed beyond designing programs or processes to create meaningful experiences. Design thinking casts HR in new role. HR role is transformed from "process developed" to "experience architect". HR is empowered to reimagine every aspect of work including physical environment, workspace designing/ergonomics along with HR process.

Design thinking casts HR in a new role. It transforms HR from a "process developer" into an experience architect." It empowers HR to reimagine every aspect of work: the physical environment; how people meet and interact; how managers spend their time; and how companies select, train, engage, and evaluate people (Caredda, S. 2020)

According to Chatterjee (2020) the success of brands like Apple, Google, Nike, Amazon and PepsiCo has established design thinking as a breakthrough methodology to create products and solutions. This methodology is applicable in pretty much all kind of business processes. In the context of HR, empathy the core principle of design thinking is a much-needed aspect while dealing with employee issues and concerns. Research shows that human resources and people operations are 5 times more likely to apply design thinking in everyday business than any other department.

As per Nguyen, P (2019), Fivestars uses "brainwriting" in the ideation phase to ensure that everybody's ideas are heard. Each member spends 5-10 minutes jotting their ideas on Post-it notes before group collaboration. Them the group come together to talk about their ideas, refine until they narrow down on 1-3 takeaways. They create, pilot and refine as they go. The High Five Program is one such ideas where peers can recognize each other via High Five notes. Dedicated employee experience manager is the design thinking initiative taken by Pixer. This manager holds regular conversations with employees and managers to understand the experiences better, challenges faces and development needs. Peer Insight

uses system for promotions, bonuses and raises as design thinking strategy. They hold a 2-hour ideation session and create prototypes and discuss with the entire team to gather input and refine the system.

According to Sinha, A, Varkkey, B and Meenakshi,N (2020) with the Design thinking supported HR strategy, the food tech company in their study created human-centred service design to improve the employee experience for delivery partners. This gives valuable lessons for new-age tech companies that choose invest in tech-based platforms and promotion instead of focussing on HR-led strategy. By using Design thinking, the food tech company emerged as market leader, delivering more than 1.4 million orders per day by partnering with 35,000 restaurants and employees more than 20,000 young people. A two-pronged strategy was adopted to address the HR pains and gains. The insights and outcomes of the journey and empathy map, and resultant clarity on end user needs helped in developing an integrated HR framework. The framework involved talent attraction, work design and a flexible work option. Complimentary HR offerings were also designed to create the desired employee behaviour.

According to Loyola, A (2020) HR needs to embed the "user or employee" at the centre of the experience in its delivery model. Design thinking is a creative approach to problem-solving. It leads to gathering inspiration, ideas, making ideas tangible and share the "story" to create innovative solutions.

- Empathizing with customers first understanding their needs and frustrations
- Moving to define the problem
- Brainstorming to identify and choose the best ideas and solutions
- Building prototypes of test what works and what does not

**Design Thinking and Employment Cycle**

Focus on employee journey: Moments that matter : Employees deliver exceptional performance and perform well at moments of truth, only if they know clearly what they are supposed to do and why. Accordingly to Caredda,S. (2020) employee experience advantage, makes a distinction between three kinds of moments that matter

1. Specific – Like the first day on the job etc
2. Ongoing – like the interaction between employee and supervisor
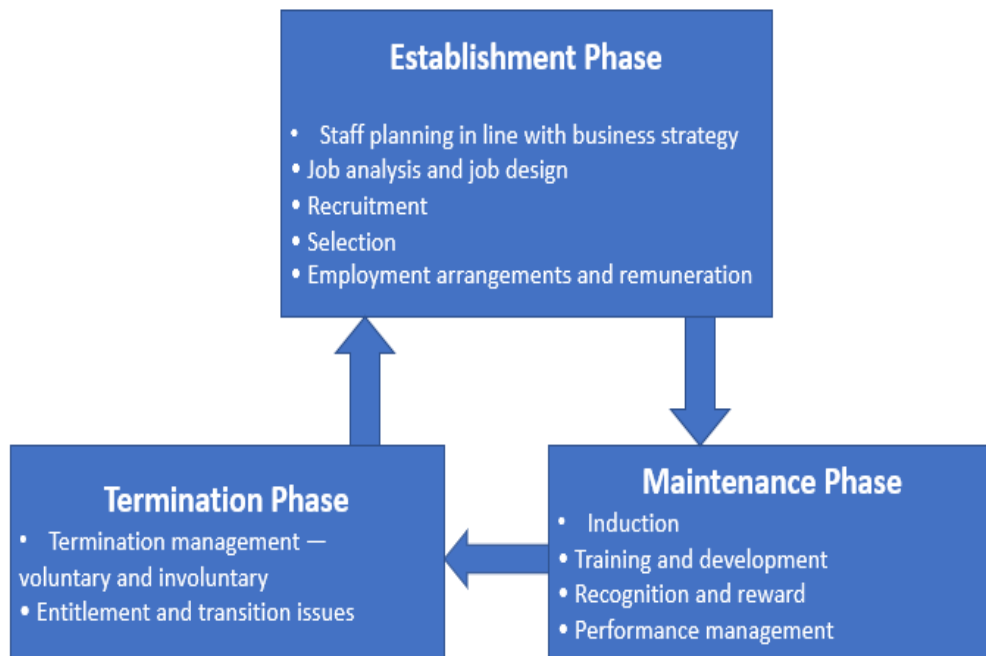3. Crated – Like the events at the office, annual office party etc.

(Source: https://sergiocaredda.eu/experience/design-thinking-for-hr/)
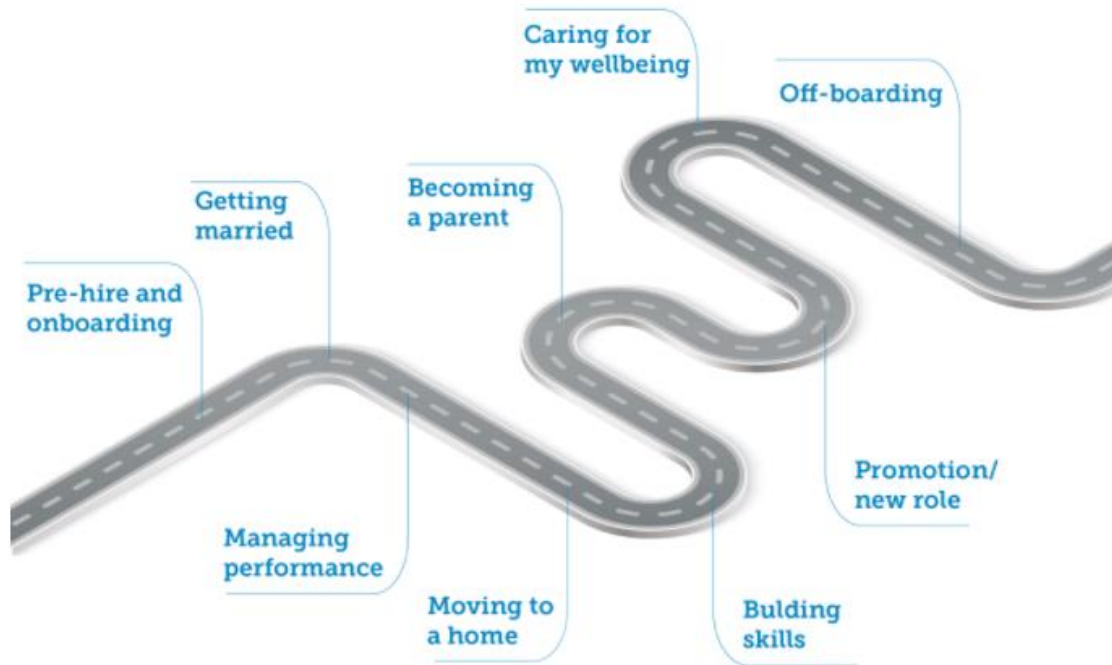
Employment cycle involves analysing the employment needs and aligning them with business strategy. Once the employment needs are established, staff need to be hired. After they are hired, organization need to ensure that they are productive. And, if the employees are happy, they stay with the organization or else exit. This cycle of employment describes the HR process from entry to the exit of the employee. Using design thinking, this process can be reinvented or reimagined to increase the organization productivity. The three stages need a thorough analysis to integrate the design thinking steps, Empathize, Define, Ideate, Prototype and Testing.
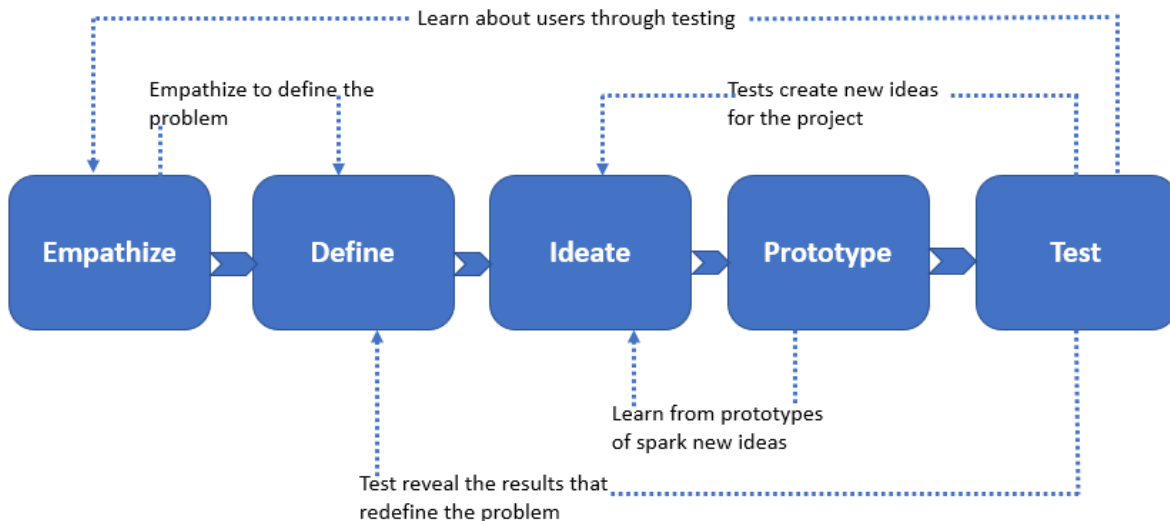
Establishment Phase

While planning for the staff in aligning with the business strategy, HR need to discuss with the internal customers, for whom they are providing the resources to understand the requirement. Know exactly what they expect instead of anticipating what the departments expect HR to provide.

Establishment Phase

- Staff planning in line with business strategy
- Job analysis and job design
- Recruitment
- Selection
- Employment arrangements and remuneration

Termination Phase

- Termination management — voluntary and involuntary
- Entitlement and transition issues

Maintenance Phase

- Induction
- Training and development
- Recognition and reward
- Performance management

While analysing the jobs, Analyst has to step into the shoes of the job incumbent to understand the roles and responsibilities. Various methods employed in the process of job analysis has to be job holder centric. Typically, a one-to-one interaction session would be the effective one. Designing the job in such a way that there is employee satisfaction and organization productivity. This requires inputs and feedback from the existing employees to understand and appraise the existing jobs.
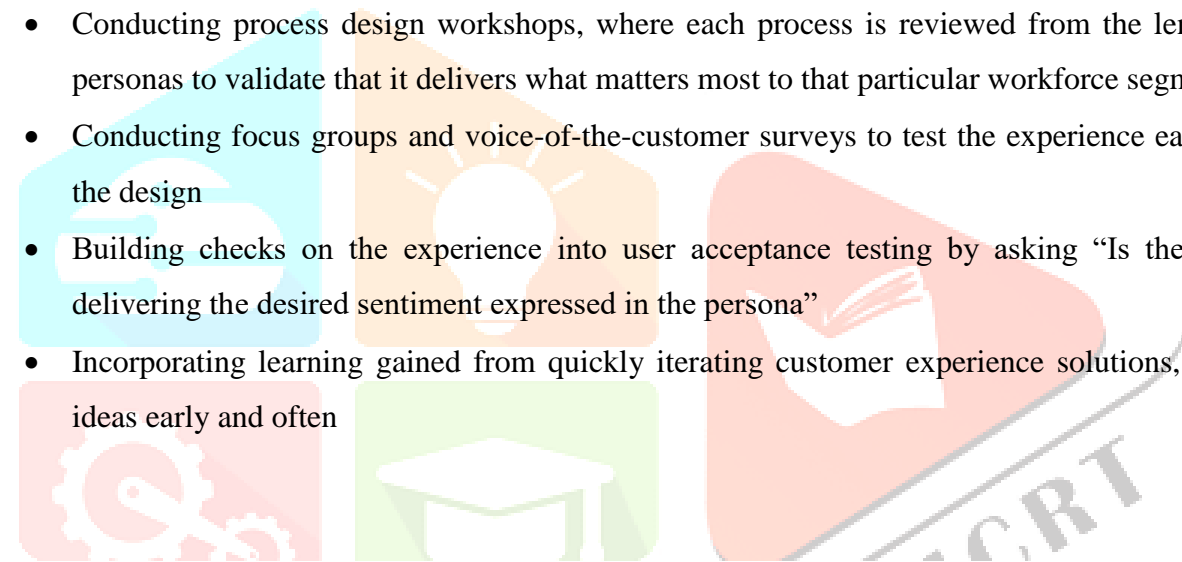
Maintenance Phase

CISCO's HR teams were trained to use Design Thinking. They looked at areas where HR could change drastically in tangible, practical ways, such as recruiting, onboarding, learning and development, and workplace design. They used Design thinking to re-design the organization with focus on "people experiences" instead of processes (Loyola, A. 2020).

For example, candidate experience, the application journey can bring different expectations from the candidate perspective. Candidates normally look for an enjoyable application and interviewing process, and opportunity to learn about the company and to be informed about their current status and potential next steps of employment. The onboarding process, should focus on creating an experience with technology, artificial intelligence in bringing a whole set of tools of HR to make sure the candidate's access to agendas, responsibilities and process-guidance.

Deloitte's Global Human Capital trends 2016 research reveals that, typically the more importance an organization places on design thinking and the more ready it is to embrace it, the faster the organization grows. According to the data, companies growing by 10 percent or more per year are more than twice as likely to report they are ready to incorporate design thinking compared to their counterparts that are experiencing stagnant growth (Deloitte, 2017 Report). Deloitte implemented a strategy which involved defining customer personas. For example, a manager, a new recruit, an experienced hire, etc) identifying the moments that matter to those customers and creating journey maps of their employment experience. Company is using Hybrid Agile methodology that employs models, prototypes, and multiple voices to design, test, and refine solutions which includes the following:

- Leveraging "fit for purpose" strategic design decisions to formulate the desired experience
- Inserting moments that matter into end-to-end process maps to further enrich the employee experience
- Conducting process design workshops, where each process is reviewed from the lens of the personas to validate that it delivers what matters most to that particular workforce segment
- Conducting focus groups and voice-of-the-customer surveys to test the experience early on in the design
- Building checks on the experience into user acceptance testing by asking "Is the process delivering the desired sentiment expressed in the persona"
- Incorporating learning gained from quickly iterating customer experience solutions, revising ideas early and often

Deloitte's employee experience framework

Align	Focus	Execute	Measure
Develop experience vision aligned with business and talent strategies	Define and brand the end-to-end experience	Implement prioritized initiatives roadmap with targeted sprints	Capture value of improving experience and find enhancements

Crafting the workforce experience to achieve
The simply irresistible organization®

Meaningful work	Supportive management	Positive Work environment	Growth opportunity	Trust in leadership
Autonomy	Clear and transparent goals	Flexible work environment	Training and support on the job	Mission and purpose
Selection to fit	Coaching	Humanistic workplace	Facilitated talent mobility	Continuous investment in people
Small, empowered teams	Investment in development of managers	Culture of recognition	Self-directed, dynamic learning	Transparency and honesty
Time for slack	Agile performance management	Fair, inclusive, diverse work environment	High-impact learning culture	Inspiration
Collaboration and connection				

Source: Deloitte Consulting LLP

As per Loyola, A. (2020) IBM brought employees from different functions into the design process and teams were accountable to co-create a brand-new employee onboarding process. Understanding the new hire's point of view and the realizing the on-boarding experience involves re-working on the process. Performance management is another stage in the employment cycle which create direct impact on business. Business measure individual and team performance when results are measured. IBM brought bunch of field experts for 5 months and developed a brand-new performance model which was implemented across the company.

In framing the compensation design thinking can help to understand the requirements and expectations of the employees and budgets of the employers and optimise the compensation accordingly. While designing policies, empathy driven approach can help formulate policies that meet the needs of the employees and truly benefit them (Chatterjee, 2020)

Conclusion

Design thinking in HR can actually change the game altogether with rethinking employee experiences. Various professionals had tried and tested the method and the results revealed that organizational results enhanced by 112% with implementation of design thinking in HR. Its ultimately people that matter in the organisation and their experiences. The shift of thinking from employer perspective to employee perspective is a breakthrough idea in design thinking which has brought paradigm shift in the way the organization look at the betterment of the results. Many organizations are experimenting on this new technique and trying to make it a culture. Corporate giants had tried and proven to the world that, design thinking is the new way, in fact the only way to achieve results and make the stakeholders happy. Research in this areas on implementation at grassroot level in the organization is the need of the hour.

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