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Connecting Customer Delight and Employee Management Practices: Case of F Gheewala Human Resource Consultants

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Abstract:

Management practices of manpower exporting firms have not been studied extensively. This paper exemplifies how by incorporating progressive management practices helped a manpower exporting company to stand out and balance business, customer and employee interests. The article describes achievement of business is made through engaging both customers and human resources at F. Gheewala Human Resources Consultants, India. It highlights the infusion of progressive management practices in an undermanaged business sector. The study uses case study method and key people accounts. In addition, industry sources were contacted for overall understanding of industry trends. The article map show customer delight is achieved through quality human resource management principles, which aids in achieving business goals. Additionally, the case illustrates in what manner differentiation is created by FGHRC through purposive concern for clients and employee engagement practices. The implications of the study demonstrate value based approach to business in the context of a small enterprise and how human resource management can be used for differentiating the firm. On the social side the article illustrates a firm can remain profitable and create difference in the life of ordinary citizens, and also eventually contribute to national prosperity.

Keywords: Manpower sending, overseas recruiting, customer delight, employee engagement, HRM, SMEs.

1. Introduction

Sending manpower abroad has become a specialized and lucrative business activity in many labor surplus countries. They generate overseas employment for the unemployed of populous countries, and thus contribute to seamless foreign exchange remittances for sending countries. India leads in sending human resources to deficient nations, which is initiated and coordinated by manpower sending companies. Indian manpower companies cater mainly to the oil rich gulf countries, besides countries like USA and Europe. While the Gulf countries require unskilled and semi-skilled workers in large numbers, western nations are interested in highly skilled workers and well trained professionals.

In India, this business space is populated by formal organized companies as well as informal players. Of late, few organized companies have made strong presence because of the licensing system, as well as rules and regulations imposed by governments of sending and receiving countries. However, still unorganized players outnumber the formal ones, and they usually rely on traditional rule of thumb and situational approaches to business. Hence the sector has remained hugely undermanaged.

F. Gheewala Human Resource Consultants (FGHRC) headquartered at Mumbai, is an overseas human resource recruiter working to match aspirations of Indian job seekers (blue-collared) with the requirements of global job providers, mainly from the GCC. Its parent company, G. Gheewala Human Resource Consultants (GGHRC) has been in existence for four decades and is currently sending highly educated and technically-skilled professionals.

Right from inception, FGHRC aimed to ensure that round pegs are fitted in round holes only, and introduced streamlined systems for managing operations, including adopting ERP system and formalizing/professionalizing internal management, including employee management. FGHRC provides professional and high quality, job-person matching experience to clients (companies seeking candidates) and a candidate (job seeker), which includes giving both the opportunity for informed decision making. FGHRC's vision is: 'to be globally the best human resource consultants.'

The business of sending manpower overseas has turned highly commoditized because of volume focus, low entry barriers and the large numbers of informal players operating in the space. The senders can be a one person firm, the local entrepreneur who provides connect and information and possibly someone who considers recruiting as an allied business activity for easy and quick returns. Even though the government has introduced licensing, large number of informal players and fly by night operators are very much present and often media reports on how gullible and often poorly educated job seekers are cheated. Hence the well-meaning players also face reputation risk and goodwill deficiency; though their contribution to national prosperity is significant.

FGHRC adopts value and relationship based approach to doing business, and has developed strong associations with governments and top firms abroad covering multiple industries. The GCC nations (Saudi Arabia, Oman, Qatar, Kuwait, UAE etc.) contribute to more than 80% of business.

FGHRC founder and Managing Director (MD), Mr. Mohd Farok says, “We are devoted towards providing the best skills to our clients, that will enable them to stay a notch above their competitors and achieve their goals not just effectively but efficiently too. Similarly, we endeavor to provide the most compatible jobs to job-seekers, so that skills and life dreams are matched. Though we regularly receive mandates for hiring talent from new companies, we are extremely choosy. We want to give the best to existing clients, before we choose to include more.”

2. Purpose of Business: Make Life Better

When asked about the motivating driver behind the business, Mr. Mohd Farok said, “Overseas recruiting is a business where you can make a difference to lives and economic situation of hundreds of people and their families. Once you help them to find a footing, their good wishes and gratitude (*dua*) are always with us. We value it more than the monetary profit generated.”

The above spirit of service distinguishes FGHRC from others. Usually, after joining the overseas employer, regular connect between job seeker and the agent is almost non-existent. Often, after travelling to a foreign country, if the candidate finds that the job and working conditions do not match expectations, the agent will be blamed. (Some recruiters use the word ‘thank-less work’.)

FGHRC’s style of functioning has created significant intangible value proposition for the candidates. That has resulted in positive word of mouth, referrals and even beyond. Narrating the experience Mr. Mohd Farok says, “Our purposeful engagement with job seekers encourages them to refer us to their next generation family members and friends.” Evidently, commitment to follow best practices and ethical approach to business has made FGHRC popular.

Of late, one of the headlines in the international migration for employment discourse is the huge recruitment costs a potential candidate has to bear for obtaining employment. Additional charges are levied, in spite of strict regulations on chargeable fee limits imposed by governments of sending and receiving countries.

FGHRC has taken a different approach and charges only the prescribed fees (sometimes lesser) to candidates. Mr. Mohd Farok clarified, “demand for a particular skill is made by the overseas companies, so seeking financial favors from the potential candidate for such jobs is not only ethically wrong but also against realization of our vision. We also ensure that only quality companies are our clients, so that candidates and their families need not worry.” Before signing new clients, FGHRC representatives or associates abroad conduct due diligence about client’s reputation and facilities (labor accommodation, transport arrangements). Additional investment is made on all selected candidates, to make them fit to the new work environment.

3. Readying Job Seekers for Global Work

3.1. Cross Cultural Orientation Programmes

A large section of candidates hired for overseas jobs, may be travelling out of their locales for the first time and may face difficulties in the new cultural environment and work settings. Recognizing that different countries have different cultural practices and value systems, and working there requires substantial adjustment and preparation, FGHRC organizes pre-departure orientation program for selected candidates.

The above training programs are conducted internally and the placement officers of FGHRC have developed sufficient expertise for training. All newly hired candidates are called to the company office or branches to collect their travel documents and participate in the pre-departure training and whenever possible the MD personally greets them.

3.2. Ensuring Banking and Communication Support.

Interestingly, FGHRC also assists selectees to open bank accounts in India for remittances and also provides them with foreign SIM cards for communicating with their loved ones when they reach destination countries. “We have tie-ups with many banks for opening accounts, if they do not have one.” Money transfer formalities and caution to be exercised for managing finances are discussed in the orientation module.

3.3. Psychological Support and Repatriation Management

Overseas recruitment agencies are in the news, unfortunately for the wrong reasons. Cheating innocent job-seekers and other unethical practices questions the integrity of all manpower recruiters. However, for FGHRC, long term business sustainability remains at the core of all interactions. “We ensure that the foreign sponsor/employer takes care of all selected candidates in the best possible manner and addresses their genuine grievances and apprehensions” narrates the MD.

However there are many business risks that can take employers or candidates off guard. If left unaddressed, it can affect market reputation of recruiters. During such rare eventualities, FGHRC stepped in to help candidates and recruiters, even at their cost. Narrating an anecdote, Mr. Mohd Farok said, “one of our clients in Saudi Arabia experienced delay in starting a project, for which we had already hired manpower and they had travelled. Without work, the client was unable to pay wages and the candidates had to be repatriated. We took the decision to bring them back and managed the repatriation process on our own expenses. Our act was appreciated by the Indian Embassy and families of stranded workers. Some of the workers subsequently found jobs through us.”

4. HRM Practices that Make the Difference

FGHRC dreams big and its achievements are supported by a strong team of job placement experts, who minimize cost and time spillovers for both job-seekers and job-providers. It is one of the few companies which has created a separate HR department headed by a qualified professional.

“Quintessential employee dedication and friendliness is our approach,” says Mr. Mohd. Farok, “this includes working all the days of a week except Sundays from 9 am to 7 pm, for making the experience of our clients remarkable,” he further added. FGHRC’s top management understands the importance of human resources and maintains strong, personal relationship with all employees, who are rewarded better than most comparable companies. Innovative ideas and thoughts from employees are always welcomed, and though an owner run enterprise, employees are involved in regular decision making. Mr. Kazi Mehruz, HR Manager of FGHRC remarked, “We develop our employees professionally to handle work independently, and imbibe the organization’s culture in them. We give platform to employees to share their views, to bring innovation, adopt latest technology and contribute to organization development.” The participative approach also helps in maintaining open and honest communication between all team members.

5. High Employee Morale Keeps the Organization Going

FGHRC’s employees value the culture and cherish being a part of the company, as evident from the employee retention levels. Top management takes special care to maintain employees’ happiness levels by organizing various functions to keep the morale up. “All employees are treated as family members. We organize employee engagement programmes such as birthday treats, get together, festival celebrations etc.,” explained the HR Manager.

Performance of employees is recognized individually and in groups with incentives, and they are given regular feedbacks to help improve performance. Employees are supported to achieve their life goals. Counseling sessions are conducted by the CMD for effective stress management and if required, special financial support is given to employees facing difficult situations. The HR Manager added, “In addition, there is ample scope for career progression here. Employees who exhibit leadership qualities and make a difference are promoted quickly to higher levels. Being involved in employees’ lives, let them feel valued and cared for, not only as just employees, but also as family members distinguishes FGHRC”.

6. Conclusion

Creating differentiation in a highly commoditized business space where volumes and costs rather than relationships are focused is the challenge for all recruitment companies. Here, FGHRC has created a distinct niche, by making human resources (both candidates and employees) the key to success. Thus customer delight and cost effectiveness has been achieved through engaging employees. Additional investments made by the company get paid back in tangible (profits/lesser costs) and intangible (goodwill, reputation) ways. In addition, in a predominantly undermanaged business sector, FGHRC is a role model. This example also illustrates how a small firm can practice progressive people management principles and create difference in its business space.