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## **HR leaders, invest in yourself first: Kiran Yadav, Canara HSBC OBC Life Insurance**

The new work priorities and shifting demands of talent are changing the rules at work. Challenging the existing workplace practices, the employee-driven era of work requires employers to respond with innovative and relevant solutions.

The power has shifted from organisations to people. Are you ready for this great power shift?

In a recent interaction with People Matters, Kiran Yadav, Chief People Officer, Canara HSBC OBC Life Insurance discusses the trends shaping this great power shift and talks about its impact on work practices and the role of HR.

### **Fears of Omicron notwithstanding, economies are cautiously re-opening, and the job market has begun to recover. How are you managing the ongoing uncertainties and ensuring business continuity?**

Planning for uncertainties forms the core of the insurance business. However, as a business enterprise, COVID has been a classic example that has tested business continuity plans across organisations and industries.

Since I play the dual role of leading administration & facilities as well as Chief People Officer, I had to think from both sides of my brain. While the analytical side was fully committed to Risk protocols and ensuring continuity of business and uninterrupted work, at the same time the other side was inclined towards employee safety and ensuring that we remain least impacted.

The last two years have been of immense learning and of self-realisation of our innate and adaptive powers. Fortunately for us, there was seamless coordination between our IT and HR teams, and we are able to enable our workforce with all that is required for business continuity.

We tried and successfully automated our hiring procedure where we interviewed, selected, hired, and inducted the new employee completely digitally. Despite a few roadblocks in the initial months of adapting, we as well as our regional teams are well equipped with all means and plans of business continuity, our fallback plan is always on the go to deal with an unprecedented situation.

Our feet on the street, the front-line sales employees, are our main business drivers. It was heartening to see how quick and agile they were. Their receptiveness to change -- face to face

meetings were replaced with zoom or WhatsApp video calls. Robust training on online document collection, eKYC, tab-based form filling, and video calls were some of the ways through which we ensured business continuity.

To stay connected, we established various platforms for continuous interaction with the senior leadership to check on the general well-being of our colleagues and to reiterate that the organisation is there to safeguard them. We also provided an additional Covid cover from the health insurer, vaccination reimbursement and vaccination day leave, and additional sick leaves for recovering from Covid. We even set up a Covid helpline which was managed by our employees only, so that quick assistance could be provided to those in need.

### **What are some of the skills, values, and strategies that will enable leaders to meaningfully transform the employee experience (EX) in 2022?**

The pandemic was that dividing line and a key driver in transforming the EX. It changed life as we know it and brought about a shift in the way we work and interact with others in our ecosystems. Today, after almost two years of the pandemic, it is increasingly becoming clear that Covid-19 was not just a crisis where everything could go back to normal afterward. Instead, it is a paradigm shift that has engendered a new normal.

Some of the trends that will impact employee experiences are:

- **Employee well-being is a top priority:** After two years of working remotely, employees are gearing up to go back to work if they haven't already. Companies need to buckle up and lay the groundwork for an enabling 'back to office' environment. As organisations chalk out a phased return to work plan in 2022, employee emotional and mental health become much more critical for enabling a smooth transition from a virtual to a physical working environment.
- **Creating a purpose-driven culture:** The key to a successful organisation is to have a strong culture that is supported by a set of values and beliefs, ethics and compliance, and a sustainable growth strategy. This can be achieved by creating a purpose-driven culture where they are able to balance their personal and professional priorities.
- **Workforce expectations are shifting** Pre-pandemic, employees were accustomed to a certain kind of support from their organisation. However, in today's situation employee expectations are changing and talent is reconsidering its priorities. Today, the workforce is looking for better pay, more flexibility, and remote work options while prioritising areas that bring purpose to their lives. As the workforce rethinks its priorities, the intangible aspects of a company's brand - its mission, its values, and commitment to society - take on a whole new meaning. It is a wonderful time for learning and development professionals to make their mark - upskill, reskill, competency enhancements - bring them on!

### **How are you leveraging technology to tackle the ongoing people and work challenges?**

Some path-breaking innovations are happening at the technology level in organisations that have limited or no exposure to remote working. However, technology development and its acceptance in the HR domain have always been fast-paced and easily adaptable.

The start of 2021 saw that employees started to use the HR systems more effectively and the need to bring in more advanced systems was also felt. On-boarding was the first of all the systems that was very well accepted and utilised by the organisations, submission of documents, automatic triggers to all the relevant stakeholders being sent to start working, such as laptop being configured to email creation and employee id and access, etc. are now automated thus helping an employee with a one-stop solution. Even if they feel they need support they can raise a concern on the system itself so that the solution is provided.

The new found support was that of online and self-paced learning, Thanks to ZOOM and LMS (Learning Management System) we were able to quickly shift to the virtual session and thus helped to ensure that we provide the requisite skills, knowledge to the employees.

### **How do you think the role of HR will evolve in this new year?**

HR will always remain the go-to person of any organisation. And we want to remain that - 'first connect' for all employees. However, we too have to shift gears and take on more.

The roles of all HR professionals are already evolved to some extent over the three waves of the pandemic, and we are so much more aligned to technology, able to think outside the box, deal with the unknown, and accept ambiguity.

All these trends will surely define the path for a few years more. However, the top two priorities for HR for 2022 in my mind are:

- **Invest in yourself first!** Whichever part of HR people work in, from talent acquisition to L&D to even the more conservation backed operations - we have seen a dramatic shift in how we operate, and we must use the opportunity to re-invent ourselves and this is the best time to try everything new. Challenge the norms, take a breather - look outside in, read more, learn the nuances of the business, and make yourself more relevant.
- **Make Diversity and Inclusion real** – It's time to move beyond the traditional format and start having deeper conversations. HR is at the forefront of this revolution and can drive this agenda till it becomes culture.

**Link:** <https://www.peoplesmatters.in/article/strategic-hr/hr-leaders-invest-in-yourself-first-kiran-yadav-canara-hsbc-obc-life-insurance-32840>