HR Footprints®
Simplifying Excellence

20 Years OF SEVA

TWENTY YEARS OF WORK

Enabling business performance through people

A short collection of assignments, told plainly

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A Note of Gratitude

To all the organisations, leaders, owners, promoters,
HR colleagues and well-wishers

who made us believe in ourselves,

who respected us for what we stand for,

who valued what we served,

who challenged us towards better learning,

who cheered when we did a good job,

who encouraged us when our shoulders were down.

We are never alone in this journey

of simplifying excellence & SEVA.

Contents

Part Two — What We Built

REWORD

How We Work

Most of our work over the last twenty years can be summed up in a single phrase: business enabling, through people. Wherever we stepped in, we began by understanding the business itself — its priorities, its direction, its current condition — and only then proposed how its people could be organised, managed and developed to deliver performance and growth.

In doing so, we have held one balance constant. Talent exists to deliver business performance; and in pursuing that performance, a business can never afford to be unfair or exploitative towards its people. We have never taken a lopsided view of either extreme. Every assignment described in the pages that follow was shaped by that balance.

The chapters ahead are drawn from real assignments across industries, ownership structures and geographies — family-managed businesses preparing for their next stage, professionally run companies whose systems had not kept pace with their growth, Indian arms of global corporations, and organisations in the Middle East, Central Africa, the West Indies, and beyond. The clients are not named, and the stories are told without embellishment: what we found, what we did, and what changed.

Part One

Assignments

CHAPTER ONE

From One City to Many

A high-performing real estate developer in Bangalore had built its reputation constructing and leasing commercial space to large organisations. The business now aspired to something larger: expansion into multiple Indian cities, and projects of a scale it had never attempted before.

The ambition was sound. The organisation behind it was not yet built for it. Everything that had made the company effective in one city — a single corporate office, one execution team, decisions taken quickly across a corridor — would strain and break once operations spread across geographies.

The first imperative, therefore, was structure. We worked with the leadership to redesign the organisation for a multi-city business: how governance would be monitored from the centre, what management controls were needed at each location, how far authority should be delegated to city teams, and what the roles at every level would actually be. Just as important was the question of people — identifying who, within the existing organisation, was right for which role in the expanded business.

Redrawing an organisation on paper is the easier half. We were also trusted with the harder half: communicating the changes and rolling them out, so that people understood not just their new positions but the reasoning behind them.

Today, that company operates successfully across multiple cities, building for and leasing to multinational corporations and large Indian corporates. The structure put in place to enable that expansion has held.

CHAPTER TWO

From Experts to Leaders

A global IT company with a very large footprint in India was growing faster than its leadership bench. Rapid expansion across the world demanded that many of its technically brilliant people evolve into something the organisation had not trained them to be: leaders of businesses, accounts and people.

The gap was not of talent but of preparation. These were deep technical experts at the associate director level — the very people the business needed to step into account leadership and business roles if growth was to be sustained.

We designed a workshop specifically for this transition, standardised it, and delivered it consistently across the company's locations. Standardisation mattered: the aim was not a series of good workshops but a common leadership foundation across an entire layer of the organisation.

By the end, a critical mass of approximately five hundred associate directors had been rigorously prepared for the leadership roles the business required. Looking back, the satisfaction lies in what the numbers made possible — a leadership pipeline that, in turn, fuelled the company's growth.

CHAPTER THREE

From Chaos to Structure

We were called in by a company whose annual appraisal process had lost the confidence of its own people. Ratings were subjective and judgmental; the underlying data was lopsided and carried visible biases. Salary increases and promotions were being decided on foundations nobody quite trusted.

The immediate task was not to install a new system but to restore credibility to the one at hand. We cleaned up the data, and worked with the senior leadership team to agree a set of working guidelines and rules for that year's cycle — a common basis on which every appraisal decision would rest. On that footing, the cycle was executed, and increment and promotion letters were rolled out within a month. From chaos, there was now a structure.

A fair appraisal, however, needs something to appraise against. So for the following year, we facilitated a systematic goal-setting exercise, ensuring that every manager and above began the year with documented goals that could serve as the basis for the next appraisal.

This was harder than it sounds, because meaningful goals demand clarity in business planning itself — clarity that was still developing. We deliberately did not aim for perfection. We aimed for discipline: goals written down, agreed, and on record. The rigor — tightening the goals and linking them to the business planning process — was designed to build in the years that followed.

The measure of the work was simple. Decisions about people's pay and careers, which had been arbitrary, could now be explained and supported with data.

HAPTER FOUR

A Blueprint Across the Ocean

A medical university operates its campus and associated hospital in the West Indies, with multiple branches across medicine and nursing — while its back office runs from India. Faculty hiring, gradations, student admissions: all of it is handled thousands of miles from the campus it serves.

An arrangement of that kind lives or dies on clarity, and clarity was what the organisation lacked. Which roles belonged in India, and which in the West Indies? Where did one team's work end and the other's begin? We stepped in to answer precisely those questions — defining the roles to be performed on each side of the ocean, and the work processes connecting them.

With the structure clear, the exercise was extended a level deeper: defining the goals and responsibilities for the organisation's critical roles, so that the people carrying the greatest weight knew exactly what they were accountable for.

For the founder, this was more than housekeeping. A second campus was to open shortly, and the blueprint created here — roles, processes, accountabilities — was designed to be replicated there. The work of clarifying one institution became the template for the next.

CHAPTER FIVE

A Small Firm with Larger Plans

In Vadodara, a small family-managed manufacturer in the thermoforming business had quietly built an enviable customer list — GE, Mahindra & Mahindra and other prominent names. The business was modest in size but not in ambition. The family wanted to grow, and knew the organisation as it stood was not yet prepared for that future.

In a family business, preparation begins at the top. Our first task was to bring clarity to the roles of the promoters and the members of the promoter family — who was responsible for what, and where one person's charge ended and another's began. Ambiguity at that level travels downward through the whole organisation; removing it was the foundation for everything else.

The second task concerned the people below. The firm had loyal, genuinely talented employees who had grown with it — many without formal education to match their capability. Rather than treating that as a limitation, we worked out a deployment strategy that placed the available talent where it could contribute most, so the organisation got the best out of the people it already had.

Alongside this, we worked with the key people to sharpen something more fundamental: the direction of growth itself, so that the appetite to grow was pointed somewhere specific.

The organisation has kept working towards those aspirations and continues to progress well. Our satisfaction is a simple one — we left the organisation better than we found it.

CHAPTER SIX

Measured, Taught, Measured Again

A global pharmaceutical leader held a conviction that many companies profess but few act upon: that business performance and productivity improve when people are managed well — and that this cannot be achieved by a CEO's vision or an HR initiative alone. It happens, or fails to happen, in the daily conduct of the business and functional managers who actually run teams.

The company began with rigour. An internal survey established a baseline: how did people actually feel about the way they were being managed? Only then did the intervention begin.

We designed and delivered people-management workshops across the company's locations, reaching close to a thousand people managers —

every one of them through the same template and the same content. The uniformity was deliberate. The objective was not to inspire individual managers but to institutionalise one consistent way of managing people across the organisation.

Then came the part that gave the project its integrity: the survey was run again. The people-management scores had risen visibly and considerably. Baseline, intervention, re-measurement — it was a textbook piece of organisation development, executed end to end, and the improvement was there in the company's own data rather than in our claims.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Setting a House in Order

An engineering products company brought us in for an uncomfortable reason: unhealthy practices had taken root inside its own HR function. In the management of contract labour, canteens, transport and similar spends, money was leaking — and the problem was one of integrity, not merely of process.

The assignment carried a double responsibility. First, to understand exactly where the loopholes lay — in the processes, the approvals, the expenditures — and to close them. Second, and more delicately, to identify the individuals who had been working hand in glove to sustain these practices, and to act on those findings together with the management: firmly, but respectably, without spectacle.

The point of acting visibly and fairly was larger than the individuals involved. It sent a message the organisation needed to hear — that when integrity fails, the management acts. Credibility with employees, once dented, is restored by what management does, not by what it says.

Our work with this client did not end there. Over years of growth, the company had accumulated more people than the business required. We designed a complete separation package and managed the rationalisation of the workforce — a process where fairness in terms and dignity in execution mattered as much as the numbers. When the business subsequently shifted out of Hyderabad to another location, we facilitated that transition as well.

Integrity failures, missing processes, workforce reduction, relocation — each of these is sensitive on its own. Handled together, over an extended engagement, they amounted to change management of an unusually delicate kind. The company came through it with its credibility intact, and stronger controls than it had ever had.

CHAPTER EIGHT

An Honest Mirror

The German headquarters of a global company wanted to understand its Indian subsidiary better — not through reporting lines, but through the honest pulse of its employees — and to use that understanding to drive the organisation's development deliberately rather than by guesswork.

We custom-designed an employee survey for the purpose. The harder work, however, was not the questionnaire. It was building enough confidence among employees that they would say what they actually thought. Surveys fail quietly when people answer safely; this one could not afford to.

That groundwork showed in the numbers: more than eighty per cent of employees responded. We collated the data, drew out the insights, and presented our findings — honestly, including the uncomfortable parts — to the German and Indian leadership together.

What mattered most was what happened next. Rather than filing the report, the leadership used it to identify their top priorities for the following six months, and began acting on them. The survey did what a survey should do, and what most do not: it changed the agenda.

CHAPTER NINE

One Platform, One Goal

A prestigious infrastructure project of national importance was approaching completion. The Prime Minister of India was expected to inaugurate it for public use. In the months leading up to that moment, the senior management needed something that no technical plan could deliver: a leadership team aligned behind a single, shared vision of what success would look like on the day.

The functional leaders were diverse — different disciplines, different departments, each absorbed in their own domain. They needed to see the same finish line. We were given the responsibility of bringing these leaders onto one platform, helping them commit to a unified goal, and articulating together how they would recognise success.

Our role was not to add technical value — the expertise in the room was formidable. It was to bring the human minds of experts together: to create a common vision, a common definition of excellence, a shared picture of the celebration to come.

Through that collective process, the team made the launch a considerable success, and the project has been running well for several years since. Ours was a short assignment by duration and an unusual one by nature — but it carried a reminder we value: sometimes the most important thing is to get brilliant people to see the same thing at the same time.

CHAPTER TEN

Defining What Was Always Understood

A closely-held organisation had grown into a substantially larger one. The talented professionals who had joined in its early days stayed on, worked shoulder to shoulder with the founder through the growth years, and matured into capable leaders. In that closeness, formality had never been necessary: people did whatever was required and whatever was asked. No one needed a document to know their job.

Size changed that. As lateral hires arrived from outside, the unwritten understandings that long-timers carried in their heads were invisible to newcomers. The organisation now needed what it had never needed before: roles defined, plans shared, goals set, and progress reviewed.

There was nothing here to repair, because nothing formal had ever existed — it all had to be written for the first time. We took this up end to end: from writing role descriptions, to articulating the business plans, to helping the top sixty managers set clear goals for the year ahead. And critically, we repeated the entire exercise in the second year. Systems launched once and then forgotten are common; our intention was to institutionalise the discipline, not merely introduce it.

Through that repetition, a formal way of defining and reviewing performance took root — one suited to the size the organisation had become, without discarding the closeness that had built it.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Knowing Where You Stand

An infrastructure leader — a company known for adopting good people practices earlier than most of its industry — came to us with its mid-layer of leaders in mind. These were technically accomplished people who had delivered extraordinary projects. The next stage of the business needed them to become something more: business leaders capable of shouldering far bigger responsibilities.

The starting point the company chose was refreshingly honest — not training, but self-awareness. We designed an assessment centre-like experience through which each leader could see clearly where they stood, what their strengths were, and where they needed to grow. Insight of that kind, delivered credibly, does what no instruction can: it makes the leader the owner of their own development.

Awareness alone, however, fades. So the experience was followed by coaching — sustained hand-holding to convert what each leader had learned about themselves into actual competence.

Since the initiative was launched, more than nine hundred leaders have been taken through this process, and it continues today. Its effect on the business is visible: a widening layer of leaders growing into the responsibilities the company's expansion keeps creating.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Build, Operate, Transfer

The Indian pharmaceutical operations of a German company had a problem it could name honestly: the management of people had become personalised. Favouritism and bias had crept into decisions, and employees knew it. Undoing that required something the organisation could not supply from within — neutrality.

We were brought in as that neutral agency, with a mandate covering the full arc. First, to study the system as it actually operated. Then to set the right systems in place — giving structure to processes that had been running on individual discretion. And throughout, to communicate widely with employees, because systems restore fairness but only communication restores confidence.

What made the assignment distinctive was how it ended. Once the rebuilt arrangement was operating steadily, a successor was brought in and the responsibility handed over smoothly. In effect, it was a build–operate–transfer model applied to people management: build the systems, run them until they hold, and transfer them into permanent hands.

The entire arc — from a compromised system to a credible one under new stewardship — was completed over two years. The measure of such an assignment is that it does not need us at the end of it.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

The Other Four Hundred

A management institute of global repute — several campuses, more than 1,500 students passing through every year, and a faculty renowned worldwide — carries an ecosystem behind it that few ever think about. Supporting the education is a considerable back-end of non-academic staff, four hundred and more of them. Attention flows naturally to the students and the celebrated faculty; the dean of the institute believed the remaining four hundred deserved the same seriousness.

We were invited to collaborate with the dean in transforming the way this workforce was managed. The transformation began with structure — making the organisation more agile and more in tune with current realities, with the right leader in the right place. It extended to new talent: as the institute set its direction towards digital transformation, innovation-led education and a larger presence in executive education, the support organisation for those ambitions had to be built alongside them.

It extended, finally, to the people already there — transforming how their careers were managed, and strengthening the reasons for capable non-academic staff to stay and contribute productively, rather than merely remain.

Working with an institution of this standing, on the part of it the world does not see, was an honour — and a reminder that even the most celebrated organisations are carried by people whose names appear in no prospectus.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Talent at the Grassroots

In a large cement manufacturing operation, with the kind of workforce such plants carry — a substantial number of people working at the lower levels of the organisation — the promoter held a progressive conviction: brilliant talent exists at every level of a hierarchy, and finding it is a leadership responsibility.

The brief was to reach down, not up. Could an assessment centre — a tool usually reserved for senior leaders — be taken to the grassroots, to identify capability among over two hundred junior employees?

We designed a half-day assessment centre and gamified the process, so that participants could engage fully without the anxiety a formal assessment might provoke. Through that experience, the company received rich, individual-level insight into initiative, planning, team leadership and conflict resolution — capabilities that would never surface in routine work.

On the strength of those insights, the organisation spotted its strongest people at the junior-most levels and began moving them into supervisory roles, upgrading their positions, and building their careers around what they had demonstrated rather than where they happened to sit.

We felt particular satisfaction in this assignment. Sophisticated assessment tools should not be the privilege of the top of the pyramid. Taking them to the grassroots — and watching people discover capabilities they didn't know they had — may be among the more meaningful things we have done.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Calibrating, Not Culling

A specialty chemical company, founded by an entrepreneur, had grown remarkably — touching ₹500 crores of turnover in two decades. That trajectory drew a private equity firm, which invested heavily and took a majority stake, with the promoter continuing to run operations. Soon after, the new investors came to us with an assignment on which much depended: understand the capability and potential of the existing leadership team, so that future growth could be planned around reality rather than assumption.

The intent deserves stating plainly, because assessments after a PE investment usually carry an unspoken threat. This one did not. The purpose was never to outplace leaders; it was to calibrate the leadership capacity at hand — to decide whether more leaders were needed, or whether the existing ones should be supported with younger talent beneath them.

We began not with the people but with the destination: an in-depth study of where the organisation was likely to go, and what leadership expertise that journey would demand. Against that requirement, we ran an assessment centre for the existing leaders and delivered deep, individual insight on each — the basis for the executive actions that followed.

What followed is the part we are happiest to report. None of the findings were used to remove anyone. Instead, organisational changes and role changes were implemented on the strength of the insights — leaders repositioned to where their capabilities served the growth plan best.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Straight Talk About Careers

A European company with sizable research operations in Bangalore hires exceptional young engineers from global campuses. Its persistent puzzle was attrition — and behind the attrition, a quieter problem: the youngsters themselves were often unclear about what they wanted from their careers. Market noise and peer pressure filled that vacuum, producing knee-jerk resignations.

The company's response was unusually principled. Rather than trying to buy retention with more money, it chose to give its young talent genuine clarity about their own careers — and then let them act on it, even if acting on it meant leaving. Help them honestly, and let the decision be theirs.

With that as the brief, we designed an in-depth career-pathing workshop and delivered it to close to five hundred engineers. Just as importantly, their managers were briefed on the same framework, so that when a young engineer sought support from a manager or from HR, the ecosystem around them was ready to respond in the same language.

The feedback that followed told the story: managers reported that career conversations with their team members had become genuinely meaningful, in many cases for the first time. The initiative changed how the young talent looked at the organisation and the careers possible within it — and it improved retention precisely because it never made retention the point.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Feedback at the Top

In Central Africa, a successful food manufacturing business — meat production alongside a retailing wing — is led by a well-educated founder and a senior team drawn from several nationalities. Capable individually, the leadership needed to become something it was not yet: a cohesive team.

The founder's own proposal set the direction — a peer feedback exercise in which each leader would offer candid feedback to every other, in the hope of better mutual understanding and a little more sensitivity towards one another. Feedback among peers at the top of a company is delicate material, and we handled it accordingly: individual reports delivered with great care and sensitivity, followed by a debrief session for the group.

Insight was then converted into intent. Through one-on-one coaching, each leader absorbed the contents of their report and worked out a personal change plan — what they, individually, would do differently.

One step remained, and it was the one that gave the exercise its integrity: a debrief to the founder. Some of what the feedback revealed carried implications for the founding leader too, and those changes were placed on the table alongside everyone else's. Cohesion at the top cannot be asked of a team while exempting its leader — and to this founder's credit, it wasn't.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

One Hundred and Ten Roles

A deemed university with more than 25,000 students and over 1,500 well-qualified faculty across multiple geographies had a workforce question of matching scale on its non-academic side. Roles had multiplied over the years across a large number of departments; some overlapped, some had grown redundant, and — hardest of all — the non-academic staff had no systematic career path within the peculiar constraints of an academic institution, where the ladders that exist are built for faculty.

This was not a transformation brief; it was a mapping problem of daunting scale — first see the organisation clearly, then give it order. We deployed a highly experienced team and did the work the hard way: interviewing more than one hundred and fifty leaders and employees, and studying the institution's documents and its various promotion policies as they had accumulated over time.

From that ground-level understanding, we articulated one hundred and ten distinct roles across the university's non-academic organisation — a definitive map where overlaps and redundancies had been. On top of it, we built a systematic promotion policy, with clear gates to be crossed for advancement at every level, giving the non-academic staff what they had never had: a visible path upward.

An assignment of this scale could easily have consumed years. It was completed, end to end, in about five months.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Structure After Growth

In Oman, a company built by an entrepreneur had done what many successful companies do: it grew first and organised later — or, more precisely, it grew and deferred the organising until it could no longer be deferred. The organic growth had brought with it a multiplicity of roles that were not clearly distinguished, ad hoc structures, inconsistent job titles, non-uniform processes, and career paths that no one could chart on paper.

The company had reached a scale at which all of this mattered. Growth without structure does not fail dramatically — it fails in daily friction, in decisions that take too long because accountabilities are unclear, in good people leaving because they cannot see a path ahead.

Our team studied the existing way of working in depth — the job titles, each department's structure, the overall organisation — and proposed an overarching design: a clear organisation structure for every department, specific levels and grades, and each employee fitted systematically to one defined role. Just as important was what came next for each person: a visible ladder showing what it meant to grow to the next level.

The result was a company that could now see its own shape clearly — second lines identified beneath every head of department, roles distinguished from one another, and an architecture that had room for the growth still to come.

CHAPTER TWENTY

After A Long Tenure

A very large multinational, grown tremendously across the globe, found itself with a problem success had created. Specialists who had joined as technical experts ten to fourteen years earlier had risen steadily while there was room to rise — and now there was none, at least not vertically. Accomplished, loyal, and stuck, they stood at a genuine crossroads.

If an earlier chapter described helping young engineers at the start of their careers, this was the same question at the other end of it — and the organisation's response was equally mature: not to manufacture promotions, but to help these individuals gain perspective and empower them to carve their own future plans.

The options were real and varied: remain a technical expert by conviction rather than by default; move into a people-manager role, with an honest reckoning of what changes that demands; step into a smaller role; or relocate to a different location for exposure to newer technologies. What these professionals lacked was not options but a thinking partner — someone to bounce their dilemmas off.

We played that role, as coach, for close to one hundred and ten of these individual contributors, over three to four sessions each. The process helped each of them clarify choices that were theirs alone to make — which may be the best support an organisation can offer its longest-serving people.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

A Culture Under the Lens

A medical surgical products company, built over two decades by a professional and later joined by his son, caught the eye of a private equity firm that saw a bigger opportunity in the specialisation. The PE firm took a majority stake, brought in a new CEO and a few new leaders, and drove a round of policy changes. Things were moving — and the investors now needed to know how the people inside were receiving all of it.

We were invited to carry out what we call a culture audit: what aspects of the culture were employees embracing, which changes were most welcomed, where reservations lingered, and what suggestions the workforce had for creating a better workplace.

The audit drew on multiple channels. A structured survey reached about two hundred and ten people.

Forty-five employees were engaged in direct, qualitative conversations. Senior leaders were interviewed, and policy documents and organisational statements were studied alongside the human data.

The resulting report was placed before the board — not as a feel-good document, but as a deep, evidence-based insight into what was working and what still needed attention, so that the changes already in motion could be steered towards genuine acceptance. For a PE-backed company in transition, knowing what your people actually think — rather than what you hope they think — is not a luxury. It is navigation.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

The Second Generation

A family-managed business had spotted a very niche segment early, built a successful track record in it, and now stood before opportunities far larger than its current shape could serve. The second generation of the family could see this as clearly as the founder. Together, they made a decision that many family businesses postpone until it is too late: to professionalise the organisation and prepare it for the growth ahead.

We stepped in to help build that future in layers. A broad architecture for how the organisation would manage its people. A restructured organisation, with properly created roles for the senior team. Leadership talent attracted from the market to fill capabilities the business had never before needed. And systems and processes to define and manage performance and rewards professionally, rather than personally.

Running beneath all of it is the slowest change of all — culture. Moving an organisation from a smaller, family-oriented way of working to a professionally driven one is not a project with an end date; it is a direction held steadily over years.

This engagement is still ongoing. The results so far are good, and the organisation is moving visibly towards the vision it defined for itself.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

Cherry-Picking

Some hires matter far more than others. For roles on which a business's growth genuinely turns, we practise something we call cherry-picking — and it begins long before any candidate is contacted, with understanding the business deeply enough to question the brief itself. On more than one occasion we have gone back to a promoter and suggested that the role should be different from the job description handed to us — and redesigned it, based on our understanding of the whole organisation, before searching for the person to fill it.

This approach has taken talent across borders: professionals persuaded to relocate from the United States to India, from India to the Middle East, from India to France. A mid-sized company, through this process, repeatedly attracted talent from far larger ones — because the opportunity was presented truthfully and the fit was real.

Truthfulness is, in fact, the discipline at the centre of it. A candidate is staking a career; a client is staking its growth. We hold ourselves neutral between the two, unwilling to oversell to either — because a hire built on an exaggeration fails both sides within a year.

Where the stakes warrant it, we reinforce the process further: leadership profiling, and 360-degree feedback gathered on candidates, so that the selection rests on evidence rather than impressions. Structured, honest, and deliberate — that is what makes a critical hire stick.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

The First Ninety Days

In a large multinational in Hyderabad, a senior leader had just joined. The organisation wanted the new appointment to succeed — and recognised that the first weeks in a new role are when impressions form fastest on both sides, and when small misreadings can harden into lasting friction.

About a month after the new leader's joining, we were invited in. Through one-on-one conversations held in strict confidence, we spoke with a cross-section of stakeholders who had worked closely with this leader — collecting not judgments but perceptions: how people were experiencing her, what was working, where the adjustments lay.

We then sat with the new leader and shared what we had heard — candidly, but as observation rather than verdict. It was not an appraisal or an assessment. It was a channel: carrying honest perceptions that, left alone, would circulate as corridor talk but never reach the person who most needed to hear them.

She absorbed the feedback, factored it into her approach over the following weeks, and a subsequent round confirmed the shifts. The process — which we call New Leader Immersion — rests on a simple conviction: the perceptions will form regardless, and the new leader is better served by hearing them early, unfiltered, and in a setting designed to help rather than to judge.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

Hearing It for the First Time

In a growing pharmaceutical company, 151 leaders were about to experience something none of them ever had: 360-degree feedback. That fact shaped everything. Before a single question could be asked, the need had to be sold — leaders convinced, a safe atmosphere created, respondents assured that they could rate honestly, with anonymity and confidentiality protected absolutely.

The rollout ran on Insyte, the feedback platform we built as part of our HR Toffy technology suite, carrying a questionnaire customised to the company — including its own organisational values, so leaders were measured against what the company itself claimed to stand for.

Reports alone, however, can do damage in inexperienced hands. So, every leader received an online debrief session — help in understanding what the report meant, drawing careful insights rather than jumping to judgments and conclusions. And the reports served one purpose only: each leader's personal development. Nothing else.

The apprehensions that hung over the launch had evaporated by the end. Leaders told us the process finally showed them where they stood, and pointed them to the areas where work on themselves should begin. For 151 people to hear the truth about themselves for the first time, and be grateful for it — that is what careful design makes possible.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

The Uncles and the Daughter

In the UAE, a Keralite entrepreneur had built, over two decades, a respected name in the construction industry — designing, producing and supplying grills for air-conditioning equipment across the Emirates and neighbouring countries. Two factories, a strong reputation, and the inevitable question: what happens next.

The founder was aging, and his daughter — well-educated with a management degree — was ready to take an active role. But the senior people in the company had started with her father. She had grown up calling them uncles. They had watched her grow from a child. Now she stood at the helm, and the discomfort ran in both directions: for her, the challenge of leading people who saw her as the boss's little girl; for them, the challenge of accepting her authority and her ideas.

This was not a problem a policy could solve. We took it up as an advisory assignment — identifying quietly where the resistance pockets lay, and working out a gradual, professional induction that allowed her to demonstrate value before demanding authority. Through her contributions, credibility would come; through credibility, acceptance.

It is a sensitive process, but a necessary one, and it was handled successfully. She now operates actively in the business, and her husband has joined to drive business development in neighbouring countries. The generational transition — that fragile passage so many family businesses fumble — was navigated with care, and held.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

From Three Hundred Crores to a Thousand

A ₹300-crore organisation, closely managed with deep day-to-day involvement from its founder and managing director, stood before a market full of opportunity. Seizing it required extraordinary talent from outside. And there lay the bind: the company's image as an employer was not strong enough to attract the very people its growth depended on. The business needed talent; talent would not come.

We worked on both sides of that equation. Inside, we set right the things that fed the reputation — including the communication systems through which the organisation spoke to its own people. Outside, we worked on presenting the true picture of the company to the market, and built a genuinely compelling proposition for good talent to join.

The subtler work was at the top. An organisation used to the founder's close involvement manages new, senior, outside talent differently — or loses it. Slowly but surely, we handheld the managing director and coached the organisation's leaders in making room for the calibre of people now walking in.

What was scoped as a two-year engagement grew into a five-year association — one that lasted until the organisation touched ₹1,000 crores. At that point, a formal in-house HR team was brought in and the reins handed over smoothly. We look back on this assignment with particular satisfaction: the company more than tripled, and the people capability grew with it rather than behind it.

Part Two

What We Built

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

Certification Tool for Accountability

Two decades of work have left us with a strong premise: capability without accountability does not deliver performance. Organisations invest heavily in building capable people, and then wonder why performance lags — rarely asking whether anyone is actually measuring how accountable the organisation is.

So we built a way to measure it. nPAS — the Net Performance Accountability Score — is a survey-based tool that gauges accountability levels across an organisation, resting on the conviction that accountability is the mechanism by which capability turns into results.

We have rolled nPAS out across many organisations. In one — a very large multinational operating in Malaysia — the findings held a number of insightful surprises for the management, and the effect was immediate: the results triggered instant discussion about the company's own reward system and its leadership coaching initiatives. The measurement did not sit in a report; it changed what the management talked about.

Our advocacy on this is unambiguous: if you truly want performance delivered through your systems, measuring accountability is not optional. What is not measured quietly excuses itself.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

AI for Everyday HR

Much of what determines how employees experience a company is unglamorous: joining formalities, records, goals, salaries, leave, travel, reporting lines. When this machinery runs seamlessly, nobody notices; when it doesn't, nobody notices anything else. HR Toffy is the HRMS platform we built to run that machinery — the entire employee lifecycle, mapped end to end.

Its range shows in who uses it. A company headquartered in the United Kingdom, with operations in India, runs its complete employee lifecycle on HR Toffy — from the day a person joins, through goal-setting, payroll processing, leave and travel, to the reporting relationships that hold the organisation together.

At the other end of the spectrum entirely, a large chain of salons in Hyderabad is bringing sixteen of its stores onto the platform — managing shifts, incentives, attendance and employee records for a workforce that could hardly be more different from a UK corporate office.

That is precisely the point. Good HR operations are not the privilege of large companies with large HR departments; well-built technology puts the same discipline within reach of a salon chain and a multinational alike.

CHAPTER THIRTY

Virtual HR: You Never Need to Hire HR

Some organisations genuinely do not need a full-time HR team on their premises — what they need is for HR to happen, reliably, wherever their people are. For them, we developed virtual HR services: fractional HR, delivered remotely, in full.

Consider one of our clients — a sales organisation with more than a hundred salespeople spread across India and only a small corporate office in Bangalore. Around 110 employees, scattered across the country, with no HR department of their own. We are their HR.

Any of those 110 people can reach our team directly. Our mailboxes receive their requests. HR Toffy, our technology platform, handles their attendance, their benefits and their records. The service is complete; only the office is absent. In a technology-dominated world, it no longer matters where your HR sits — it matters whether the service is fully provided.

Companies like this are now plenty in our portfolio, and we keep refining the model. For a growing organisation, the choice is no longer between building an HR department before its time or doing without one — there is a third way, and we have made it dependable.

What Two Decades Taught Us

The business question comes first.

Not one assignment in this booklet began with a brief that survived first contact with reality. The real brief was always a business problem — an expansion the structure could not carry, a leadership bench too thin for the growth ahead, talent that would not come, talent that would not stay. When we understood the business deeply enough, the people solution often looked different from what was first asked of us. Start with the business, and the people work designs itself honestly.

Discipline before perfection.

When we first brought goal-setting to organisations that had never documented a goal, we did not chase the perfect system — we chased the habit of writing things down. Perfection demands clarity the organisation does not yet have; discipline builds that clarity year by year. Every system we have seen endure was launched imperfect and improved in use.

Systems restore fairness; only communication restores confidence.

Where favouritism and bias had crept in, putting the right processes in place was necessary — and insufficient. Employees do not experience systems; they experience whether anyone bothered to explain them. In every restructuring, every rollout, every difficult cleanup, the communication was not the last step. It was half the work.

Institutionalise, don't just launch.

Organisations are littered with programmes that ran brilliantly once. When we set goals with sixty managers, we returned and did it again the next year. When a thousand people managers were trained, every one received the same content. The second year, the common template, the repeatable blueprint — the unglamorous repetition is where change actually happens.

What gets measured gets acted upon.

A pharmaceutical company surveyed, intervened, and surveyed again — and the improvement sat in its own data, beyond argument. An accountability score put before a management team in Malaysia changed that day's agenda. What is not measured quietly excuses itself.

Growth begins with self-awareness — and no one is exempt.

Nine hundred leaders in one company, a hundred and fifty-one in another, veterans at mid-career crossroads, a founding leader in Central Africa receiving feedback alongside his team, a new leader in Hyderabad hearing unfiltered perceptions within her first months — the pattern never varied. Development that begins with honest self-awareness sticks, because the person owns what they saw.

Be honest with everyone, even when it costs.

We told young engineers the truth about their careers knowing some would leave — and retention improved because it was never the point. We refused to oversell roles to candidates or candidates to clients. We put uncomfortable findings before German boards, Indian promoters and founding families alike. Honesty occasionally costs an engagement. Dishonesty and any temptation of unethical choices always cost more.

The best engagements make themselves unnecessary.

One assignment ended with systems handed to a successor after two years. Another, after five years and a threefold growth in the business, ended with a formal HR team taking the reins. We measure our work not by how long clients need us, but by how completely they eventually do not. What remains behind — the structure, the discipline, the confidence — is the actual deliverable.

Our Services & Products

HR Consulting · Organisation Design · Leadership Development

www.hrfootprints.com

Net Performance Accountability Score

www.npas.ai

HRMS · Employee Lifecycle · Insyte 360° Feedback

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