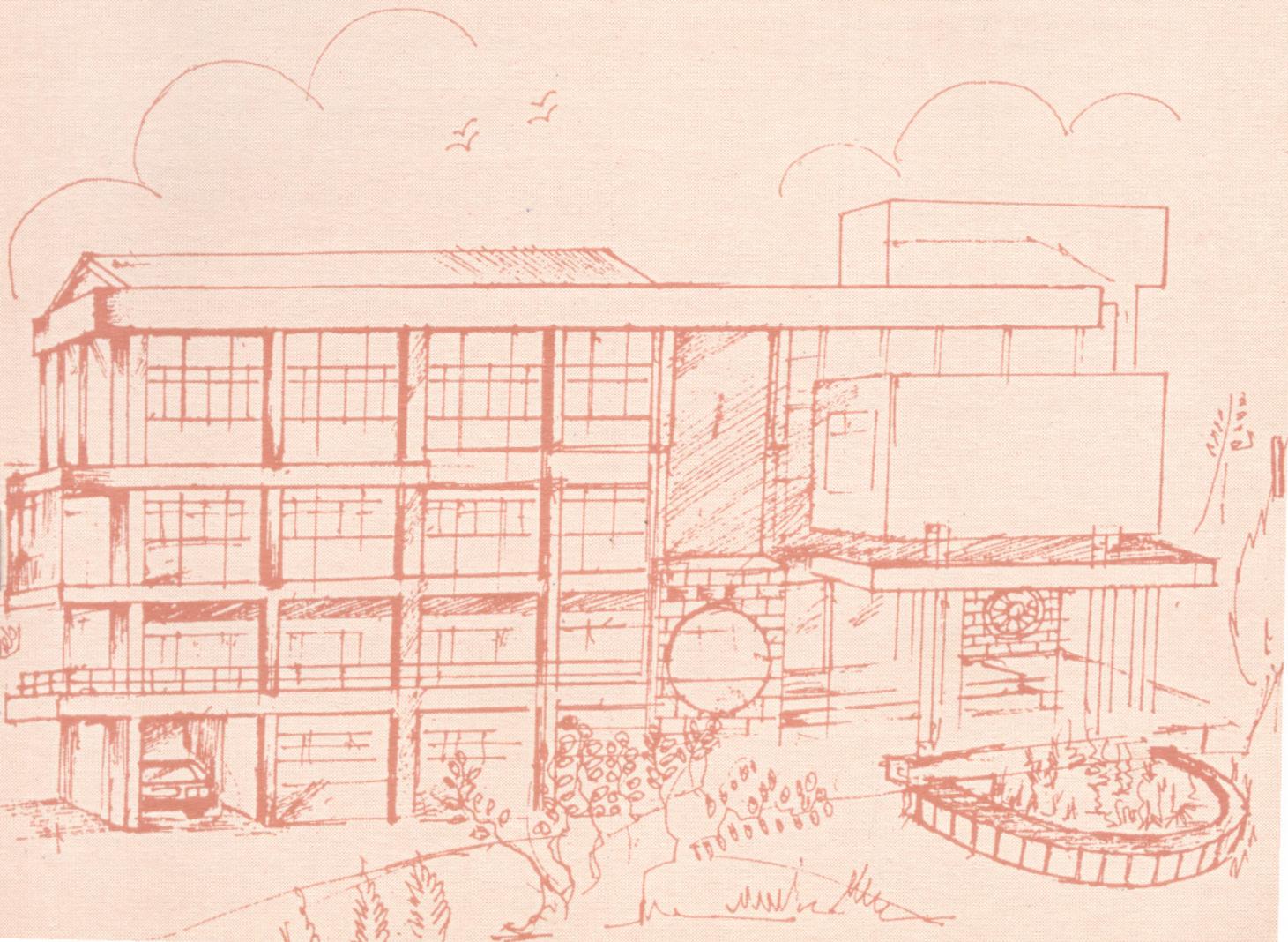




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**Research strategies for a collaborative approach in dealing with people-related challenges**



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## **Research strategies for a collaborative approach in dealing with people-related challenges**

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## **RESEARCH STRATEGIES FOR A COLLABORATIVE APPROACH IN DEALING WITH PEOPLE-RELATED CHALLENGES**

### **Abstract**

This paper seeks to develop an agenda for action research to understand people-related challenges in technology organizations through an exploratory study. Through this study, a methodology for action-research based academic-industry interface was examined. There were two objectives set forth in the study. One, was to gain a basic understanding of the predominant issues and challenges faced by the technology organizations. Literature survey and consequent interviews with managers in our research case sites provided data for an initial understanding of some critical issues faced in people management by the technology sector. The second objective, was to examine a hypothesized methodology for action-research-based intervention, with the practitioners. The practitioner's perspectives provided valuable insights into people-related challenges as well as on a methodology for action research.

**Key words-** Technology organization, People challenges, Human capital, Action Research, stages of research

## **RESEARCH STRATEGIES FOR A COLLABORATIVE APPROACH IN DEALING WITH PEOPLE-RELATED CHALLENGES**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Since the last one and half decades, the changes in the international business environment have fundamentally shifted the nature of work and organizations. Work life has undergone tremendous changes (Frese, 2000). The new developments in today's work place have been global competition, rapid technological advancement, corporate culture changes due to mergers and acquisitions, increased complexity of work, reduced supervision, changing job and career concepts and increased cultural diversity (Riggio, 2003). These changes have led to a plethora of people challenges, specially so, in the technology-driven organizations.

Rapid technological advancements have led to a stupendous growth of technology-based organizations the world over. It had been estimated that the world market for technology from the sale or licensing of technology alone is well over \$ 50 billion (Arora et al, 2001). Academic researchers in technology organizations have operated largely from three perspectives –Firstly, that they manufacture a high technology product involving a technology-intensive manufacturing process (Jassawalla and Sashittal, 2002). Secondly, that they operate in a context where the time to market for a quality product is paramount having to deal with an environment that operates in real time measurement (Vickers & Ellis, 2004). Reference has been made to industries in the defence sectors, laser measurement, communication and information technology, telecommunications, high speed optoelectronic components, aerospace, satellite systems and computer electronics. Thirdly, these organizations have had to deal with issues mainly pertaining to highly educated employees ( Baruch & Rosenstein, 1992). All the three observations have as their key referent either a high technology product with a high-technology process with sensitive time-to market issues or an educated work force. It can be inferred here that these are inclusive categories of reference for a technology organization. These referents have been chosen as the criteria for the selection of the sample for the study.

While referring to the work force in the information technology organizations, which is the segment that has been explored in this study, Ferratt et al (2005) observe that human capital in the information technology organizations has been considered a strategic resource and its effective management represents an organizational capability. In India, the IT software and services industry has grown rapidly over the last decade. In 2005, it encompassed about 6,50,000 employees and the prediction for the next five years, was that this number is expected to triple, to over 2 million persons, so as to meet the target of \$75 billion in revenues, including exports of over \$50 billion (Karnik, 2005). Some of the challenges faced by the Indian IT Sector are attracting and retaining talent in an explosive growth phase, the working conditions, the pressure and stress faced, obsolescence of skills and technology at a fast pace and the career growth issues of employees (Karnik, 2005). Similarly, a number of challenges have been generally observed in the context of managing the knowledge workers by Robertson (2000). Some of them have been the issues of competitors constantly trying to entice the employees for their expertise and skills and, consequently the need to take care of retention in the organization. As early as 1993, Tampoe's observation on the key motivators of knowledge workers as the need for personal growth, operational autonomy and task achievement seems to hold good even today. Kalra's (1997) conception of the need for a paradigmic shift in philosophy from HRM to HPM (Human potential management), also seems to be relevant in today's scenario where the focus has to be on an integrative and continuous process of developing employee's capabilities. Robertson (2000) has also noted that a unique work environment for knowledge workers with a high level of autonomy, trust and an egalitarian culture in inter-disciplinary projects of their choice enhances their professional development as well as the intellectual capital. One key preference of the knowledge workers is to be unencumbered by any form of bureaucracy, procedures or systems, other than only a financial control system.

We can infer from their insights, that managing the highly educated knowledge workforce poses a number of similar challenges which can be facilitated *only* by a proper understanding of the impact of internal organizational environment and the industry context. Thus, problems can manifest from two sources – the external environment

which is the industry and the internal environment which constitutes the culture, work environment, reward systems etc. Nafukho et al (2004) have emphasized the need to focus on people as assets in organizations, providing a major emphasis in defining the research agenda for HRD scholars and, in turn, guiding HRD practice. According to NASSCOM (2005) a scientific and analytical approach should be implemented by Indian IT services and ITES companies to address their people's issues. It is in this context that the role of research acquires immense importance to understand and deal with people-related issues in the technology sector.

In order to deal with a complex environment as in IT, there should be consonance in the various levels of the HR function, which includes its philosophy, policies, programmes, practices and processes (Schuler, 1992). However, it is not possible to achieve that unless one is able to specifically understand the people challenges and deal with them at the different units of analysis in the organization. Gaining clarity in adequately identifying and understanding the source of the problem is important. Taking this context into account, two objectives were set forth for this study. Resultantly, these have been dealt with in two separate sections.

**The Objectives of this paper:**

One objective of this paper is to discuss our broad understanding of certain crucial people-related issues faced by technology organizations based on a preliminary exploration.

The second objective is to discuss the dynamics and implications of research engagement as a process to attain a meaningful outcome for the organization/ industry as well as the researcher.

**The Hypotheses postulated –**

I Level –

1. For research to be relevant, there should be a continued interface and not a one-time contact with the organization.

2. Sustained contact is a function of the depth of the relationship built (comfort level) between the researcher and the practitioner.
3. Relationship building is influenced by involvement in sequential phases of the research process
4. The depth of research process is a function of the level of interactions/ participation of the practitioner and openness to share internal data

II Level -

The above hypotheses, merged into the following **central hypothesis** of the study.

**There is a need for a multiple stage configuration of the research process.**

### **The Research design-**

The qualitative approach was used to gather data from the field. Data from eight case sites were collected during the exploration and consequently validation of concepts.

The sampling criteria were the following –

1. Information and communication technology business operations
2. A professionally educated workforce
3. Small and medium scale of operations
4. Two to fifteen years in existence

Criteria 1 and 2 ensured that the understanding gathered would be representative of technology organizations.

Criteria 3 and 4 ensured that the organizational system is characteristic of the new age organization in a scaling up and growth mode. A Nasscom report (2006) observes that for early phase companies in India, achieving success is simply fraught with challenges, the least of which are their size and scale of operations. These contenders are up against larger, more established players, with greater experience and track record and a market that thrives on the “survival of the fittest” culture.

**Table I – Organisational variable classification<sup>1</sup> details considered in the study**

Classification Details	Categories
Scale	SM- small <500 employees MD- Medium 500-1000 employees L- Medium Large > 1000 employees
Technology referent	HTP – High technology product TIP – Technology intensive production EWF – Educated work force
Nature of business	P – Product S – Service PS – Product and service
Time to market	NRT -Near Real Time (Development to marketing time near zero)
Organisational age	Y – Young < five years MY – Medium young 6 to 10 yrs M – Mature > 10 yrs
Ownership	I – Indian MNC – Multinational corporation

**The Data collection –**

Literature survey provided the basis of identifying the key people-related challenges faced by organizations today. Based on this template, depth interviews were held with practitioners. The practitioners involved in the study were the Heads of organizations, operational Heads and HR Heads/ Managers. Interview schedules had been prepared and the collected data was collated and compared across the case sites.

**Findings-**

The field data was collated and the findings are presented in two sections. Section I deals with the crucial people challenges faced by the technology organizations in the study. Section II consists of three parts. The first part describes the organisations' approach to people challenges. The second part highlights observations in literature to bring research closer to practice. The third part deals with the proposed collaborative research agenda relating to the multiple stages of the research process.

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<sup>1</sup> These letter codes are used in Tables II, III and IV

**Section I**

**Crucial challenges faced by the technology organizations in the study-**

All the case sites dealt with Information technology as the business domain, although they worked for different applications like telecom software, software for electrical product design, application software development, among others. Table II shows the findings on the people challenges experienced by the organizations

**Table II presents the findings based on a mapping of the people challenges to the case sites and the organisational variables<sup>2</sup> in the study**

People Challenges → Case sites & variables ↓	Work force Acquisition & Retention	Performance & Career /talent management	Succession planning & grooming leadership	Enhancing employee commitment
1 MD-S-MY-I	√	√		√
2 M-P-HTP-Y-MNC	√	√	√	√
3 SM-S-MY-I	√			√
4 SM-S-MY-I	√			*
5 LA-PS-HTP-NRT-M-I		√	√	*
6 SM-P-HTP-NRT-Y-I	*			
7 LA-P-TIP-M-MNC	√	√		√
8 LA-PS-TIP-NRT-M-MNC		√	√	
√ = perception of challenge		* = perception of control over challenge		

All the organizations were in the age range of 2 to 15 yrs. The organizational variables being discussed are scale of operations, nature of business, technology referent, organizational age and ownership. Educated work force as one technology referent is present in all case sites and formed one criteria of sample identification. We shall discuss the various challenges<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> Refer to Table I on the organizational variable classification and the respective letter codes

<sup>3</sup> It may be mentioned that the observations made here may be seen as indicative and not conclusive, in line with this study being the exploratory stage of the hypothesized research process explained in section II

### 1. The challenge of acquisition and retention of the educated work force

In the relatively smaller scale Indian organizations, the issue was more about trying to bring in manpower and retain them in the environment of other competitive large scale organizations who have established their brand identity in the global scenario. Whereas, in the small scale MNC organizations, the issue was large scale acquisition in a relatively short time. This clearly indicates that depending on the scale and ownership factor, the challenge of acquisition manifests in different ways. However, an exception was observed in the smallest case site with around a little more than a 100 employees where acquisition does not pose a challenge. The acquisition strategy of bringing in joiners from Tier II<sup>4</sup> educational background, but at the same time ensuring learning challenges in terms of work and technology complexity, is found to be an effective strategy. Moreover, being a young organization, recruitment is based predominantly on personal networks. Attrition has also not posed a major issue in this young organization which manufactures a high technology product.

Retention is perceived to be a major challenge by the small and medium scale organizations including the MNCs. Employees' reasons for attrition as gathered from the practitioners, are the need for challenging work and better pay. The employees seem to benchmark standards of larger organizations, even if their ownership, is multinational. Retaining fresh trainees after the contract period of training is another crucial issue faced in small organizations. The practitioners felt that a lot of knowledge formed during the training process was lost, once the trainee opted to move out to larger multinationals for better compensation.

### 2. The challenge of performance and career/talent management

Within the boundary of performance management, issues such as measuring productivity, compensation, rewards and recognition mechanisms were found to be critical. 'Are the young employees really interested in learning and growth?' was a query posed by the Chief of a small scale organization, who felt that learning and development cannot take place at the individual level, if people chose to move continuously without persevering and upgrading their

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<sup>4</sup> Tier I educational background refers to engineering graduates and Tier II refers to the Masters in Computer Applications in the IT corporate parlance

skills in a role/ job. The performance appraisal is a ‘charged’ scene in most of the organizations. The difficulties with measuring productivity, the highly demanding expectations of the work force, peer comparisons on perception of inequity are some of the issues faced. A distinction was brought between career growth issues and salary issues by the practitioners. They felt that these were used interchangeably by many employees who do not give the true reason of quitting during the exit interviews.

If Performance relates to the present, Career is about the future. Career management is also a very crucial issue. The employees’ demand for a fast-track promotion and growth prospects in relatively younger organizations seems to create a lot of concern. The IT organizations regardless of scale or technology, are still grappling to define the career growth path of the technically proficient employees, which they refer to as the ‘tech ladder’. This could be so as many of the Indian organizations continue to be engaged with routine application development and maintenance work and not so much into innovation, R&D and /or product development work.

3. The challenge of succession planning and grooming leadership With a well-established HR system a good brand image and enough tangible resources to attract and satisfy employees, one sure way of ensuring that the organization capitalises on the promising ones, is succession planning. It was very evident from the data that the scale of operations and ownership plays a major role in the organizations’ perceiving this challenge. Whether it is an Indian medium organization scaling up rapidly or a large Indian organization, or a large MNC, succession planning and grooming for leadership are found to be their major challenges. Efforts in terms of clear growth plans, succession of roles, mentoring and coaching is assumed to provide some answers to both, the promising employee and the organization, on the issues of talent management. In the large organizations especially, this is very pertinent, as attrition is not found to be as pressing a problem.

4. The challenge of enhancing employee commitment The challenge of keeping employees committed and motivated at work is independent of the influence of any of the organizational variables considered in the study. Some specific observations on certain

case-sites will be shared here. A small as well a large Indian organization, specifically mentioned that it is possible to manage people challenges well when there is a conscious need to work on mutual understanding . The practitioner observed that people can feel committed to work with the organization, if attempts are made to understand and empathise with the employees in different contexts. Principles of procedural and distributive justice when consciously applied at the work place, seems to have an impact of even promoting organizational citizenship behaviour. Some examples of conscious organizational attempts to ensure equity observed, were the egalitarian nature and random allotment of seating arrangements, role-based and not hierarchy-based position titles.

To sum up, there were many issues which were found common in the case sites. The predominant concern was about attrition and demanding salary expectations and the need to define a clear career path especially in the technical domain. Issues of measuring productivity and managing the performance management process were also expressed. The unreasonably high demands placed by the knowledge workers is also an issue that the organizations find difficult to cope with . There is an overall agreement among the practitioners that the rising market opportunities have created a huge gap between demand and supply. This is one major area of concern.

The causes of issues and challenges can be clubbed into two categories. One, the external market force with a rising demand is a phenomenon over which a single organization has no control in bringing about a change in the state of affairs. The second is the ‘perception’ of the employees regarding the internal environment within the organization. This perception is based on an internal benchmark within the organization or externally with other organizations. For eg- Salary expectations are built on an external benchmarking, while the performance appraisal process is compared to the internal treatment of other employees. Whatever be the issue, there seems to be a perception of inequity by the organization as well as the employee. The input from the organization is its effort/cost of upgrading skills and knowledge of the employees. Whereas, the outcome does not result in any gain from all such efforts, on the exit of an employee. This becomes a major source of concern. From the employee’s point of view, it could be the perception of a mismatch between the hard work and the efforts of applying knowledge

and a lack of adequate rewards and recognition in terms of either career growth or salary hikes. It is to be noted in this context, that other than objective facts, there are possibilities of subjective views and perceptions among both employees and the organization.

One of the root causes for many of these challenges seems to be a lack of understanding of each others' expectations. This could have happened due to two reasons. One, that both of them have not made an effort to convey clearly what are their expectations, especially in the initial stages. It is also possible that the absence of comfort level has contributed to their not doing so. Two, the other possibility is that in spite of understanding the expectations, they have not been inclined /able to fulfill the expectations. Keeping this observation in view, research into the realm of psychological contracts can contribute considerably to gain a better perspective in dealing with the challenges arising from mismatch of expectations. Understanding industry level trends as well as organization-specific data relating to employer-employee expectations will be useful in such a research effort.

## **Section II**

In the first part of this section, some observations on the organizational approaches to understand their people challenges will be dealt with. In the second part, some observations on the criticality of researcher-practitioner collaboration in research will be made. In the third part, the hypothesised collaborative research agenda will be proposed. This has been evolved on the basis of literature survey, the postulation of the central hypothesis<sup>5</sup> for this study and, an examination of the same in the field by getting the practitioner's inputs.

### 1. The organisations' approach to people challenges

The approach to people challenges has been categorized on two dimensions. One is the perspective they adopt on understanding the issues. The other is their method of gathering data to understand issues. The findings on these two dimensions are presented in Table III and Table IV respectively.

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<sup>5</sup> Refer to the section 'The Hypotheses postulated'

**Table III presents the findings on the perspectives on understanding the issues in the organisations in the study**

Case sites & variables <sup>6</sup> ↓	Perception of control	Perception of no control	Concern with short term issues	Concern with long term issues	External focus on the problem	Internal focus on the problem
1 M-S-MY-I	√	√	√	√	√	√
2 M-P-HTP-Y-MNC		√	√		√	
3 SM-S-MY-I		√	√		√	
4 SM-S-MY-I	√	√	√		√	√
5 L-PS-HTP-NRT-M-I	√		√	√		√
6 SM-P-HTP-NRT-Y-I	√				√	
7 L-P-TIP-M-MNC	√	√	√	√	√	√
8 L-PS-TIP-M-MRT-	√			√		√
√ = present						

As can be observed from Table III the perception of control or lack of it is not an ‘either or’ state. There is no uniform pattern observed. Regarding the time horizon of issues, the smaller organizations are more preoccupied with short term issues, while the larger ones concentrate on long term challenges. The medium ones that are scaling up are concerned with both. It can be inferred that the larger organizations are adequately geared to deal with the short term issues. Except for two case sites, all the organizations are open to getting industry level trends/data in order to make a meaning out of their issues. It may also be mentioned that five out of the eight case sites were open to examining internal factors contributing to their people challenges. It augurs well for proceeding to the next/second<sup>7</sup> stage of the research process provided the researcher is able to establish credibility.

**Table IV presents the findings on the methods of data gathering to understand issues adopted by the organisations in the study**

<sup>6</sup> Refer to Table I on the organizational variable classification and the respective letter codes

<sup>7</sup> Diagnostic research is the second stage of the research configuration as explained in section II

Case sites / variables <sup>8</sup>	Formal 1	Informal 2	Research 7	Experience 8	Standard 5	Local 6
1 M-S-MY-I	√	√	√	√		√
2 M-P-HTP-Y-MNC	√		√		√	
3 SM-S-MY-I		√		√		
4 SM-S-MY-I		√		√		
5 L-PS-HTP-NRT-M-I	√	√	√	√		√
6 SM-P-HTP-NRT-Y-I		√		√		
7 L-P-TIP-M-MNC	√		√		√	
8 L-PS-TIP-M-MRT-MNC	√		√		√	
√ = present						

There are various data gathering and analyzing methodologies adopted by the organizations to understand and deal with their people-related issues. Based on the practitioner’s sharing of data, it was understood that a formal as well as an informal means of gathering data to understand specific issues were present. In smaller organizations, data is mainly gathered informally, while in large organizations, data is gathered based on a formal structure. Medium organizations adopt both methods. For eg- In the case of attrition, informal means to gather data from close associates of an employee who has left is in practice. The formal means to gather data on issues are skip level meetings, focus group discussions and other formal discussions. External consultants conducting internal survey on an annual basis is also a normative practice in medium organisations.

In multinational organisations, whether it be large or small, a standardized framework is adopted globally within the organisation to track, monitor and bring in improvements on people-related issues. Internal surveys are conducted without any external agent’s intervention in large organizations. One large MNC case site is working on predictive models on people management, based on the input of a multi-dimensional profiling of the educated work force. This is a positive indication of large organizations moving to using

<sup>8</sup> Refer to Table I on the organizational variable classification and the respective letter codes

a scientific method for an assessment and prediction of long term people challenges. Such positive trends when shared in the second<sup>9</sup> stage of the research process will be a significant value-add for the practitioners' participation in the first<sup>10</sup> stage, which forms the basis of this paper.

A conscious research-based understanding is predominant in large scale organizations whether it is an Indian or a multi-national organization. In the medium organizations, the recognition that research can contribute to valuable data is present. On the contrary, in the youngest case site observed, there is absence of any research initiative. As observed earlier, research has acquired an important priority in the large organizations. In one of the large Indian organization case site, the HR functionaries are into considerable internal research on people issues. They have authored research articles and many of them possess a doctoral degree and have researched on various issues like citizenship behaviours, career management, among others. The HR head, who himself is a doctorate, related quite well to terms like organizational citizenship, psychological contract, transformational leadership, principles of distributive and procedural justice, equity, self-worth enhancement etc. The insights that the large organisations have gathered from their research endeavours, have definitely given them the confidence to say emphatically that people issues can be dealt with based on certain scientific principles.

Quite a clear distinction can be observed between the larger organizations with a higher level of research focus internally and the other relatively younger ones, in the clarity they showed in the need to explore and understand people-related issues and the ways to tackle them. Two conclusions can be drawn in this context. One, that the business stability and security to some extent gives the organization the luxury to think through more long term endeavours in terms of research. Another reason could be that since the brand is well established, the problem of employees being poached away by larger organizations is less applicable here. Here, the question is, what has contributed to what? Is it that research has helped to deal with the human capital better and, therefore, a better business growth? Or, is it that once the organization has grown considerably, it has

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<sup>9</sup> Diagnostic research is the second stage of the research configuration as explained in section II

<sup>10</sup> Field research is the first stage of the research configuration as explained in section II

the luxury of conducting research and also perceives a dire need for it? It does emerge from the above findings, that research is undoubtedly meaningful for understanding and dealing with people-issues.

## 2. Criticality of researcher-practitioner collaboration -

Research literature reveals a conscious recognition of the researcher-practitioner 'divide' that has been created. Anderson et al (2001) have evolved a four-fold typology of prevailing research based on the levels of rigor and relevance. They postulate that research on pragmatic science which ensures a high degree of rigour and relevance is critical in today's context. Intervention research has been proposed to be a solution to address the rigor-relevance paradigm as they are relevant to practitioners (Gerald, 2006) and, are important in academic research as well. For the researcher, they provide an alternative to a more limited cross-sectional research that dominates the field (Arnold, 2004). For the research to be meaningful for the organisation, there is a need to shift the focus of the research from the academic researcher's agenda to the practitioner's need arising from the need to deal with the people challenges in the organization. The relevance of the research is rooted in how much the variables studied form a major concern/interest to the organization / industry. The relevance is thus rooted in the possibility of gaining clarity on the problem faced by the industry, and also, the solutions that can be evolved on a scientific basis that will impact the organization in return, positively. Though this is the ideal expected state, the process of gaining acceptance for academicians in the industry is not an easy task. If the initial contact and rapport is established, conscious efforts have to be made to sustain the same.

## 3. Multiple configuration of the research process

Based on the hypotheses<sup>11</sup> postulated and the central hypothesis that the research process has to be configured at multiple stages, three stages are proposed. They are the field research, the diagnostic research and the intervention research. This configuration of multiple stages of the research process is primarily based upon the principles of the classical OD approach of all interventions emanating from a scientific diagnosis based on organizational data. The relevance of the research can be enhanced by consulting and

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<sup>11</sup> Refer to section 'The Hypotheses postulated'

enabling participation of the organization at every stage including the initial probing of issues.

The Field research – This is the first step into exploration on a theme or issue faced by organisations. There is no a priori hypothesis in mind. The basic objective is to understand the dimensions of the theme / issue. When the academic researcher is able to collect data from a number of organizations of a specific sector, a pattern or a theme can be identified and this will be a useful feed back to the organizations from where the data was collected. Some amount of benchmarking can be attempted by organizations if they learn that they deviate considerably. The approach is usually qualitative based on one or two interview sessions with the HR and senior/middle management. Based on these initial interactions, the comfort level can get tested. Based on the first level of relationship building in this stage, if the practitioner feels comfortable, then he/she may be willing to discuss more specifics of issues when he /she learns that there is some relevant take-away for them. The take-aways in field research can be a sectoral data, qualitative data and case anecdotes that can be shared across the organizations that have contributed to the data pool. The data could be converted into knowledge through conceptual processing and identification of patterns that can be published. Whether it be the industry or the academic institute, publications symbolize serious research.

This paper focused on field research on an experimental mode. Gathering from the practitioners' inputs, an internal VS external focus to give the problem due recognition was understood. In most of the organizations, a high eagerness is shown to understand 'industry' level data which they believe will enable them to get an initial understanding and some hold over the issue. The expectation set is that the data on a particular theme or issue contributed by the organization will remain confidential and would be a 'part' of a 'whole' which they will get back. The buy-in of the organization is very important at this stage.

The Diagnostic research – In this stage, a problem or issue is identified and data is gathered to understand the specifics of the problem and also the causes for the same. This begins when the organization becomes more comfortable in the research relationship and

is willing to share some organizational data related to symptoms or issues that has to be explored further. In this case, as mentioned, there should be joint efforts on setting the research hypotheses and also the validation by the practitioner at each emerging phase of understanding the problem.

In this stage, the focus shifts from the external 'industry' level to the internal 'organisational' level. The researcher and practitioner have to jointly begin the exploration of the details of the internal issues. Importance of the methodological rigor has to be stressed on how it contributes to the accuracy of diagnosis of the issue. Examples on distinction between the causes and the symptoms, the importance of the right data and the right interpretation of the problem has to be stressed upon by the researcher. Once the problems are rightly diagnosed, the organizations may want to interact with the researcher further to the diagnostic report. This can happen if the relationship gets mature and moves to the next stage.

The Intervention research – In this stage, interventions are planned and worked upon and the effectiveness is also consciously measured. At this stage, the comfort level between the researcher and the practitioner should reach a mature stage. In other words, the practitioner must be able to make sense of the principles and frameworks that evolve through the process of abstraction and conceptualization based on the available data on the problem. It gives shape to the design, measuring and monitoring of different types of Organization Development interventions.

The focus here is on a method to convince the organization of the positive purpose or the outcome of the research relationship. Joint publications can also be proposed. Attempts are to be made to build a common understanding of the problem through the correct data based on consistent monitoring of the situation and consensus in agreeing upon the understanding drawn. The intended outcome is a long term relationship with an effective intervention to the organizational problem and enough research output for the researcher.

Based on this study, the practitioners' views on the central hypothesis<sup>12</sup> relating to the multiple stages of the research process provided a picture of the nature of involvement and the expected outcome from each of the postulated stages of the research process. It was conceptualized that the dependent variable in the research process is the 'relationship' level that gets built between the practitioner and the researcher. It was observed that the practitioners were open to interacting on a continuous basis with the researcher if each stage results in a valued outcome.

The valued outcome for the different stages are the following –

Field research – Data on Industry trends/patterns, focus group discussions with peer practitioners, publications of case anecdotes

Diagnostic research – Diagnostic reports, joint publication<sup>13</sup> of research papers on people challenges

Intervention research – Design and implementation of intervention strategies and data on their progress, joint publication<sup>14</sup> of comprehensive case studies, book publications on people challenges

Though the multiple phases of research has been perceived to be a meaningful concept by the practitioners, this concept will have to be validated further with adequate testing in the field with the organizations based on further research endeavours.

### **Summary and implications of the study –**

We have hypothesised in this study that multiple configuration of the research process is important in building a researcher-practitioner collaboration for rigour and relevance in people research.

Action researchers have referred to a number of pertinent factors in the third party intervention process. These factors affect the dynamics of the proposed next stages of diagnostic and intervention research. Further research will provide deeper insights into that.

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<sup>12</sup> Refer to section 'The Hypotheses postulated'

<sup>13</sup> Based on mutual consent in sharing organizational data

<sup>14</sup> Based on mutual consent in sharing organizational data

A framework needs to be evolved on how the relationship strategies can enhance /maintain the researcher-practitioner collaboration at each stage of the research process.

There is also a need to investigate operationalising of the modes of data collection, analysis and dissemination and findings to the practitioner to increase relevance of the research.

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