CONCEPTUALIZING 'LIFE CAREERISM' IN THE INDIAN CONTEXT

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Abstract
Organisations today are facing a critical challenge of attracting and retaining competent employees. The newly emerged concept of employer branding has connotations of these challenges. Starting from job analysis, design and description, the organisations focus on accumulation and judicious preservation of skilled workforce. However, established techniques of employer branding may turn cliché in the highly dynamic ambience of human resource management, if not the new dimensions of employer branding are meticulously explored. Of late, the concept of 'life careerism' has unveiled a prospective area of branding the organisations effectively. This notion has assured the employees, especially the new-generation workforce reportedly having propensity to job hopping and high locational mobility, with meaningful and value-added work efforts. Literature reveals that for the knowledge workers, 'life careerism' is an effective HR strategy. In this paper, the authors have made an attempt to conceptualize 'life careerism' in the Indian context. We have proposed a conceptual model exhibiting the linkage between 'life careerism' and organisational performance. The implications of the model for the managers have been dealt with. However, the proposed model needs to be empirically tested.

Key Words: Employer Brand Strategies, Life Careerism, Organisational Performance.

INTRODUCTION
"JOIN US" – this phrase is often emphatically heralded by the employers in the job advertisements. This tagline instigates a desire in the new job seekers' mind to work in a renowned organisation with high remunerations and rich career prospects. The employer brand proposition is, therefore, often delivered to the right target groups through the job advertisements and the concerned organisation enjoys competitive advantage on getting better talents from the labour market.

The fresh graduates or postgraduates are not always aware of the state of health and growth scenario of the companies they are applying to. They definitely have plenty of information nowadays about the organisations but often fail to analyze them. As a result, they often jeopardize their decision about their choice of employer. A study conducted of late, involving different economic and cultural zones of the world has yielded the result that the fresh job seekers can specify the industry they want to join; however, fail to specify the name of the companies (Wilden, Gudergan & Lings, 2010).

Ideally, this employer branding and the subsequent recruitment scenario should be a "win-win" one and the situations like alienation and burn-outs arising from gap of relevant information are totally uncalled for. Integration of family need with career requirements are significantly needed (Sturges & Guest, 2004). In line of this concept, here we would try to identify the relevance of such integrated life and career approach for new job seekers in Indian scenario.

LIFE CAREERISM: EMERGENCE OF THE NEW DIMENSION
The "employer attractiveness" is defined as - "the envisioned benefits that a potential employee sees in working for a specific organisation" (Berthon, Ewing, & Hah, 2005, p.156). Employer branding can be done loosely just in order to gain fragmented advantages with no long-term objectives per se. This, therefore, cannot provide sustainable benefits to the organisation. On contrary to this, organisations having true intention to care for their employees and keeping the promises they made in job advertisement, are definitely at the gainer side. The IT (information technology) giants like HCL Technologies, Mahindra Satyam, Mphasis, Infosys etc. are enjoying a leading position because of their perspective about employee care (Priya, 2011).

Work-life balance is a widely used concept nowadays and life and career are also closely associated. The notion of life careerism is therefore a highly contemporary concept. The new generation searches for purpose in every action as well as value, and the companies need to communicate to the job aspirants the way such values are observed within the organisation (Universum Global, 2013).

The concept of life careerism signifies a homogenous blend of personal and working life for the new entrants in the job market. The new job seekers do not even want a balance in both the above-mentioned spheres of life, but want the softer

professional attributes like job characteristics and people and culture to be properly maintained and nurtured by their prospective employers. They are keen to know the employers' stand on such value proposition rather than mere exaggerated branding features (Universum Global, 2013).

In the line of Maslow's hierarchy of needs and attainment of self-actualization state, the research has shown that adequate economic development induces the desire to obtain the softer values in workplace in the form of individual autonomy, gender equality and democracy (World Values Survey, 2013). However, the BRIC nations (Brazil, Russia, India, and China) and other developing nations still to prioritize the softer professional attributes as parameters of evaluation of their prospective employers (Universum Student Survey, 2006–2013).]

One highly pertinent area of further research is to identify the effective contribution of the 'life careerism' in employee performance leading to tangible organisational benefits. The major job attitudes like job satisfaction, job involvement, psychological empowerment, commitment to the organisation, as well as employee engagement are attributed to work environment and organisational culture, meaningfulness of job, keeping promises, perceived autonomy and these positive attitudes in turn positively influence the employee attraction, engagement and optimum performance (Robbins, Judge, & Vohra, 2013).

SCENARIO OF PRESENT INDIAN WORKFORCE
The present Indian workforce is unique if observed from various angles. With the advent of the neoliberal economy in India in early 1990s and frank introduction of foreign direct investments in various product and service sectors, the organisations felt the utter need of generation of innovative ideas to satisfy their existing workforce (Khandekar and Sharma 2006). At that juncture, the organisations had also perceived the need of well-planned talent management to ascertain effective employer branding as well as development and retention of competent employees (Bhatnagar 2007). One prevalent sector which witnessed an unprecedented growth at that era of liberalization of Indian economy was information technology and associated services enabled by information technology.This particular industry does have a special feature of being highly labor intensive (Rangaraju and Kennedy 2012) and keeping them aligned with the industrial need has been a big challange for the employers all over the country (Simhan 2006). The employers usually incline for the best graduates to hire for the IT and ITeS jobs and a large number of English-speaking and technology-savvy graduates are recruited by the frontline employers of India (Bhatnagar 2007).

Instead of a formidable growth in this sector where most of the youngsters are employed, still Indian IT industry is not recognized as a reliable employer. There has been a marked shift in the conventional work practices and the employees of this sector have high mobility. The industry itself is termed as "footloose industry" as the young employees, aging between 25 to 34 are not at all interested for a lifetime employment, however, focus on lifetime employability (Annapoorna and Bagalkoti 2011).

Life-careerism, as illustrated at length in the preceding sections of this article, presents the essence of understanding multiple dimensions of one's career, the deep involvement with the organisation and employer, as well as emotional attachment with the organisation (Super 1980). A global study has revealed that the young job seekers are highly prejudiced to their personal development while at work (PricewaterhouseCoopers 2011).The contemporary research suggests that the gap between work and life is gradually tappering down and an homogenous amulgamation is expected per se (Universum Global 2013). IT and ITeS being the largest private sector employer having 35-38% share in total employees (NASSCOM 2014) has maneuvered its human resource policis into different flexible work practices like home-based employment, flexible shifts, high incentive rates, on-the-job training, sponsorship of certification examination etc. (The Council of Economic Advisers 2014).In the following sections, we would try to find out if these practices can lead to a successful life-careerism in India in long run.

Nevertheless, the spread of young jobs seekers, whom we have been discussing about so far, is not restricted to the purview of IT and ITeS only. In Indian scenario, a high percentage of young job seekers between the age group of 25 to 34 shows higher affinity towards job security compared to the higher salary irrespective of the industrial domain. This percentage of 75% is lot higher compared to the world average of 39% (Randstad India 2013).

One more striking phenomenon which characterizes young Indian job aspirants is the mobility and India sits on top with mobility index value of 147, ahead of Malaysia and Brazil with indices of 138 and 134 respectively (Randstad India 2013). The aforementioned "footloose" community of young employees, therefore, throws the challnage of retention for the employers in India.

CHANGE OF PERCEPTION TOWARDS PRESENT HUMAN RESOURCE POLICIES – A GLOBAL OVERVIEW

Of late, the global scenario of human resource policy has not changed drastically; however, the perception about the HR policies across the international economy has witnessed a significant paradigm shift. The post-recession era after 2008 has seen matured evaluation of HR policies with a larger inclination towards social consciousness and in light of trust-building attributes (Universum Global 2013). The implicit trust and belief about employer agreement is much more worthwhile compared to a mere written agreement full of inert legal clauses. This ascertains a psychological contract between employee and employer (Rosseau 1995).

A recent research conducted on young job seekers states that most of the young employees leave their jobs at nascent stages due to the failure of employers to meet their expectations due to a weak psychological contract between the employee and the employer (Universum Student Survey 2013).

Recently, a significant change has taken place in employee perception. The sterotype branding efforts with slogans, catchlines, and attractive job postings do not suffice any more. The employees, especially the young aspirants, want to know what values will be created by the employer for them which will meaningfully contribute to their career as well as life development (Universum Global 2013).

LIFE CAREERISM IN THE INDIAN CONTEXT – A LITERATURE REVIEW

Of note, very little amount of research has taken place in the area of life careerism in India. However, substantial amount of studies has occurred in the fringe zone connected to life careerism. Organisational learning is one of the major areas which have direct positive effects on organisational performance (Khandekar and Sharma 2006). On a global perspective, learning efforts in the form of training and development have evidently shaped up the students' opinion about the employer (Universum Student Survey, 2006–2013). The need for comprehensive training with stipulated national standards for the new job entrants has been advocated for prospective Indian workforce, which carries the essence of employee development requirements to ascertain life careerism (Chadha 2007).

The common business motivators like need for achievement, locus of control, self-esteem, and innovation were studied around attitude components like cognition, affect, and behavior involving young female trainees of Air Force Academy, Dundigul, India, and achievement motivation was found to have the highest weightage over other aforementioned parameters (Kundu and Rani 2007).

An attitude and work-perception survey of different generations of Indian workforce is noteworthy. The Gen-X employees have birth years between 1961 and 1970, E-Gens were born between 1971 and 1980, and Gen-Y alias Millennials' birth years are between 1981 and 1990. A very recent research shows that E-Gens have a desire for "life'' other than their works; however, the Gen-Y professionals have a preference to flexibility in their career and disposable jobs. Acceptance of diversity in workplace and multicultural orientation are the innate features of this techno-savvy professional community (Rajesh and Ekambaram 2014). The same research shows this group to be highly mobile, footloose, globally aligned, and inclined to flexible job pattern rather than a conventional full-time work culture.

CONCEPTUAL MODEL OF LIFE CAREERISM

The managerial implications of life careerism are obviously directed towards the final destination – the organisational performance. The salient features of the above-mentioned Gen-Y professionals ostensibly a bit erratic and do not comply with the conventional Indian HR policies. Life careerism can be incorporated as the best practice by Indian firms to ensure fruitful recruitment campaign and retention of the so called "footloose" employees.

In this section, we would try to align the existing HR policies in India with the ideal life careerism practices, and resultantly a conceptual model will be framed directed towards remarkable organisational performance in line of the above mentioned alignment.

Alignment of Learning and Development Policies with Life Careerism

In India, organisational learning will play the significant role in organisational growth and success in near future (Khandekar and Sharma 2006). The young job aspirants are much more focused nowadays towards personal development opportunities in the organisation they wish to join. This learning and personal development practices will allow the new employees to grow substantially while at work (Universum Student Survey 2013). Therefore it can be inferred from this linkage that the Indian organisations need to fortify their learning and development efforts to attract and retain the competent workforce.

Alignment of Social Responsibility Policies with Life Careerism
Previous to the enactment of Companies Act, 2013 in India, social responsibilities used to be defined as benevolent gesture of corporate sector. However, the scenario has changed after the enactment where firms having the annual turnover of 1000 crore and more or having net worth of 500 crore or more are forced to expend minimum 2% of their net profit. On the other hand, the young prospective and existing workforce expect the organisations to perform social responsibilities, but not to the restricted scale as laid down by the law (Havas Worldwide, 2011). This attitude carrying the essence of life careerism will seemingly drive the Indian corporates to spend beyond the stipulated minimum percentage of profit for societal benefits.

Alignment of Employer Branding Policies with Life Careerism
Employer branding has been proven to be instrumental in India as it has advantages like expressing and highlighting organisational culture to the outsiders, promoting effective recruitment drives, as well as ensuring retention of absorbed manpower (Vijayakumar, Parvin, & Dhilip, 2011). This branding has got different cultural dimensions in Indian context per se in view of her diverse demographic and regional characteristics (Srivastava & Bhatnagar, 2008). The giant corporate enterprises in Indian market, especially IT and ITeS firms like Infosys, Wipro, and Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) do possess effective employer brands which were not built consciously, however, their organisational culture has promoted the brand. On the other hand, organisations like RMSI and Google follow conscious brand building methods (Vijayakumar, Parvin, & Dhilip, 2011). India has also witnessed the heterogeneity of employer branding strategies varying according to organisational diversity (Srivastava & Bhatnagar, 2008).

As illustrated in the previous sections, young job seekers having an inclination to life careerism prefer their prospective employers to be lucid about the corporate ethics, values, as well as societal responsibilities (Universum Global, 2012 and 2013).

In Indian scenario, it is highly recommended that corporate, irrespective of their size and extent of operations, whether obligated by law of not, should remain clear about their stand on ethical practices, soft attributes like jobs characteristics and cultural aspects, as well as their benevolent roles towards society. Compared to a highly exaggerated and conscious branding effort, development of organisational culture conducive of life careerism may attract and retain the talents in India in better ways.

Alignment of Job Characteristics with Life Careerism
The Job Characteristics Model (JCM) by J. Richard Hackman and Greg Oldham includes five job dimensions which are – skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback (Robbins, Judge, & Vohra, 2013). A study done in Indian context used modified version of job characteristics model with seven dimensions including – role ambiguity, role conflict, role overload, role significance, job autonomy, monetary gain, and career scope.

Moderate-to low statistical correlation is observed for these job characteristics when aligned with dimensions like organisational commitment, job satisfaction, and work motivation (Suman & Srivastava, 2009).
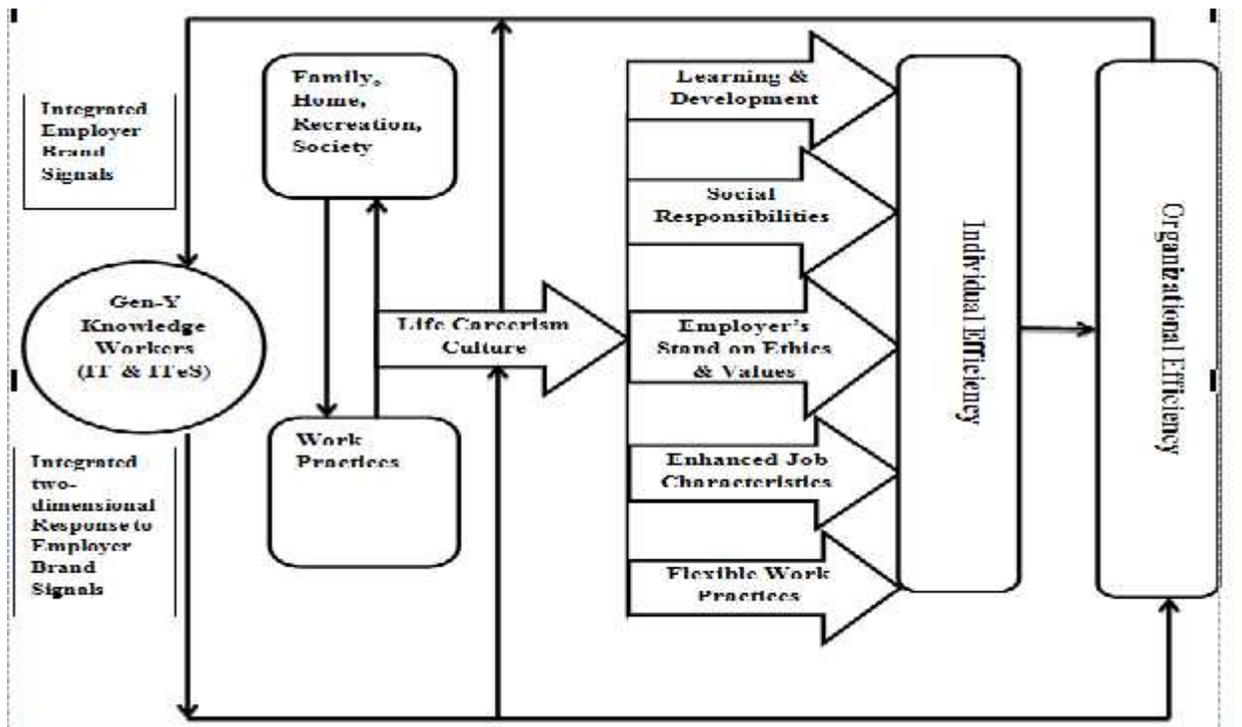
The job characteristics are also known as "soft attributes" and recently these attributes received significant attention from student community to ascertain their employer of choice (Universum Student Survey 2013)
It is therefore would be worthwhile for the organisations in India to enrich the dimensions of the jobs characteristics and to ensure talent attraction and retention.

Alignment of Work Practices with Life Careerism
If we take the IT and ITeS sectors which house maximum amount of Gen-Y professionals, it is clear that this industry in spite of being highly remunerative, has failed to earn status of being reliable. High attrition rate due to excessive stress and lack of integrity in familial and social life is prevalent (Annapoorna & Bagalkoti, 2011). This is absolutely incompatible with the concept of life careerism where family and belongingness are not only balanced, but synchronized with work (Universum Student Survey, 2013).

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Conceptual Model: Life Careerism for Organisational Performance (LCOP) Model

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS OF LCOP MODEL

The LCOP model illustrated above encompasses the aligned features of human resource policies of Indian organisations with the emerging concept of "life-careerism". These alignments have been explained at length in the preceeding section as perceived from a thorough review of extant literature.

In this model, the work practices for Gen-Y knowledge workers working in IT and ITeS domains overlap and blend with vital facets of one's personal life and vice versa. This homogenous and ideal blending carries the essence of the notion – "life careerism". Different dimensions of life careerism can be aligned with Indian HR policies to bring up individual worker's performance. In an organisational setting, individual work efforts, if nurtured without discrimination, would ideally multiply to collective manifestation of commendable organisational performance.

This model contains two feedback loops – the upper one signifies an integrated employer brand signal for Gen-Y job aspirants, generated from good organisational performance as well as tangible "life-careerism" culture within the organisation. The reverse loop also signifies the integrated and appreciative response to the above-mentioned brand signal with dual dimensions directed towards organisational performance and life careerism culture. The employer branding policies of the organisations can be guided by this integrated brand signal and response phenomenon by and large.

CONCLUSION

In face of highly dynamic nature of modern HR management research, the basic theory of Maslow still stands relevant with lower four layers of his need hierarchy pyramid to be met first. The Gen-Y IT professionals are predominantly from the affluent families, thus they can opt to reach the apical level of Maslow's hierarchy – the self-actualization need (Universum Global, 2013). Whether life careerism is truly a dimension of self-actualization need or is a mere pretension of that, can only be stated after a thorough empirical research. Our model is a hypothetical one and has attempted to involve as many as components of life careerism in it. The conceptual linkage has been established on the basis of existing research works done so far in India and abroad; however, it leaves the scope widely open for the future empirical explorations to test and predict such linkage with assertion.

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