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## ***What drives the adoption of SHRM in Indian Companies?***

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## **Abstract**

Managerial innovation and its critical importance in today's global business is well documented. The crucial role of managerial innovation in strategic human resource management is becoming increasingly prevalent in both business and academic literature. However, practically no such study has been undertaken in an emerging country scenario as India. This study identifies the drivers of adoption of innovative strategic human resource practices (SHRM) in Indian organizations. This study is of critical importance against the backdrop of the liberalization of the Indian economy which started in 1991. The structural adjustments due to liberalization have created a hyper-competitive and turbulent environment. Drawing from both innovation and SHRM literature this research report discusses five main propositions of adoption of innovative SHRM practices in Indian organizations. The generalisability, applicability, acceptability, and the diffusion of practices are discussed.

Key words: SHRM, Innovation, India

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## **What drives the adoption of SHRM in Indian Companies?**

### **Introduction**

Managerial innovation and its critical importance in today's contemporary highly dynamic and complex environment are well documented. The topic of innovation has come into existence as an outcome of progressive developments in management science and practice. Innovation is defined as adoption of an internally generated or purchased device, system, policy, program, process, product, or service that is new to the adopting organization (Damanpour and Evan, 1984). Kimberly (1981) defines managerial innovation as any program, product or technique which represents a significant departure from the state of the art of management at the time it first appears and which affects the nature, location, quality, or quantity of information that is available in the decision-making process while Kogut and Zander (1999) define managerial innovation as a recombination of current capabilities that leads to new knowledge creation. For this article managerial innovation is defined as:

*"Any intentional introduction of program, policy, practice or system designed to influence or adapt employee attitudes and behaviors that is perceived to be new and creates current capabilities and competencies"*

This definition distinguishes managerial innovation from the organizational change process i.e. not all changes involve innovation, since whatever an organization adopts is not perceived to be new. This definition reflects the wide scope of innovative practices, from functional activities to wide ranging strategic initiatives aimed at building the capabilities and competencies that organizations need in hyper-competitive environment. This thesis focuses on innovative human resource strategies in Indian organizations.

Internationalization, liberalization, growing competition and changing environments make managerial innovations inevitable prerequisites for growth, success and survival for an organization. Adoption of managerial innovation occurs in highly complex social, political and economical environments (Kimberly, 1981). Analysis of managerial innovation in organizations, therefore, requires a better understanding of the environment in which individuals within an organization function.

Post-1991 India started its phased economic restructuring to provide domestic organizations the time and competencies to face greater competition. This was the initial phase of liberalization. The economic restructuring was triggered by a serious balance of payments crisis when foreign exchange reserves touched their all time low to a mere billion dollars. IMF and the World Bank agreed to help India face the crisis with structural adjustment loans. The components of liberalization was a process of macro-economic stabilization (devaluation of the rupee, reducing fiscal deficit, reducing government expenditure, reduction of some subsidies, controlling inflation), phased deregulation and elimination of license regime to bring in competition, opening of economy to foreign and private investment, rationalization of tax structure, healthier functioning of capital markets, increase functioning autonomy of public sector units and implementation of a safety net for those hurt by structural adjustments. Liberalization creates intensive competition through easier entry and greater foreign participation. It opens many opportunities for growth through the removal of artificial barriers on pricing and output decisions, investments, mergers and acquisitions, JVs, technology imports, import of foreign capital etc. It enables corporations to expand diversify, integrate, and globalize more freely. Economic restructuring has profound effect for effective management of organizations especially in the face of superior competition.

The extensiveness of the typology of managerial innovation has mainly been confined to the western nations and has not penetrated many developing countries and their organizations. It

is no surprise then that, even lesser research has been conducted in the field of SHRM and its innovative practices in India. There has been very little empirical research to comprehend how firms, both Indian and foreign owned adopt managerial innovation and inculcate strategic Human Resource practices to make organizations more competitive. Even though there has been accumulating evidence of the economic impact of strategic HRM (e.g., Harel & Tzafrir, 1999; Huselid, 1995), cross cultural equivalence has to be ensured in order to meaningfully apply the implications for management practices and the concepts of managerial innovation.

This article is an attempt to understand managerial innovation in an emerging country context like that of India. The study identifies and then analyzes what drives managerial innovation, in an emerging country context. The research questions that the article focuses on are: What are the drivers of managerial innovation in an emerging country scenario? What are the innovative strategic Human Resource management (SHRM) practices that are being adopted by Indian organizations in the face of hyper-competition? How universal are those policies and practices i.e. how relevant are they to most sectors and industries in the world wherever there is a competitive market economy or a movement towards it. These questions motivate this research report and it tries to develop propositions of adoption of strategic SHRM practices in Indian organizations.

### **Adoption of Managerial Innovation**

Insights offered by organizational theories reveal that managerial innovation is adopted by organizations mainly to improve organizational performance. Walston et al (2001) argue that managerial innovation promise to enhance efficiency and is particularly attractive to organizations facing intense competition and/or performance deficiencies and can be thought of as either driven by economic efficiency or by non-economic factors. Adoption and diffusion occur as they encompass the generation, development, and implementation of new ideas or behaviors (Damanpour, 1991) and are influenced by the characteristics of individual

people, by the characteristics of the organization itself, and by characteristics of the context in which it operates and out of which it emerged (Kimberly, 1981; Kimberly and Evanisko, 1981).

In terms of the context influencing innovation Orru, Biggart and Hamilton (1991) reported that each society creates a context of fiscal, political, and social institutions that limit and direct the development of "fit organizational forms". They asserted that in East Asia, private businesses operate according to substantively distinct institutional models that contribute to differentially shaping organizational behavior and structure. This conjecture was supported by empirical findings that business organizations in South Korea, Taiwan and Japan "operate according to different institutional principles and exhibit dissimilar organizational and inter-organizational structures that manifest those principles". The authors concluded that company structures and interfirm networks are "strikingly uniform or isomorphic within each economy but different from each of the others. The institutional principles that shape organizational forms in these three countries do not hamper organizational efficiency, but rather provide a basis for market order and for competitive relations (Orru, Biggart and Hamilton, 1991: 363).

Management researchers like DiMaggio and Powell, (1983, 1991), Scott (1995) have emphasized that organizations tend to adopt an innovation due to institutional factors such as normative and regulatory pressures, highlighting the effects of pressures for conformity against economic efficiency. Barringer and Milkovich (1998) enriched the institutional model by including comprehensive organizational theories such as resource dependence (Peffer & Salancik, 1978; Oliver, 1991), agency theory (Jensen & Meckling, 1976; Eisenhardt, 1989) and transactional cost models (Williamson, 1981). The key implication of their work derives a theory explaining why and how managerial innovation, and its adoption thereafter, is legitimized by managers. In one of his review of institutional theory, Kimberly (1995) tends

to differ in this context and suggests that managerial innovations were adopted by organizations and now are being adopted by individual people.

The capacity of individual people to adopt managerial innovation is determined by human resource management practices (Gooderham et al, 1999; Wolfe, 1995; Kossek, 1987). Strategic HRM like other organizational functions has been called upon to contribute to new organizational demands and requirements vis-a-vis organizational performance. Researchers (Ulrich, 1999) have increasingly studied how HRM can be used to plan the activities strategically and how to effectively manage HRM. Research has tended to suggest that not only do innovative SHRM practices result in tangible organizational results (Huselid, 1995; Inchinowski, Kochan, Levine & Olson, 1996) but assist organizations in developing innovative solutions as the need arises (Schuler & Jackson, 1987). A wide array of SHRM policies can be construed as an innovation. Wolfe (1995) interviewed and surveyed a sample of 60 US HR professionals, over 40 different innovations were named. Participants were asked to name an HR innovation and then to identify an innovation they had actually implemented or helped implement. Examples given include human resource information systems; 360 degree appraisals; internet recruiting; on-line access to employee information; strategic HRM; telecommuting; Six Sigma; People Soft; realistic job previews; outsourcing; and competency based compensation.

Gooderham et al (1999) reported in their study of adoption of innovation in six European countries, that different types of human resource management practices may be determined to a considerable extent by the imperative of maintaining external legitimacy through adherence to institutional structures, rules, and norms at the national level-and may vary as a result of dissimilar national contexts. Geary and Roche (2001) in their study of Irish SHRM practices argued that foreign owned firms are distinctive in their practices in comparison with indigenous firms. The compliance with local laws and regulations lead to differentiated and

innovative practices. In other instances, foreign firms may seek to resemble local firms to compete more effectively in the local market to “fit in” by imitating local practices.

Adoption of managerial innovation is affected by the characteristics of the context or the environment in which individuals and organisations operate. The task environment in which the carriers of innovation, namely the employees, function as a network directly influences an organization’s choice of strategic HRM policies, thus affecting the concept of innovation. Munene's (1995) study of managerial innovations in Africa revealed that there are external and internal characteristics in an organization which extend or limit its ability to first adopt and then diffuse managerial innovation. The intensification of poverty in such developing countries, as Nigeria and Uganda, is both a cause and an effect of organization misbehavior, and the environment in which their employees should exhibit their capacity to innovate, poses severe challenges due to the economic conditions. Poverty, debt, and governmental regulations dictate the speed of implementation, and show a negative relationship with an innovative process adoption by the management.

On the other hand, presence of factors within the company such as accountability, aspirations of educated elite as individuals in the organization tend to accentuate the implementation process. Awamleh (1994) in a similar study in Jordan reported that there is negative relationship between managerial innovation and age, organizational level, and length of service while a positive relationship exists between managerial innovation and education. His study reported that the most significant obstacles to innovation are those related to organizational climate rather than those to societal environment or managers themselves. Hence, these findings support the notion that in different countries, dissimilar organizational forms and practices may prove equally efficient, due to varying cognitive criteria, legislation and normative structures.



Both innovation and strategic SHRM literature individually have identified the linkage of adoption process and institutional environment, however, detailed discussion regarding the linkage of SHRM adoption practices and the peculiar institutional variables has not been addressed adequately for emerging economies. Gooderham et al (1999) in their findings highlight the need to incorporate country-specific, institutional factors in studies of patterns of organizational practices in general and HRM practices in particular. Their analysis indicates that the national institutional embeddedness of firms plays a far more important role in shaping HRM practices than their industrial embeddedness. In this context, we believe that a study of the adoption of SHRM by Indian companies will add to the nascent body of knowledge about managerial innovation in emerging economies.

### **Strategic Human Resource Management Adoption in Indian Organizations**

India, after decades of protectionism, has experienced a revolutionary change. The liberalization of the foreign investment climate in India during the 1990s has facilitated the integration of Indian economy with the global economy (Venkata Ratnam, 1998). India, from 1991, shifted from a regulated environment to a "free market economy". This liberalization has resulted in sudden and increased levels of competition for Indian organizations from multinational organizations, globalization and internationalization of domestic businesses, unbridled imports, concerns for total quality management, incentives to export, demographic changes in the employee profile, retraining and redeployment of workforce, focus on performance appraisal and performance based incentive systems and rightsizing (Budhwar and Sparrow, 1997; Som, 2002). A recently concluded study (Som, 2002) of 54 Indian corporates reveals that out of eight items of rated change in the business environment over the past five years, the four largest perceived changes were: greater turbulence in the product market environment characterized by many unexpected changes, more intense competition, greater buoyancy and growth potential, and greater requirements for technological

sophistication. The response to liberalization has created opportunities for technology upgrading and sophistication, resource mobilization from new sources, highly competitive input/output market, high growth and buoyant environment and HRM issues associated with strategic initiatives of diversification, mergers and acquisitions, restructuring, joint ventures, strategic alliances and for overall internationalization of the economy (Som, 2002). Thus, with liberalization there is an increasing pressure on organizations in India to change from indigenous, costly, sub-optimal levels of technology to performance based, competitive and higher technology provisions.

This change from a regulated environment to a free market environment has direct implications for SHRM practices in India (Krishna and Monappa, 1994, Rao, 1999) and HRM specialists and the HRM departments are under severe pressure to bring about large-scale professionalized changes in their organizations in order to cope with the challenges brought about by economic liberalization (Rao et al., 2001; Som, 2002). Indian organizations have to develop the work-force capable of taking up the challenges thrown by the new economic environment. In this scenario, to manage organizations efficiently and to compete globally, adoption of SHRM practices has become more important than ever.

To tackle such a challenging situation, Indian academics and practitioners have both advocated the adoption of the concept of human resource development (HRD). The adoption of professionalized HRD practices in India is a recent phenomenon, but has gained momentum in the past ten years (Rao et al., 1999, 2001; Krishna and Monappa, 1994). This HRD policy places special importance on targeting of recruitment of professional personnel, performance based management systems, performance appraisal, evaluation of training, retraining and redeployment, emphasis on communication, organizational development and the role of HR personnel and the HR Department (Som, 2002).

The last twenty years have seen radical changes take place in the human resource management (née) personnel function in India (Rao, 1999, Rao et al., 2001). In a recent survey of the trends and emerging practices in SHRM, Belout, Dolan and Saba (2001) point to the importance of the adoption of SHRM practices. They point out that organizations are asking their HRM departments for innovative approaches and solutions to improve productivity and the quality of work life, while complying with the law in an environment of high uncertainty, energy conservation, and intense international competition. Rao et al (2001) in their in-depth HRD audit study of Indian organizations reports that HRD function in India is not well structured, is inadequately differentiated, and poorly staffed. In the light of the above mentioned scenario in Indian organizations the need for adoption of managerial innovation in general and innovative SHRM practices in particular in Indian organizations is a necessity.

### **Discussion and Hypotheses**

The differences in the adoption of SHRM innovation can be attributed to external environmental conditions that often distinguish organizations from one industry to another (Kossek, 1987). In the post-liberalization India, these conditions are: national environment, organizational restructuring, legitimizing, ownership structure and culture and role of HRM department.

### **National Environment for Innovative SHRM Adoption**

- **Extent of Unionization and Sector**

“National Environment” refers to the influence possessed by aspects such as national institutional frameworks, national culture and incentive structures for innovation. Recent research has tended to suggest that national factors can have an impact on the type of SHRM practices adopted (Gooderham et al., 1999). In addition to SHRMs’ obvious vulnerability to legislative changes, the function is also susceptible to changes in the socio-political landscape.

Indian organizations in the face of hyper-competition have to cope with the changes of developing a diverse work-force with competitive skillsets. The development of competitive skill-set is challenging in the face of hyper-competition. This is all the more challenging because Indian work-force has a very diverse socio-economic background and the antagonistic nature of trade unions makes it very difficult to make them work as a team (Venkat Raman, 1995; Budhwar and Sparrow, 1997). Kossek (1987) in his literature survey postulated that external environmental forces such as unions, technological change and labor market conditions distinguish HRM innovation across industries. In general the literature examining the impact of trade union activity would suggest a positive effect on the adoption of innovative SHRM practices (Ng & Maki, 1994). In fact, much of the research tends to contradict the popular perception that trade unions hinder or resist the implementation of innovative practice (e.g. Wagar, 1997). Rather unionised workplaces tend to demonstrate a greater degree of SHRM practice sophistication and are more likely to possess a more formalised model of HRM (Jackson et al., 1989; Ng & Maki, 1994).

Ramaswamy and Schiphorst (2000) suggests that the presence of an active labour union in companies restricts the HR managers to innovate their processes. The high degree of resistance that comes through the legitimate labour institutions in India, act as a hindrance for the managers to innovate and new processes such as SHRM.

Even though managers might innovate such processes, however, their adoption remains a question mark before implementation as it depends upon the collective bargaining of labor unions. Each process, which reflects changes in the workforce management, needs an approval by the union leaders and only then the decision reaches the implementation stage. It has been noticed that long negotiation processes often tend to weaken the innovative process because of the time lag between the innovative measure being conceived, and approved by the management in conjunction with the union leaders before it is actually implemented. The

rates of diffusion of such processes are also affected by approval or non-approval of the new strategies of HR management by unions. Hence in the Indian context we propose:

*Proposition 1A: The higher the extent of unionization in an organization in post-liberalized India, the lower is the adoption of innovative SHRM practices.*

The differences between industry sectors are also often cited as possible determinants of innovation adoption (Kimberly et al., 1987). Sector or industry characteristics influence adoption decisions by providing the context within which “meanings are construed, effectiveness is defined, and behaviours are evaluated” (Jackson et al., 1995: 252). The desire of organizations to be seen as “good corporate citizens”, socially responsive, or as “employers of choice” is also a powerful driver of innovation adoption (Kossek, 1989; 1987; Tannenbaum et al., 1994). In the Indian context, labor associations are more prominent in the manufacturing sector than in the services sector. Hence in the Indian context we propose:

*Proposition 1B: The extent of adoption of innovative SHRM practices is lesser in the manufacturing sector than in the service sector.*

- **Technological Sophistication**

Like unionization, technology affects SHRM innovation in a number of ways (Kossek, 1987). The impact of rapid structural changes during the liberalizing process in India saw evolution and development of technological sophistication. Som (2002) in his study of 54 Indian organizations reported that there was a sharp rising resort to establish a comprehensive, computer-based information system, technical vendor development and increasing use of sophisticated technology for business. Technical innovations, microprocessors, have altered the way white collar work, in particular, is organized. Tasks have been subdivided, job contents enlarged and access to information has increased. Increased access enables employees to be privy to information that was once only a managerial prerogative, which has ramifications for power relations and hence task environments that encourage additional

SHRM innovations (Kossek, 1987). The increased technological sophistication in the job redefines work environments where employees have more time and information for experimentation and innovation. Regular personnel functions such as administration, paper work, salary processing needs less time due to sophisticated use of technology. Hence in the Indian context we propose:

*Proposition 1C: The higher the extent of technological sophistication in Indian organizations the higher the chance of adoption of innovative SHRM practices*

### **Organizational Restructuring and Ownership Structure as a driver of Innovative SHRM adoption**

In the post liberalization scenario, organizational structures seem to be changing to cope with greater competition and to avail of growth opportunities afforded by liberalization and globalization (Som, 2002). Corporate restructuring, many involving the services of international management consultants has become far more frequent (Khandwalla, 2002). The major reason for restructuring appears to be the unsatisfactory corporate structure and business processes. Intensive scanning of the national and the international environment for growth opportunities was on the rise, and so was comprehensive strategy-making that was integrated with a human resource management strategy (Som, 2002). Economic and market pressures influenced the adoption of strategic HRM during the organizational restructuring process. Large, diversified family owned business houses, such as the Duncan Goenka Group, were regrouping their varied product lines spread over diverse companies into synergistic product clusters for sharper focus; some, such as Godrej, were graduating product divisions into “strategic business units” with more freedom to make financial and investment decisions and for entering into alliances; some, such as Modi Xerox, were converting functional departments into profit centers via the transfer pricing mechanism for greater bottom line consciousness in management; a few, such as Tata Consultancy Services and Wipro Infotech,

in the business of executing projects, were resorting to the matrix structure in which staff members were grouped both by areas of core competencies and by principal markets or industries served (Khandwalla, 2002). Only large organizations with adequate financial power could undertake restructuring programs offered by the foreign consultants. The preferences seemed to be to try and increase organizational differentiation through decentralization (Som, 2002), and through setting up self-contained, autonomous units with bottom line responsibility, and try and increase integration through a system of apex coordination, use of coordinating committees and cross functional teams, internal communications participative decision making, shared vision, and institutionalisation of core values (Som, 2002). Downsizing through voluntary retirement schemes, and SHRM development also seemed to be on the rise (Som, 2002). The SHRM systems of the corporates were characterized by rising emphasis on professionalism, skills development, incentives, accountability, flexibility and openness, and rightsizing (Som, 2002). Hence we propose that:

*Proposition 2A: The greater the size of the organization, the greater is the likelihood of adoption of innovative SHRM practices*

*Proposition 2B: The greater the financial resources of the organization, the greater is the likelihood of adoption of innovative SHRM practices*

Sparrow and Budhwar (1997) in their study of 137 fully-owned Indian organizations with more than 200 employees, located in north, central and western states within six manufacturing sectors of food processing, plastics, steel, textiles, pharmaceuticals and footwear suggest that they are still not geared to adopt innovative SHRM practices. Their findings state that 48% of the Indian HRM professionals see little or no value in adopting 360 degree performance appraisal systems, 48% see no role of using new technology to promote corporate-wide communication and 45% see no role for providing employees with more access to information systems. National Management Forum (1995) of All India Management

Association conducted a survey to study the response of Indian organizations to the new scenario vis-à-vis corporate restructuring. The study encompassed thirty-two public sector organizations and sixty private sector organizations. It was observed that in order to cope with uncertain and competitive environment thrown up by liberalization, 65% of the public sector organizations were undergoing restructuring and another 25% were planning to restructure compared to 75% and 10% in the private sector respectively. Public sector organizations assigned abolition of license regime, end of monopoly, reduction of import duties and the need of upgradation and technological sophistication as causes to restructure. The reasons for restructuring cited by the private sector organizations ranged from new economic policies, opportunities in both local and international markets, shrinking of domestic markets for existing products and scarce resources. Private sector organizations, mostly family owned, wanted to concentrate on core competencies and focus on capacity enhancement while the main aim for public sector was to gear themselves to face competition with the deregulation of their respective industries. Participants also cited improving customer focus, reducing hierarchies in organizations to have a “flat” structure for faster response in decision-making, communications, new technology and facing competition, as reasons for restructuring. The reasons for restructuring are different for public and private sector. For public sector organizations, in India, the chances of adoption of innovative SHRM practices will be difficult and time consuming and it can be hypothesized that they will be late in their adoption process. The reason for this can be attributed to the high degree of bureaucracy, red tapism, high power distance between management and employees, level of empowerment (Ramaswamy & Schiphorst, 2000) and role of unions (Ng & Maki, 1994). In case of private sector organizations, mainly family owned organizations, the process of adoption of innovative SHRM practices will also be slow and tedious, as the adoption process will depend on the motivation, style of leadership and management of family business head, financial



resources and cost of adoption and implementation of these innovative SHRM practices and bandwagon pressures, mimetic and fads and fashions that may originate from institutional forces (Abrahamson & Rosenkopf, 1993; Abrahamson, 1991, Walston et al, 2001). Hence:

*Proposition 2C: Organizations that adopt restructuring earlier in the adoption cycle vis-a-vis organizations with foreign participation will have more extensive implementations than public and family owned organizations that adopt later in the cycle*

The reasons for restructuring of Indian corporates as borne by the two studies (National Management Forum, 1995; Sparrow and Budhwar, 1997) seems to be to adopt innovative, professional management practices and policies, which have been studied as “best practices” in two recent studies (Som, 2002; Khandwalla, 2002). Also restructuring of Indian companies seems to be the cause of new partnership with foreign organizations which are looking for growth by way of new product, new market development, M&A, JV and strategic alliances. Such foreign investors generally recruit a consulting firm in their home country which assess potential partners in India. Such firms offer additional services for a smooth integration of the two partners and generally conduct training to transfer innovative practices in general and SHRM in particular to the partner company in India. Through such transfer of managerial innovation techniques, adoption of processes occurs. Indian organizations which have foreign partnerships should exhibit a greater extent of managerial innovation techniques and also offer conducive environments for an early adoption and a relatively faster speed of diffusion of innovative practices in Indian organizations.

Thus in the post liberalization scenario in India we propose:

*Proposition 2D: The greater the need to professionalize and be competitive, the greater the need for restructuring of public sector, private sector and foreign*

*partnership organizations, the greater the chances of adoption of innovative SHRM practices*

*Proposition 2E: Public sector organizations will have a higher likelihood of being late and slow adopters of innovative SHRM practices while private sector organizations will have a higher likelihood of faster adoption of innovative SHRM practices*

*Proposition 2F: Family owned organizations will have a higher likelihood of being late and slow adopters of innovative SHRM practices while organizations with foreign participation will have a higher likelihood of faster adoption of innovative SHRM practices*

### **Legitimizing drivers of Innovative SHRM adoption**

- **Use of International Consultants by Indian Organizations**

According to institutional theorists, executives tend to follow the social norms and try to mimic (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983) each other to secure their firm's legitimacy. The rapid spread of SHRM innovations, particularly among Fortune 500 companies, can partially be explained as a phenomenon where organizations adopt new practices in order to appear more legitimate in their environments. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) view institutional isomorphism as "a constraining process that forces one unit in a population to resemble other units that face the same set of environmental conditions".

In the post liberalization scenario, in India, organizations are trying to be competitive by involving the services of international management consultants (Som, 2002). A study by Mukherjea et al., (1999) indicated that most of the largest 200 companies in India had been restructured or were being restructured by the same group of international consultants. The international consultants propound that SHRM strategies i.e. job rotation, training, redeployment, performance appraisal, compensation and reward mechanisms, succession planning as key indicators for improvement. The services of a handful of international

consultants operating in India depicts a higher level of adoption of innovative SHRM practices. The reasons are mainly because of the perception that foreign consultants offer better services and global benchmarks, therefore, the management approach and reaction to such consultants changes automatically. The consultants recommend cost optimization, recruitment of specialists, retraining and redeployment, performance based management systems and rightsizing to name a few from the bundle of SHRM recommendations, which, organizations try to implement to improve management skills. Thus in the Indian post-liberalization scenario, we propose that:

*Proposition 3A: The greater the extent of use of international management consultants in an Indian organization, the greater the chances of adoption of innovative SHRM practices*

### **Organizational culture for Innovative SHRM adoption**

Liberalized India, seems to be inducing significant cultural and management systems related changes in the corporate sector. The new rhetoric of corporate India seems to be “change is the only constant,” “only quality ensures survival,” “people, not products, are paramount,” and “information is everything”. The main challenges before the chief executives are seen to be to create flexible systems, to develop a culture of excellence, to facilitate teamwork and empower employees, and to speed up and decentralize data flows (Mukherjea et al, 1999). There may still be a gap between rhetoric and reality. But the change in corporate culture and management seems to be increasingly compatible with a competitive market environment (Khandwalla, 2002). A common feature of strong culture organizations like TATA Group, Infosys and BPCL, Clariant (Som, 2002a) and others in India, is the influential role of top management in HRM issues and the organizational impact that the leaders in these organizations have on the adoption process of innovative SHRM practices. Peters and Waterman (1982) in their *Search for Excellence* demonstrate how philosophies of leaders,

especially the founders, regarding the way employees should be treated has become institutionalized while they are alive and also after their departure. In the most direct sense organization leaders can determine the role of the HR function of the organization (Kane & Palmer, 1994). Organizational leadership can also have a significant impact in the development of “innovation friendly” cultures, providing a clear vision and sense of direction (Peters and Waterman, 1982) and a focus for innovative activity (Arad et al., 1997). The majority of literature suggests that organizational cultures demonstrating high levels of internal communication, promoting interactive behaviours and an ability to deal with change will encourage innovative behaviour (Hauser, 1998). Recent research has also shown that the presence of existing effective or complementary SHRM practices tends to increase the adoption rate of additional “high performance” HR practices (Pil & McDuffie, 1996, Huselid, 1995; Huselid et al., 1997). It is argued that high performance HRM practices tend to foster innovation through the development of innovation values, encourage information sharing, goal setting and appropriate training and development (Arad et al., 1997). It has also been seen that major innovations in HRM occur when senior line managers take the lead (Kossek, 1987) and adoption of these innovative SHRM practices depends on the attitude of top management and their relationship with the HR Department.

Thus, under the post liberalization era in India, we propose:

*Proposition 4A: The stronger is the organizational leadership, the stronger is the likelihood of organizational culture of innovation within the organization, the more the likelihood of adoption of “high performance” innovative SHRM practices*

### **Role of HRM department as a driver of Innovative SHRM adoption**

Kimberly (1981) tries to understand what makes managerial adoption in an organization more receptive than the other, and also how this innovation spreads in the population, i.e. diffusion of innovation. Kossek (1987, 1989) argues that major HRM innovations occur when senior

management takes the lead and adoption of innovative SHRM practices is dependent on the nature of relationship of the HR Department with the CEO and the line managers. Legge (1978) commenting on the actions of the personnel practitioner in the innovation process suggests that adoption of an innovation by an organization depends largely on HR practitioners credibility with information and resource providers. HR Department and HR managers in these innovative organizations play a strategic role (Ulrich, 1997) linking the HR strategy with the business strategy of the organization. The characteristics of the role of HR managers and the HR Department in these organizations cannot be ignored in the process. The knowledge possessed by an HR practitioner depends on the extent to which they undertake activities associated with professionalism. Activities undertaken by members of a profession should include amongst others, maintenance and development of an individual knowledge base, ensuring continued competence levels and membership of a professional institution (Hatcher & Aragon, 2000). The possession of a current knowledge base and the ability to research new developments via methods such as benchmarking and networking are widely acknowledged as key determinants in the adoption of innovation (Sanchez et al., 1999). The same is true for the HR Department. Considering that knowledge is the prime source of innovation or the motivation for innovation, one can argue that the companies that have cognitive knowledge of employees accumulated through academics acts as a stimulus for innovation.

Awamleh (1994) in his study with civil services of Jordan tested the relationship between education and managerial innovation. The results from the regression revealed that there is an evidence of a positive relationship between innovation and education of the staff and the management. However, the degree of this interdependence is not clear, as it depends on the cultural and vocational conditioning of the staff as well. Som (2002) reported in his study of 54 organizations in India that the role of the HR Department is positively correlated with

organizational performance and the HR Department plays a significant role in the adoption of “best practices” within the organization.

However, it is worth mentioning that such employees if not taken care of, will utilize the industry cluster through networking in order to gain access to other companies where their innovative ideas would be adopted quickly for better rewards. It becomes imperative for original companies to recognize such employees and retain them to gain competitive advantage.

*Proposition 5A: The more professionally managed is the HR Department, the greater is the strategic role of the HR Department in terms of ability to identify, develop and manage support resources, the greater is the likelihood of adoption of SHRM practices*

## **Conclusion**

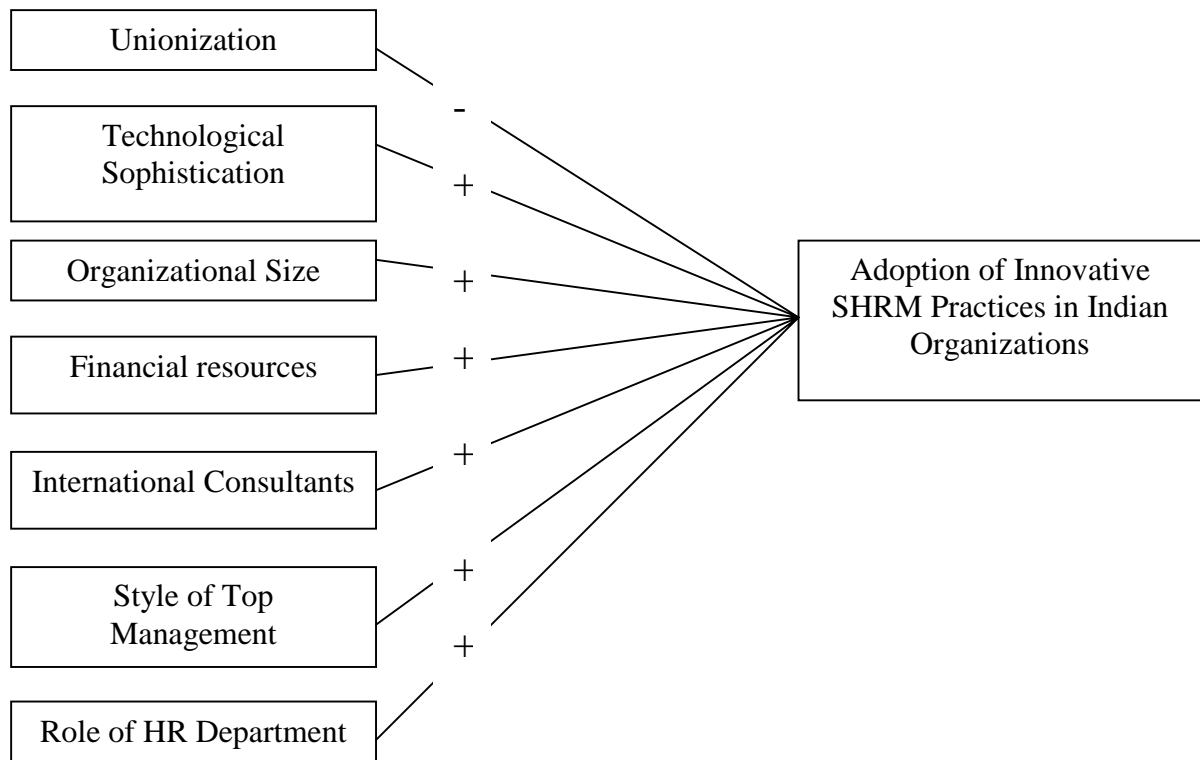
This article provides valuable insights into the adoption of managerial innovation practices in Indian organizations in general and innovative SHRM practices in particular. Consistent with prior research, we find that institutional pressures have influenced the adoption of SHRM practices in the post liberalization scenario in India. The article demonstrates that organizations adopt SHRM practices for a variety of reasons. The antecedents of managerial innovation include national environment (extent of unionization and sectors, technological sophistication), organizational restructuring and ownership structure, legitimizing driver (use of international consultants), organizational culture, and role of HR Department. Figure 1 summarizes all the propositions of this study.

The article points out that though the institutional environment is specific to the Indian context the propositions are not. With respect to HRM practices the question for researchers and practitioners are two fold: How generalizable are these propositions? What is the value of these propositions?

The propositions of this study are close to those found in the literature meant for developed economies (Kimberly, 1981; Kossek, 1987, 1989; Wolfe, 1995; Godderham et al., 1999; Walston et al., 2001) and therefore may be relevant to most sectors and industries anywhere in the world wherever there is a competitive market economy or a movement towards it. While the propositions are grounded in managerial innovation literature and is supported by a limited number of studies of innovative SHRM practices, surely, a lot more research needs to be done to test out the generalisation, but there are fairly strong logical reasons why these practices may have wide relevance in emerging market economies.

In the post liberalization scenario in India, the hyper competitive business environment has presented a number of challenges and opportunities, both external and internal. External challenges and opportunities being deregulation, governmental incentives, pressure from regulatory authorities to name a few. External challenges and uncertainties are barriers that are difficult to control. Internal challenges like dramatic advances in technology, changing of organizational forms necessitate redesigning of SHRM practices like recruitment and selection, promotion, retraining and redeployment, performance appraisal and rightsizing (Som, 2002). The globalization of business brings with it a global workforce and global practices that need to be adopted and diffused for the global work place. It is true that managerial innovation adoption in organizations takes place at a slow pace and some innovations are slower than others. Potential payoffs, cost of adoption of innovation, power relations and social factors hinder adoption process in organizations and more so in organizations in the emerging economy. Successful adoption, diffusion and implementation of SHRM practices can be critical determinants of organizational success and effectiveness. When innovative SHRM practices are adopted, they may be able to provide a sustainable competitive advantage depending upon how creatively and effectively they are interpreted and executed.

FIGURE 1





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