‘Harley Davidson’ Success Speaks- Brand Image and Culture: An HR Perspective

Dr. Kishore Kumar Das and Aftab Ara

Abstract--- Technology is the cause of shift in HR to go beyond mere administrative support functions to fruitful strategies for success. HR strategies decide whether market share, sales, or profits would increase or not. The key result areas in people management shows shift from production and quantity to productivity and quality. Capability is measured in ideas generated by employees to be implemented, since productivity gained is of more prominence than capacity measured in man-hours lost, man-hours available, absenteeism, etc. Success achieved in business has its own challenges. William M. Harley in 1901, created his own blue-chip of the engine to fit a bicycle. Since then his journey was transformed from a small business to a business tycoon as the manufacturer of Motorcycles along with genuine Harley-Davidson parts, accessories and collectibles. Harley – Davidson Inc became headquarter of his group of companies as Harley-Davidson Motor Company (HDMC) and Harley-Davidson Financial Services (HDFS) in USA after being founded in 1903. The company has a strategic position in marketplace with his valued customers who are extremely satisfied with the global standard image and brand. Even after having such huge success it faced challenges from lower priced competitors and was unable to expand into overseas markets. Accenture helped Harley –Davidson in improving its business strategies to meet the challenges at such troubled times. This study aims to find the popularity of its brand, image and culture of H-D which has helped in success of the Motorcycle Industry. It also aims to study the gaps in culture that needs to be improved. The purpose of the article is to study the case of H-D and recommend certain strategies to be brought by HR in bringing changes in the organization. The methodology of study is by collecting the primary and secondary data. Interviews of employees are conducted and on-line surveys were taken. The findings provide an opportunity for other well -to-do world class companies to have a look into their systems and recognize their deficit in strategies which is preventing them to move forward with speed in such a fast paced world of today.

Keywords--- HR Strategies, Brand, Image, Organizational Culture, Competency Development

INTRODUCTION

TECHNOLOGY causes shift in HR to go beyond mere administrative support functions to fruitful strategies for success. HR strategies decide whether market share, sales, or profits would increase or not. The key result areas in people management shows shift from production and quantity to productivity and quality. Capability is measured in ideas generated by employees to be implemented, since productivity gained is of more prominence than capacity measured in man-hours lost, man-hours available, absenteeism, etc. Success achieved in business has its own challenges. William M. Harley in 1901, created his own blue-chip of the engine to fit in a bicycle. Since then his journey was transformed from a small business to a business tycoon as the manufacturer of Motorcycles along with genuine Harley-Davidson parts, accessories and collectibles. Harley –Davidson Inc became headquarter of his group of companies as Harley-Davidson Motor Company (HDMC) and Harley-Davidson Financial Services (HDFS) in USA after being founded in 1903.

Harley Davidson is the worldwide producer of motorbikes, known by its brand, style, strength, freedom, individuality and independence. Since 1903 it has produced world class bikes which has not been done by anyone. In addition to motorbikes it produces a complete line of Genuine Motorcycle Parts & Accessories, apparel and branded merchandise and offers our riders thousands of custom, personalized options for their bikes. Having celebrated its 100th anniversary as a company it earns a name for the quality of its product and customer loyalty enjoying 98% customer retention rate. The workforce feels pride in working at Harley-Davidson. There is an internal recruitment of employers from the friends and families at HD thus contributing to the addition of workforce. The company has a strategic position in marketplace with his valued customers who are extremely satisfied with the global standard image and brand.

Even after having such huge success it faced challenges from lower priced competitors and was unable to expand into overseas markets. Accenture helped Harley –Davidson in improving its business strategies to meet the challenges at such troubled times. This study aims to find the popularity of its brand, image and culture of H-D which has helped in success of the Motorcycle Industry. It also aims to study the gaps in culture that needs to be improved. The purpose of the article is to study the case of H-D and recommend certain strategies to be brought by HR in bringing changes in the organization. We reviewed relevant secondary literature to understand existing Strategic role of HR practices. We also conducted interviews with employees and customers – inside and outside of Harley-Davidson – who have worked with
companies on HR transformation efforts. The findings provide an opportunity for other well-to-do world class companies to have a look into their systems and recognize their deficit in strategies which is preventing them to move forward with speed in such a fast paced world of today.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

HRM is chiefly responsible for recruiting, selection, training, assessment, rewarding and giving benefits to the organization with control over the organizational culture, leadership and at the same time abiding with the employment and labor laws. HR acts as a primary interpreter between the company and his employees. Human Relations movement gave form to HR in the 20th Century when the researchers thought of strategic management of the workforce. In those times the HR's main work was mostly transactional like payroll and benefits administration. Presently due to globalization, technological advancement and cut throat competition worldwide it is taking strategic initiatives like mergers and acquisition, succession planning, talent management, labor relations, diversity, inclusion.

In the early 20th century Frederick Taylor coined the term "scientific management" also known as Taylorism with an effort to improve the economic efficiency in manufacturing jobs. He thus put labor as the key input for manufacturing. Elton Mayo’s Hawthorne studies brought forth a clear picture that financial compensations and working conditions lead to more enthusiastic workers leading to higher productivity. The contemporary work by Abraham Maslow, Kurt Lewin, Max Weber, Frederick Herzberg, and David McClelland gave the foundation of organizational behavior and organizational theory. Andrew Carnegie John Rockefeller made hypothesis for strategic workforce management. The employee-employer relationship took form as industrial and labor relations by a la Sidney and Beatrice Webb, Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal.

The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development was founded in England as the Welfare Workers' Association, which later became the Institute of Industrial Welfare Workers after a decade and again to Institute of Labor Management. Cornell University in 1945, was set up as the world's first institution of higher education, dedicated to workplace studies as the School of Industrial and Labor Relations

During the latter half of the 20th century, as the workforce management expanded and influenced whereas the union membership declined significantly, the "Industrial and labor relations" were used to refer to issues relating to collective representation, and the companies referred to the profession as "personnel administration".

In 1948, the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM)—was founded as the American Society for Personnel Administration (ASPA) which later became the largest HR association in the world. In the 21st century with the increased communication and transportation there was an increase in workforce mobility. Companies now viewed employees as assets and not just machines for doing work. "Human Resource Management was the dominant term for function and its name was changed to SHRM in 1998. Human Capital management is used with HR.

The strategic management discipline originated in the 1950s and 1960s. Alfred Chandler recognized the importance of coordinating management activity under an all-compassing strategy. Interactions between functions were typically handled by managers who relayed information back and forth between departments. Chandler stressed the importance of taking a long term perspective when looking to the future. In his 1962 ground breaking work Strategy and Structure, Chandler showed that a long-term coordinated strategy was necessary to give a company structure, direction and focus. He says it concisely, "structure follows strategy."

In 1957, Philip Selznick formalized the idea of matching the organization's internal factors with external environmental circumstances. This core idea was developed into what we now call SWOT analysis by Learned, Kenneth R. Andrews, and others at the Harvard Business School Genera Management Group. Strengths and weaknesses of the firm are assessed in light of the opportunities and threats in the business environment.

Igor Ansoff built on Chandler's work by adding concepts and inventing a vocabulary. He developed a grid that compared strategies for market penetration, product development, market development and horizontal and vertical integration and diversification. He felt that management could use the grid to systematically prepare for the future. In his 1965 classic Corporate Strategy, he developed a gap analysis to clarify the gap between the current reality and the goals and to develop what he called "gap reducing actions".

Peter Drucker was a prolific strategy theorist, author of dozens of management books, with a career spanning five decades. He stressed the value of managing by targeting well-defined objectives. This evolved into his theory of management by objectives (MBO). According to Drucker, the procedure of setting objectives and monitoring progress towards them should permeate the entire organization.

Strategy theorist Michael Porter argued that strategy target either cost leadership, differentiation, or focus. These are known as Porter's three generic strategies and can be applied to any size or form of business. Porter claimed that a company must only choose one of the three or risk that the business would waste precious resources. W. Chan Kim and Renée Mauborgne countered that an organization can achieve high growth and profits by creating a Blue Ocean Strategy that breaks the trade off by pursuing both differentiation and low cost.

In 1985, Ellen-Earle Chaffee summarized what she thought were the main elements of strategic management theory by the 1970s.

Strategic management involves adapting the organization to its business environment.

- Strategic management is fluid and complex. Change creates novel combinations of circumstances requiring unstructured non-repetitive responses.
• Strategic management affects the entire organization by providing direction.
• Strategic management involves both strategy formation (she called it content) and also strategy implementation (she called it process).
• Strategic management is partially planned and partially unplanned.
• Strategic management is done at several levels: overall corporate strategy, and individual business strategies.
• Strategic management involves both conceptual and analytical thought processes.

Edith Penrose’s work in the late 1950s, the resource-based view was largely introduced to the field of strategic management in the 1980s and became a dominant framework in the 1990s

A. Organizational Performance

Organization performance has been the most important issue for every organization be it profit or non-profit. Researchers among themselves have different opinions and definitions of performance, which remains to be a contentious issue among organizational researcher [1]. The central issue concerns with the appropriateness of various approaches to the concept utilization and measurement of organizational performance [2]. Performance is equivalent to the famous 3Es (economy, efficiency, and effectiveness)[3].Performance measures could include result-oriented behavior (criterion-based) and relative (normative) measures, education and training, concepts and instruments, including management development and leadership training, which were the necessary building skills and attitudes of performance management. Hence, from the above literature review, the term “performance” should be broader based which include effectiveness, efficiency, economy, quality, consistency behavior and normative measures [4].

Organizational model of firm performance focused on organizational factors such as human resources policies, organizational culture, and organizational climate and leadership styles. Another study found that there were five major factors determining organizational performance, namely:

- Leadership styles and environment,
- Organizational culture
- Job design
- Model of motive, and
- Human resource policies

B. Corporate Branding

It was in the mid-nineties that branding literature emerged. Businesses began shifting their focus from product brands to corporate branding [6]. A corporate brand as a brand that represents an organization and reflects its heritage, values, culture, people, and strategy[7].Corporate branding congruent with the strategic brand vision dwells on developing brands at an organizational level[8].A corporate brand is defined primarily by organizational associations and thus can develop and leverage organizational characteristics, as well as product and service attributes [9].The distinguishing six differences between product and corporate branding[10]. They are-

- The shift in focus from product to corporation of the branding effort;
- The different exposure the organization is subject to, which makes the firm’s behavior and its interaction with society much more visible;
- The relation of the brand to all company stakeholders, not just customers;
- The requirement of organization-wide support;
- The temporal dimension of corporate brands includes past and future, not just present
- The greater reach of corporate brands than product brands means that they take on more strategic importance.

A Corporate branding is based on three elements –Vision, Organizational Culture and corporate image.

Vision is the decision made by the top management such as the lines of business, locations, partners and alliance, change initiatives and corporate symbolism.

Culture is the decisions made by the organizational members such as working hard , seeking challenge, being loyal and taking organization to the positive side of success.

Image is made by the external stakeholders such as buying products and services, seeking employment, praising or criticize company, investing in company or seeking to regulate the company.

![Corporate Branding Image](image)

Figure: 1: Corporate Branding Image
Hatch and Schultz 2003

C. Organizational Culture

Organizational culture has been characterized by many authors as something to do with people and the unique quality and style of the organization [11], and the way things are done in the organizations [12]. Sometimes, organization culture is also known as “corporate culture”. “Corporate Culture” is used to denote the more “commercialized” meaning of organizational culture[12].The collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one organization from another. This included shared beliefs, values and practices that distinguished one organization to another [13]. Set of symbols, ceremonies and myths that communicate the underlying values and beliefs of the organization to its employees [14] Three component systems: context or core values, forms (process of communication, e.g jargon), strategies to reinforce content (e.g. rewards, training programs)[15].
a. Refers to something that shared by all or almost all members of some social groups[16]
b. something that the older members of the group try to pass on to the younger members and[16]
c. something that shapes behaviour or structures one's perception of the[16].

The underlying values, beliefs and principles that serve as a foundation for an organization’s management system as well as the set of management practices and behaviors that both exemplify and reinforce those basic principles[17]. What is valued, the dominant leadership styles, the language success that make an organization unique[18].

III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY
The objectives of the study are-
- Gauge popularity of H-D brand image by customers.
- Establishing correlation between the work culture and growth of the company.
- Find the importance of employee’s recognition by the Top Management.

IV. SETTING UP OF HYPOTHESIS
The study aims at the following hypothesis
- Harley Davidson has its own brand image.
- Friendly work culture helps in the company’s growth.
- Employee’s recognition is essential by the Top Management.

V. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY
The research methodology was –
- To understand the organization.
- To gauge the popularity of H-D by its brand Image
- To evaluate the work culture helping in the growth of the organization.
- Importance of employee’s recognition by top management.

The tools and techniques used were- interview, online survey and questionnaire.

The sources of data were:
- Primary Data was collected by interview, online survey and questionnaire
- Secondary Data was collected by journals, internet, magazines, newspapers etc

The respondents were the sampling units through which data was collected. These were the employees of Harley Davidson. There were 139 employees and the sample of study was taken as Harley Davidson Inc. with the period of this study from 3-4 years.

VI. HARLEY-DAVIDSON: AN OVERVIEW
Harley-Davidson Inc formerly known as HD is H-D in abbreviation or Harley is an American motorcycle manufacturer. Founded in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, during the first decade of the 20th century, it was one of two major American motorcycle manufacturers to survive the Great Depression. Harley-Davidson also survived a period of poor quality control and competition from the Japanese manufacturers.

In brief
- In 1909, the First V-twin powered bikes became most enduring icons of Harley Davidson history in 1917.
- 1/3 rd of the bikes were sold to the U.S military, at least 20,000 HD bikes were used in World War I (1918).
- In 1922 HD dealerships spread across 74 countries. In 1933 there was an art deco “Eagle” is printed on tanks which started the graphic design on HD.
- 1953 saw the new attractive logo created for 50th anniversary with caption “50 years-American made”.
- In 1997 two big plants were constructed in Milwaukee & Kansas cities.
- In 2002 there was an “Open Road Tour” debuted in Atlanta to celebrating 100th Anniversary.
- The demand for heavy weight motor cycle in U.S surged by 17% compared to IGR of 10%. In 2003 there were more than 950,000 bikes were sold in U.S & 28 million worldwide expected to grow 5% every year. HD thus recorded its 19th consecutive year of record earnings in 2004. Harley is known to be the only major American Manufacturer of heavy weight motor cycle having more than 15,000 employees.
- In August 2009, Harley-Davidson planned to enter the market in India, and started selling motorcycles in 2010. The company established a subsidiary, Harley-Davidson India, in Gurgaon, near Delhi, in 2011, and created an Indian dealer network.
- The main features Harley Davidson is Softail Family for example narrow seats, tombstone tail lights, full length floor boards Harley Davidson Sportster Family e.g.: low-rise handlebars, bullet style head light. Harley Davidson Touring (Dressers) Family large windshield & have a full front fairing, leather saddlebags, optional sidecar, & option to customize, engines Big V-twins, Small V-twins and the Revolution engine.
- The Main figures in 2009 is HD’s share of the U.S.
- heavy weight (651+cc) market was 53% &12% in Europe. (app.) Capital Expenditures were $116.7 million in 2009 & $1.0 billion in the last 5 years. $100 invested in Harley-Davidson at the end of 1986 would be worth approximately $9,000 at the end of 2009. The Company incurred R&D expenses of $143.1 million, $163.5 million and $185.5 million during 2009, 2008 & 2007 respectively.
- Values of HD: Values are the heart of HD business, they guide our action and serve as the framework for the decisions and contribution of our employees make at every level of the company.” Tell the truth Be fair
Keep your promises Respect the individual Encourage Intellectual curiosity “.
- Product Extensions :Motor Cycles Bike accessories Buell motor cycles: wholly owned subsidiary of Harley by 2003 which is now closed .
- Brand extensions Merchandise Helmet Clothes (Jackets…) Mugs Collectibles…. Beer Bars

VII. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY
Though it has been tried to make a detailed analysis on Strategic role of HR at Harley Davidson, still the study suffers from certain limitation.
- Due to the constraint of not revealing the company’s policy, the organization was reluctant in sharing their information for the fulfillment of the study.
- As the employees were so busy, it was too difficult for them to give some time for the study and some working employees hesitated to give their own opinions.
- There was time constraint.
- Sample for survey was not enough.

VIII. ANALYSIS OF THE VARIABLES
From the above discussion a study was conducted for the employees of Harley Davidson by an online questionnaire regarding the work culture helping in the company's growth, recognition of the employee’s by the Top Management and involvement of Management for the innovation of new products. Some of the variables are analyzed as follows:

A. Analysis of Brand Image of the Product
a. Does Harley Davidson create a Brand Image of its own?

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<td>Fulfill Dreams</td>
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Figure 2: Brand Image of H-D
Sources: Compiled from survey of H-D respondents
Interpretation: According to the survey of data we found that 95% responded that the company has strong brand personality, 93% responded it is tough, dark and strong feeling .92% responded that the products gave a feeling of Harley experience,91% responded that the product gave a rugged appearance,90% responded as giving the feeling of being rebellious and individual ,89% responded it made them feel born free,88% responded that it fulfills dreams and 80% response that it is outdoorsy.

B. Analysis of Organization Culture
a. Prevailing Working Environment in the Organization

Figure 3: Friendly Working Environment
Sources: Compiled from survey of H-D respondents
Interpretation: According to the sample selected we can deduce from the above pie chart that the majority of employees at Harley Davidson comprising of 84.89% found the working environment to be very friendly

b. Prevailing Environment is a Challenging Place to Work

Figure 4: Prevailing Working Environment
Sources: Compiled from survey of H-D respondents
Interpretation: According to the sample studied 79.85 % of the employees feel that the environment is a challenging place to work.

c. Is the Company a Great Place to work?

Figure 5: Company is a Great Place to Work
Sources: Compiled from survey of H-D respondents
d. **Quality of work/Life Balance**

Interpretation: According to the sample selected 86.33% of the employees find the company as a great place to work in.

![Quality of work/Life Balance](image)

Figure 6: Good Work/Life Balance

Sources: Compiled from survey of H-D respondents

Interpretation: According to the sample studied 54.67% of the employees find good work/life balance.

e. **Acknowledgement Good Work by top Management**

![Acknowledgement Good Work by top Management](image)

Figure 7: Acknowledgement for good work from top Management

Sources: Compiled from survey of H-D respondents

Interpretation: According to the sample only 1.43% of the people completely agree that the supervisor acknowledges their good work and a majority i.e. 56.11% strongly disagree the acknowledgement of the good work done by their supervisors.

f. **Opportunities for Career Growth**

![Opportunities for Career Growth](image)

Figure 8: Organization provides Opportunities for career Growth

Sources: Compiled from survey of H-D respondents

Interpretation: According to the sample 48.2% of the employees strongly agree that the organization provides opportunities for career growth.

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g. **The factors which Motivates most for Working at H-D.**

![Factors which Motivates most for Working at H-D](image)

Figure 9: Factors which Motivates me Most for Work

Sources: Compiled from survey of H-D respondents

Interpretation: According to the sample studied 43.16% of the employees say that mostly the benefit provided by the company motivates them for work at H-D.

h. **Employees Satisfied at Harley Davidson?**

![Employees Satisfied at Harley Davidson?](image)

Figure 10: Satisfaction as an Employee of HD

Sources: Compiled from survey of H-D respondents

Interpretation: According to the sample studied 81.29% of the employees of H-D are satisfied to work at H-D.

i. **Recommend this Company to Friends and Relatives**

![Recommend this Company to Friends and Relatives](image)

Figure 11: Recommending the Company to Family and Friends

Sources: Compiled from survey of H-D respondents

Interpretation: According to the sample 53.9% of the employees would recommend the company to their family and friends.

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j. **Accepting the present CEO of H-D**

![Accepting the present CEO of H-D](image)

Figure 11: Accepting the present CEO

Sources: Compiled from survey of H-D respondents

Interpretation: According to the sample 48.2% of the employees strongly agree that the organization provides opportunities for career growth.
Sources: Compiled from survey of H-D respondents

Interpretation: According to the sample 56.11% of the employees recommend Keith Wendell as the CEO of the company.

IX. TESTING OF HYPOTHESIS

- Harley Davidson has its own brand image: In view of hypothesis 1. We found that 95% responded the company is having strong brand personality. 93% responded it gives a tough, dark and strong feeling. 92% responded that the products gave a feeling of Harley experience. 91% responded that the product gave a rugged appearance. 90% responded as giving the feeling of being rebellious and individual. 89% responded it made them feel born free. 88% responded that it fulfills dreams and 80% response that it is outdoorsy. Hence we accept the null hypothesis (H0) and reject the Alternate hypothesis (H1).

- Friendly work culture helps in the company’s growth: In view of hypothesis 2 we found 84.89% of the Harley-Davidson employees found the working environment to be very friendly. Hence we accept the null hypothesis (H0) and reject the alternate hypothesis (H1).

- Employee’s recognition is essential by the Top Management: In view of hypothesis 3 we found 56.11% strongly disagree the acknowledgement of the good work done by their supervisors. Hence we accept the null Hypothesis (H0) and reject the alternate Hypothesis (H0).

X. FINDINGS AND SUGGESTIONS

From the primary and the secondary data by interviews of employees and customers and on-line questionnaires we came up with the following findings of the company. The findings highlighted the reaction of customers on the brand Image of the work/life balance, culture/values, compensation and benefits program, senior management and career opportunities at Harley Davidson Company.

The Findings are-

- Company has a brand image of its own and is very popular among the youth due to its strong brand personality, tough, dark, strong feeling, feeling of Harley experience, appealing rugged appearance, giving the feel of being rebellious and individual. Its speed agility gave a feeling of being born free. It fulfilled dream and was known for being outdoorsy.
- Company has a Good work culture
- Company provides Good Benefits
- Company has a friendly atmosphere at work.
- There is Good Work/Life Balance
- There is unfavorable union management relation
- The employees were not appraised for their work by the management

Finally I would like to put forth the strategies which would help to re- revive and keep up to the standard, quality, work culture, market competitiveness and better relationships with the upper management

A. Advice to Management

- Culture Shift: Management should engage the employee for being the catalyst to drive the new culture shift and take employees views in some matters.
- Organized Departments: Departments should be more organized for proper functioning.
- Include Training and Development Program: Management must help their employees to grow professionally and rationally as good human beings and thus be given proper training. They should be comprehensively trained in the core sector as required and also in specific problem-solving methods
- Employee Involvement Program: Management must be committed to Employee Involvement program and should have mutual trust among themselves and the management,
- Need Good Leaders: There is need for good leaders to inspire the company for growth and be focused on employee engagement.

XI. CONCLUSION

Harley Davidson has a mark of its own in the market of automobiles. This research is an attempt to find the popularity of its brand, image and culture of H-D which has helped in the success of the Motorcycle Industry. From our findings we conclude that Harley Davidson has its own brand image, a good work culture, good benefits for its employees, friendly atmosphere and good work/life balance. We came to know that there are certain areas where the management should improve such as union management relationships and in appraising the employees for their work. We have also recommended certain strategies to be undertaken by HR for bringing changes in the organization such as taking the employees views on certain matters, organize departments well, helping the employees in their personal and professional growth by having Training and Development programs and employing inspiring leaders for the growth and development of the company. This article is an attempt to guide the future HR of High rising companies to look into their systems and develop the programs to ensure sustainability in business.

REFERENCES

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She has worked as Lecturer and Telecommunications Department at Government College, Rourkela, Orissa, India from July 2004 – February 2005.

She has also done her internship at (i) Steel Authority of India Limited during her engineering career on 2003 (ii) undertaken Projects at Software Training Parks of India on Visual Basic, Java and Oracle and (iii) Undertaken MBA Project on Training and Development at Infibids Projects Pvt. Limited.


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