

Strategic HR Leadership in Metro Economies: A Review-Based Study of Practices in Delhi/NCR

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Abstract: This paper explores the evolving role of strategic human resource (HR) leadership within the dynamic landscape of India's metro economies, with a specific focus on Delhi/NCR. As a result of the quick pace of urbanization, digital disruption, and the competitive nature of the labor market, human resource (HR) leadership is projected to gradually shift away from administrative and support roles and towards strategic business partnership. The research emphasizes how metropolitan ecosystems, such as the Delhi/National Capital Region (NCR), with its diverse workforces, high rates of employee turnover, and highly competitive environments, increase the necessity for human resources departments to develop leadership styles that are adaptable and prepared for the future. Although Delhi/NCR is a bustling commercial center, it does not have the necessary infrastructure to nurture human resource leaders who are capable of influencing corporate strategy and promoting resilience inside their organizations.

Insights have been derived from a variety of sources, including scholarly articles, global human resource models, consulting white papers, and recorded human resource practices of businesses operating in the region. These insights were gathered using a conceptual technique that is secondary in nature. The authors of the report conducted a theme analysis that revealed systemic shortcomings in the development of leadership skills, the planning of succession, and the strategic engagement of human resource professionals. Additionally, it evaluates the landscape of Delhi/NCR in relation to international standards of excellence in order to bring attention to areas that require enhancement.

According to the findings, firms located in the Delhi/NCR region are failing to provide sufficient resources to the development of human resource leadership as a result of outdated attitudes, fragmented mentorship, and a lack of competency-based position mobility. The report recommends that metropolitan corporations adopt city-specific leadership academies, policy frameworks, and organized internal mobility initiatives as a means of repositioning human resources as a fundamental strategic pillar inside their organizations.

Keywords: HR leadership, metro economies, Delhi/NCR, organizational strategy, talent management

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary organisations, Human Resource (HR) The conventional job of leadership, which was previously focused on people administration, has undergone significant transformation and is now regarded as a strategic partnership within the corporate world. Human resources (HR) responsibilities have historically been concerned with the following

areas: employee welfare, payroll, hiring, and compliance with regulations. On the other hand, it is expected that contemporary human resources leadership will have an impact on business strategy, will motivate the recruitment, development, and retention of talent, will manage culture, and will connect the competencies of people with the requirements of the firm. The transformation that is taking place inside human resources (HR) is demonstrated by the change in its role from that of a support function to that of a crucial strategic enabler. As a result, leadership within human resources entails more than simply overseeing operations; it also includes the development of future leaders, the facilitation of change, the interpretation of human capital as a strategic asset, and interaction with upper management. The idea of human resources leadership that is described here is becoming more widely accepted as an important factor for organizations that are fighting for talent and agility (SHRM, 2008).

In urban economies that are characterized by high velocity, this transformation is particularly pertinent since the volume of businesses, their development, and the dynamics of their workforces all place distinctive requirements on human resource activities. The pace of recruiting, the intensity of the rivalry for skills, the mobility of employees, the adoption of hybrid and digital work models, and the business transformations that necessitate HR professionals to be flexible, strategic, and prepared for the future are all phenomena that are rapidly taking place in urban corporate centers such as Delhi/NCR. In these kinds of situations, human resource professionals are required to oversee not just talent logistics but also strategic workforce planning, digital human resource integration, leadership pipelines, and the retention of high-potential personnel. The human resources leadership that is required by the urban economic ecosystem is one that is able to adapt to speed, complexity, and talent churn with foresight.

The Delhi/National Capital Region (NCR) area provides a real-world example of the need to investigate weaknesses in human resources leadership. The region, which has one of India's most active business clusters, has a workforce that is diverse, has substantial inbound and outbound mobility, a culture of job hopping—particularly among Generation Z—accelerated digital transformation, and enhanced hiring demands. For example, the results of a poll conducted in recent times revealed that 62 percent of Indian professionals were offered new employment in the year 2025, and 37 percent of them were successful, demonstrating a high level of mobility. As a result of this churn, there are difficulties in maintaining consistent leadership within human resources, and there are complications in organized leadership

development (Michael Page, 2025). Moreover, industry commentary indicates that HR roles in India remain under-structured with respect to leadership development frameworks, mentoring, and clear career pathways (Economic Times, 2025).

The human resources (HR) leadership in metropolitan areas such as the National Capital Region (NCR) of Delhi continues to be largely underdeveloped as a result of the absence of formal competence frameworks, a lack of mobility based on roles, insufficient succession planning within HR functions, and a restricted strategic approach to the development of HR leadership pipelines. This gap reduces the capacity of human resources to operate as a strategic partner, impedes the retention of employees and continuity in leadership, and restricts the flexibility of organizations in metropolitan business environments.

This article seeks to evaluate and analyze human resource leadership development techniques that are relevant to metropolitan economies. It uses the Delhi/National Capital Region as a reference zone, and its goal is to provide conceptual pathways for human resource transformation in Indian organizations in urban areas. In this study, institutional, structural, and mobility-driven elements that impact human resources leadership in metropolitan contexts are examined based on secondary data sources alone. In addition, the study suggests conceptual solutions that may be used to bridge leadership gaps in human resources.

The document has taken a strictly secondary and intellectual approach in its methodology. It examined academic publications, human resources consulting reports, business white papers, case studies of Indian organizations situated in metropolitan areas, and worldwide best practices. There was not any data collecting that was either primary or statistical in nature. In order to assess HR leadership practices and identify any deficiencies that may exist in metropolitan environments, a theme comparative analysis framework was utilized. This framework drew parallels between worldwide models and HR situations in Indian urban settings.

HR LEADERSHIP IN URBAN BUSINESS ECOSYSTEMS

Due to the quick pace of economic expansion, the existence of businesses with a worldwide reach, and a workforce that is constantly changing, urban business ecosystems—particularly metropolitan centers such as the Delhi/NCR region—present human resource management with distinctive challenges. Within such a context, human resource functions are required to negotiate the high levels of economic activity, the expansion of international firms and

startups, and the resulting demand for agility. Talent becomes both a strategic advantage and a source of tremendous competitive pressure as an urban company environment evolves. The leadership of the human resources department in this setting cannot continue to be limited to administrative or transactional responsibilities; rather, it must have a strategic role in decision-making, workforce planning, change management, and digital transformation.

HR directors are confronted with generational, technical, and workforce changes all at once in these metropolitan organizations. Workforces that consist of many generations have a wide range of expectations. For example, members of Generation Z desire quick professional advancement and digital fluency, millennials place a high value on purpose and flexibility, while older generations may place a higher value on stability and tenure. The need for human resource functions to undergo a transformation is being driven by the emergence of hybrid work patterns, the digital automation of human resource operations, and expectations about talent on a global scale. The scope of human resources departments is being transformed by the skills necessary for automation and digital technology, as indicated by the worldwide study published by PwC (2017). These changes need human resources departments to shift their focus from process administration to strategic workforce capabilities (PwC, 2017). This implies that in metropolitan centers, executives in human resources are required to forecast changes in the workforce, create pipelines for talent that are flexible, and contribute to business strategy instead of only enforcing human resources policy.

Legacy structural restrictions that prevent human resources from undergoing strategic evolution are amplified by urban business ecosystems when they are taken to a large size and fast pace. A large number of organizations in the Delhi/NCR region continue to perceive human resources as being a support service or a back office rather than as a strategic role. The patterns of high attrition and job hopping that are observed in metropolitan centers that are known for their information technology industries (such as Gurugram) and service sector clusters (in Noida and South Delhi) continue to make it difficult for human resources departments to maintain a consistent leadership presence. For example, the findings of a large-scale industry study revealed that organizations in India consistently encounter gaps in human resources (HR) capabilities as a result of process inertia and talent mobility (CIEL HR Industry Report, 2024). Because of these dynamics, human resources leadership frequently finds it difficult to get a voice in strategy conversations that involve the highest levels of management, and they are also unable to establish formal paths to leadership positions within the firm.

Human resources positions in metropolitan ecosystems must transition from their current state of performing standard personnel tasks to one of shaping workforce strategy. This involves forecasting key roles, constructing talent models that are data-driven, aligning talent mobility with business growth, overseeing digital human resources readiness, and embedding culture in markets that are rapidly moving and have a high velocity. Nevertheless, according to the available data, onboarding of new HR executives or promoting internal HR talent remains uneven in many organizations in Delhi/NCR; mentorship, role-based mobility, and strategic HR career paths continue to be undeveloped. As a consequence, human resource management is concerned with managing attrition, compliance, and hiring, which is a reactive approach, rather than predicting talent requirements and incorporating human resource strategy into company growth, which is a proactive approach.

As a result, human resources leadership in metropolitan areas such as Delhi/NCR is required to undergo a process of fast evolution. It must make the shift from being operational to being strategic, from being reactive to being predictive, and from being supportive to being a partner. In order to properly address this change, it is necessary to acknowledge that human resources (HR) is a fundamental component of a business. It is also necessary to equip leaders in the HR department with the necessary strategic and digital skills, to embed leadership development and succession planning within the functions of the HR department, and to align the leadership of the HR department with the overall dynamics of the organization in rapidly evolving urban environments.

TRANSITIONING HR FROM SUPPORT FUNCTION TO STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP

The role of human resources (HR) has experienced a considerable transformation in many organizations across the world, shifting from that of a support or administrative unit to that of a strategic business partner that is vital to the success of the organization. According to the well recognized model that was put out by Dave Ulrich, there are four fundamental responsibilities for human resource professionals. These positions include those of Strategic Partner, Change Agent, Administrative Expert, and Employee Champion. This model served as a blueprint for the transition that took place (Ulrich & Brockbank, 2009). The emphasis of this approach was placed on the fact that human resources leadership need to go beyond transactional duties, such as payroll and personnel records, in order to concentrate on strategic workforce planning and

organizational competence. Similarly, the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) Competency Model, which is a framework of this kind, defines the important behavioural and technical competencies—including business acumen, leadership and navigation, and global and cultural effectiveness—that are necessary for human resource professionals to fill leadership positions (SHRM, 2021).

According to data from cases throughout the globe, companies who were able to successfully move their human resources departments into strategic positions had benefits in succession planning, talent forecasting, leadership pipeline building, and culture shaping. One example would be multinational firms that embraced human resource business partner models. These corporations integrated human resource practices with the strategy of their business unit, which allowed human resource executives to engage in talent forecasting and thereby decrease leadership gaps (AiHR, 2023). In a similar vein, businesses that included competency-based frameworks into the career trajectories of their human resources (HR) employees were able to allow HR experts to advance to senior decision-making positions as opposed to confining them to jobs that were limited to compliance or support activities.

Nevertheless, Indian firms, especially those that are located in metropolitan regions like Delhi/NCR, are not making sufficient progress in their implementation of these frameworks. Research has shown that Indian human resource departments continue to put a great deal of emphasis on transactional activities, and HR professionals frequently lack the abilities or growth routes that would allow them to move into strategic leadership positions (Vu & Hayes, 2017). When compared to other departments, such as marketing or operations, organizations have a tendency to underinvest in the development of human resources leadership. For instance, leadership development programs were more likely to place a greater focus on sales or brand leadership rather than HR leadership. As a result, in many urban companies, pipelines for HR talent were either nonexistent or inadequate. Furthermore, according to anecdotal and industry accounts, HR practitioners in companies situated in the Delhi/National Capital Region (NCR) have limited opportunities for advancement into higher-level strategic roles. Human resources continues to be on the periphery rather than being integrated into the executive table.

As a result of the inclination to regard human resources (HR) as a service or support department rather than as a strategic partner, a number of difficulties pertaining to leadership gaps have emerged. Human resource professionals are less likely to develop the business acumen,

strategic orientation, and leadership experience that are required for senior positions in the absence of organized career mobility. As a result, human resources departments do succession planning on an as-needed basis, and the construction of leadership pipelines continues to be incomplete. Human resources (HR) are unable to provide value to the process of decision-making and the transformation of a company due to the fact that there are no clearly defined roles, competence mapping, or organized development for HR leadership. This is particularly true in rapidly developing metropolitan economies.

REGIONAL PRESSURES AND LEADERSHIP CULTIVATION CHALLENGES IN DELHI/NCR

The National Capital Region (NCR) in Delhi is an example of one of the most dynamic business ecosystems in all of India. This unique environment exerts an increased amount of pressure on the development of human resource leadership. Among the most significant problems is the elevated turnover rate of human resources specialists at the mid-level, which interferes with leadership pipelines and reduces the continuity of organizations. An investigation on the turnover of employees at service companies located in Delhi/NCR revealed that a recurrent obstacle is the frequent departure of employees, which has a particularly detrimental effect on those who would otherwise be suitable candidates for leadership positions (Anonymous, 2021). According to the KPMG Talent Feasibility Report from 2024, another poll showed that almost 70 percent of enterprises located in Tier 1 cities—including those situated in Delhi—reported that their attrition rates were higher than average owing to the fierce competition and the abundance of opportunities for career switching. The constant state of flux that is created by this perpetual movement results in an instability within human resources operations, which in turn makes it challenging to cultivate leadership from inside the organization.

Human resources mentoring and organized leadership development programs are also dispersed around the area. Human resources departments in Gurgaon, Noida, and South Delhi tend to prioritize short-term operational needs above leadership development due to the high rate of organizational scaling and restructuring in these regions. People Connect – Human Resources Mentoring, n.d., reports that many HR departments do not have the formal mentoring programs or rotational position mobility schemes that are necessary for the development of strategic HR leaders. As a result of this disjointed structure, HR departments

are less likely to take the initiative to develop succession plans and strategic talent pipelines and more likely to respond reactively to issues like attrition, compliance, and recruiting.

There is already a lot of pressure on HR leadership due to the fast changes happening in the business, particularly in the IT, e-commerce, start-up, and digital services sectors centered in the Delhi/NCR region. The dynamic nature of these industries' business models, workforces, and talent demands necessitates quick HR responses. The problem is that many metro-based companies' HR leadership approaches are stuck in the past and haven't adapted to the changing times (AiHR, 2023). As a result, HR leadership in the region is often under-prepared to manage culture change, talent forecasting and strategic workforce mobility.

Talent acquisition and retention, not internal HR leadership succession or job mobility frameworks, are the focal points of public policy pronouncements and HR site material from top Delhi/NCR organizations. Human resources leadership programs aren't often as structured as their marketing or operations counterparts. This organizational discrepancy suggests that regional HR departments could be busy with day-to-day operations but lacking in strategic planning.

When seen in comparison, the HR leadership cultivation problems in Delhi/NCR are similar to trends in metropolitan India more generally, but they are more condensed and intense. Human resources leadership development deficits are exacerbated in metro areas due to the confluence of rapid expansion, significant employee turnover, adaptable company models, and fierce competition for top personnel. Therefore, the HR leadership issues of India's national capital may be seen in Delhi/NCR. Companies in India are starting to see the strategic benefit of human resources, but they aren't always willing to put the money into the organized procedures that may turn HR into a true leadership function, such as mentorship, position mobility, and succession planning.

Accordingly, a unique "pressure zone" for HR leadership development exists in the Delhi/NCR area as a result of the combination of a highly mobile workforce, rapid industrial growth, and inadequate HR leadership development pathways. Modest adjustments won't be enough to alleviate these regional demands. In dynamic urban business ecosystems, organizations need to make sure HR is linked with strategic planning and decision making as well as with execution, provide rotating career pathways for HR professionals, and include structured HR leadership development into HR operations.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

Despite seeing fast economic growth and a worldwide footprint in business, the survey indicated that urban corporate centers such as Delhi/NCR have not spent enough in creating organized HR leadership frameworks. Despite the metro economies' reputation as trailblazers in innovation and corporate dynamism, their human resource departments are still not up to speed in moving from supporting operations to taking the lead strategically. The absence of HR-specific leadership preparation programs, established mentorship systems, and specialized leadership pipelines was a glaring example of this mismatch.

The increasing employee turnover, technological disruption, and under-recognition of HR in executive decision-making processes in Delhi/NCR are causing acute issues for HR leadership. Human resources professionals already have challenges in stabilizing, growing, and assuming key positions, and the fast-paced industrial expansion, particularly in the information technology and service industries, makes matters worse. Meaningful inclusion of HR perspectives on senior leadership teams is sometimes prevented by structural limits and cultural inertia, even in firms that have acknowledged the strategic relevance of HR.

According to the research, HR has to change its image and function immediately. Rather than seeing HR as an afterthought tasked with compliance and recruitment, companies should see it as an integral part of their strategy for fostering innovation, growth, and stability. To survive in fast-paced urban markets like Delhi/NCR, businesses must see human resources as an engine for strategy, innovation, and leadership succession planning.

Recommendations

To address the challenges identified, the following recommendations are proposed:

- **Develop Metro-Focused HR Leadership Roadmaps:** Human resource leadership development techniques in India's metropolitan areas should be adapted from international models such as the SHRM Competency Model and the Dave Ulrich HRBP Model.
- **Promote Internal Mobility and Mentorship:** Human resources departments should be able to follow formalized career pathways. Human resources professionals in the

middle management tier can benefit from structured mentoring programs in many ways, including the development of leadership abilities, exposure to other departments, and readiness for executive positions.

- **Establish Metro-Based HR Leadership Academies:** Public-private partnerships involving academia, corporate organizations, and policy think-tanks should be initiated to set up HR Leadership Academies in Delhi/NCR. These institutions can serve as centers for certification, leadership simulations, and best-practice dissemination.
- **Integrate HR Development into Corporate Governance:** Regulatory bodies should encourage companies to include HR leadership metrics within ESG or CSR reporting standards. Recognizing HR development as a governance priority can institutionalize accountability for talent leadership growth.
- **Foster Industry-Academia Collaboration:** Business schools and HR forums should design specialized certification courses focused on HR leadership in urban and high-pressure business environments. These modules can include real-life case studies from metro firms, preparing professionals for the unique challenges they face.

By following these steps, companies in the Delhi/NCR area may strengthen their HR leadership pipelines, which will benefit their organizations and the greater ecosystem of people-driven, sustainable growth in India's urban business settings.

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