

THE HINDU

We have an array of growth and development initiatives..... Hema Gopalakrishnan



The Chennai-based Rane Group, one of India's leading auto component manufacturers, has always strived for excellence. The group is known for its focus on TQM and operational excellence. The group has always strived to promote an innovative culture and create learning opportunities for employees. **The Hindu Opportunities** spoke to R Venkatanarayanan, President – Corp Services, Rane Group on its HR initiatives.

What is Rane Group's people philosophy?

Rane Group, a leading auto component company in India, celebrated its Platinum Jubilee last year and believes in the simple people philosophy of aligning aspirations, inspiring to take on challenges and partnering in healthy and profitable growth.

What is unique about your recruitment process?

While a rigorous selection process is practised at every level at Rane like most good companies, there are three facets where we stand out:

Our selection process is competency-based across levels and is linked to the current and future competency needs. We also have a centralised hiring process at entry levels for better control and consistency. The selection process is among the most rigorous in the industry with aptitude tests, psychometric profiling, and group discussion followed by personal interview to ensure the right fit. For lateral hires, competencies - both technical and behavioural - form the basis of selection.

We have invested heavily in creating a pool of senior HR and line leaders who are extensively trained in selection skills. This ensures both rigour and consistency in the recruitment process right from the initial stage. The interviewing process is further structured to ensure hire of 'right fit professionals'. There is senior management commitment to the recruitment process with the Chairman himself being involved in senior level recruitments.

We have a very strong and customised induction programme that varies with levels and the kind of talent being recruited. All new entrants go through programmes like "Know Your Group" and "TQM for new recruits". The programme is quite intensive with a blend of classroom and on-the-job exposure.

Can you share with us your initiatives for employee development and growth?

At Rane, we have an array of growth and development initiatives that ensure a smooth shift to the next generation of leaders. As part of this, development opportunities are provided to employees at all levels in a direction that best suits their talents, aptitude and ability. Our philosophy of growth from within provides employees opportunities for both lateral and vertical growth. The key to ensuring that this happens is our four-level professional Development Architecture (PDA), which focuses on identifying high performing individuals and grooming them for future roles. The focus is on developing leadership, managerial and domain competencies at senior, middle and junior levels. Development initiatives focus on strengthening conceptual skills followed by experiential learning and customised coaching. The core constituents of our PDA are specific training modules, job experiences, and participation in cross-functional teams and pre-scheduled programmes designed and delivered at Rane Institute for Employee Development (RIED) and other institutions of repute. Participants identify specific development projects and execute them based on the learning during these programmes. The programmes are delivered in multiple modules spread over a long duration of three to four months.

Rane Advanced Management Programme (RAMP) is a major programme that aims at building a robust leadership pipeline for future senior management positions. For senior levels, we introduced Coaching for Leadership development in 2006 and also customised Strategic Leadership Programme (SLP), like the one at IIM Bangalore. Our 60 senior managers underwent this programme.

Our 3P Initiative (People, Performance and Potential) criss-crosses levels with a focus on individuals with exceptional performance and high potential. Such talent has a line of sight with the top management with specific and targeted retention measures such as accelerated growth, larger and multi-dimensional roles, and competitive compensation.

“Learning updates series” are interactions with professionals from diverse backgrounds.

This is a regular feature. Underlying all this is our Annual Corporate Talent Review meetings which take stock of the ‘talent readiness’ to address the emerging business challenges. Talent Review meetings are designed to review the current talent status and future succession needs in the organisation.

The success of these initiatives can be understood from the fact that over 30% of the senior management talent in the organisation has multiple business/geography experience, and retention levels of such identified talent are in excess of 90%.

Tell us more about the Rane Institute for Employee Development (RIED)

The founders of Rane dreamt of RIED becoming a talent factory to build people, who in turn would become building blocks of industrialisation and growth. RIED’s operating principles are linked to business needs, emphasising practicality and transfer of learning to the workplace. Each employee spends 2% of working hours (six days) on relevant training every year. RIED is staffed by full time faculty and part time faculty drawn from the Group and outside. A blended learning approach is used.

A serene and excellent ambience is provided at RIED which is housed in a Silver certified Green Building. RIED plays a key role in our efforts to leverage the projected high growth in the auto

industry by providing training for building competencies and consulting for better production and management systems.

You have won awards for Excellence in Training. What contributed to this success?

We have been recognised for Excellence in Training by the Employer Branding Institute as part of Asia's Best Employer Awards. The entire gamut of Learning and Development framework right from training need identification to evaluation of its effectiveness is streamlined through processes that are meticulously carried out at each stage.

Application-based learning which leads to business results at workplace is the key attribute that defines Rane Group's approach towards building talent. Structured training needs emanate from strategic business plans, individual competency development plans and specific requirements. Both HR and line managers are involved in the process at appropriate stages. Effectiveness of select programmes is tracked for future improvements. RIED is of course a long-term investment which is a stellar example of our structured and future driven approach towards training.

What are your initiatives for gender equality and diversity?

Hiring efforts to improve diversity has increased and today when we look at our workforce, one would find the presence of more women among entry level hires and in new projects. Gone are the days where it was believed that manufacturing industry was for the men. Be it engagement, career development or any such aspect of our talent management framework, women and men are treated on par. As part of our affirmative action initiatives, we partner with NGOs, CII, etc., in skill building initiatives and extend training to students from less privileged backgrounds in our plant neighbourhood.

You have also won the Asia's Best Employer Award for Talent Management recently. What factors made this possible?

The HR vision of Rane is "To stimulate and nurture the intrinsic desire in people to learn, grow and enhance performance to achieve business success and growth". The secret lies in the commitment of our senior management to invest in the talent development process and to nurture a strong Employer brand. We strive to live up to our Employer Brand promise of creating an exciting workplace founded on the principles of values, fairness and transparency.

We believe in offering a 'career' to each employee which goes a long way beyond just a job.

The emphasis is on balancing the short, mid and long term aspects of career planning and management - wherein the focus is on a blend of delivery, continuous learning, acquiring a deep insights and mastery over one's core area. Our refreshed and updated Performance Assessment and Development System (PADS) aims at creating a High Performance culture by working on Individual Development Plans (IDP) to accomplish challenging targets.

Some of the strengths that have come out in the internal and external employee perception surveys are pride in the company and its brand image, pride in the management credibility, meaning and purpose in the job and opportunity to learn and grow.

A more important sign for us is that a good number of those who left Rane are returning of late.

What do you think makes Rane unique in terms of HR practices as compared to other companies in your industry?

HR at Rane partners with the business at the corporate level in formulation of strategies and in developing organisational capability for achieving business goals. At the business unit level, HR is embedded into leadership teams, which brings about a collective ownership and collaborative culture towards talent management. Crafting clear roles with elements of stretched goals and ownership, involvement in development projects and key assignments promoting individual contribution and value addition through cross functional teams bring in a meaningful experience in employees' work life. Engagement levels are enhanced by aligning individual goals with organisational ones, assessing performance with focus on both results and competencies and by adoption of robust processes for identifying and developing high potential talent. Continuous benchmarking within and across industries for identifying and implementing appropriate best practices is unique to Rane.

What is your HR agenda for the future?

To intensify engagement with employees across levels to promote and sustain a stable employee relations climate

To nurture and support a culture of innovation

To identify and develop leadership talent at all levels to drive our business agenda of profitable growth

To build a succession pipeline for all key and critical positions with full succession cover

To leverage the multi-generational workforce for pursuing opportunities on a global scale

Increased use of technology and tools like social media. Recently, we have implemented SAP HCM. We will be launching a Social Intranet based employee portal to promote collaboration and continuous real time learning.

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