

SMT is an empowered, multi-skilled and energetic team

Developing an internal talent pool is important for organisations as it represents significant savings in terms of recruitment costs and on boarding time. Self-Managed Teams (SMTs) represent a unique way of providing employees with the opportunity to develop leadership skills and establish a supportive work environment. Dr. Reddy's Labs has realised this and developed innovative talent management strategies. **The Hindu Opportunities** spoke to Mr. Saumen Chakraborty, President & Global Head of Quality, HR & IT, Dr. Reddy's Laboratories to know about these strategies in greater

detail. **What prompted the idea to develop self-managed teams in your organisation? How did the idea germinate?**

In 2001, Dr. Reddy's was trying to understand how the organisation could be aligned to deliver better results. The idea was to build an organisation without the pitfalls of the conventional organisation and serve as a benchmark in terms of speed of response to customer needs, first time right and overall plant efficiency. Keeping this in mind, the SMT concept was introduced first at our formulations manufacturing facility



at Yanam in 2002 and later at Baddi in 2005.

The concept being new at that point of time with few precedents, especially in the pharma industry, required efforts to gain initial buy-in. A core team was formed and an external consultancy was roped in to study and understand the SMT concept implemented in other companies. They then brainstormed the concept and designed the implementation plan addressing the concerns raised by various internal stakeholders.

SMT is an empowered, multi-skilled and energetic team with day-to-day operational decision-making ability. The team largely handles plant operations, with minimal supervision from a handful of senior-level people called the Hand Holding Team (HHT) who serve primarily as guides rather than typical 'bosses'. In this model, people are responsible, accountable and feel a sense of ownership.

You have mentioned that your SMT idea is aimed at 17-18 year olds and provides a platform for them to develop decision making skills but do you really think that high school students can undertake such responsibilities? How do you equip them to develop such skills?

In the SMT Way of working, the idea is to create a talent pool for our plant operations. We recruit candidates in the age group of 18-20 years with 10+2 qualification. Our recruitment process enables us to get the right candidate.

As they join, there is heavy emphasis on training. Just after their induction, for the first three months the focus is on "Pharma Basics" delivered through a partnering technical institute. During this period, they are also given behavioural training emphasising the desired attitude at the workplace.

Once they are deployed on the shop floor, they are placed under the guidance of Hand Holding Team (HHT) members who are involved in design and delivery of the training to the SMTs. They ensure that the SMTs are equipped with the necessary skills during the six month on-the-job training.

As they work, they also pursue higher education - a graduation programme after completing two years of training, facilitated by the company through a partnering institute. Most of the earlier batches of our SMTs are now graduates/post graduates and have grown in their profession. Today, some of them handle important roles in Dr. Reddy's and even in other organisations.

What is the selection

process for these SMTs?

We follow a scientific selection process for SMT recruitment. The candidates are recruited from rural and sub urban areas within a 100 km radius of the plant. The six stage selection process comprises initial screening, aptitude test, psycho diagnostic test, dexterity test, group discussion and personal interview. Over these stages, we ensure that the incoming talent pool has the desired aptitude, are good at performing work with the requisite training, have the necessary motivation to work and gel with teams.

How is this idea different from on-the-job training provided to regular employees? How do those selected for this programme benefit?

SMT training is customised to meet plant operation requirements while keeping in mind their background (10+2) at the time of joining. Therefore, it is more thought through, structured and organised. An SMT member while working, earns, acquires knowledge and skills and also undertakes a higher education program. Thus, the model is beneficial to all - the employee, the company and the society.

In addition, during the initial two years all SMTs live together as a community facilitated by the company which helps in nurturing strong team work and togetherness among them. Engagement initiatives built around the community living and at the workplace help in building ownership and belongingness.

How is your idea of developing internal talent from SMTs different from those followed at other organisations?

In our plants the SMT way is taking roots and thereby development and growth opportunities are open to them. This is a defined process of movement based on knowledge, skill, ability and education.

Over a period of time, as they acquire knowledge and multiple skills, their growth opportunities increase.

What are the benefits you have gained from the programme?

The SMT concept is a part of our talent management strategy for our manufacturing operation. The benefits are immense. An agile and energetic workforce helps implement any new initiative quickly. In such plants, the overall productivity is higher than traditional plants. Their curiosity and inquisitiveness paves way for a culture of continuous improvement resulting in business benefits. The operations are more seamless as resources have now become flexible and can handle multiple tasks. Decision making is fast and thus timely execution is assured. The enthusiasm of an SMT member is remarkable and their pride in their work is noteworthy.

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