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For the first time ever, HR has become the frontline: Sanjeev Roy

In an exclusive interview with ETHRWorld, Sanjeev Roy, executive coach and organisation & leadership development consultant, talks about how to make virtual collaborations work, skillsets required for winning a job opportunity in the new normal and the power of purpose.

Rajesh Barnwal ETHRWorld

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Sanjeev Roy, Co-Founder and Managing Partner, Bullzi



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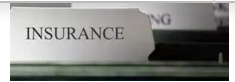
Sanjeev Roy is Co-Founder and Managing Partner of Bullzi Inc. His first innings of 20 years was in advertising industry. In his current innings, Roy works as an executive coach and an organisation & leadership development consultant. He has coached over 100 leaders and has helped design structures and performance management systems for many organisations. Recently, he collaborated virtually to form a four-member team that has authored 'Here Today Here Tomorrow', a compilation of short stories about the possible future scenarios in a Covid-19 era.

In an exclusive interview with ETHRWorld, Sanjeev Roy talks about how to make virtual collaborations work, [skillsets](#) required for winning a job opportunity in the [new normal](#) and the power of [purpose](#). Edited excerpts:

How has the [HR function](#) evolved over the last few months?

For the first time ever, HR has become the frontline. Today, HR is standing shoulder to shoulder with the CEO in the daily operational role of running the organisation. That I think is an enormous change and shift. The other major change has been huge focus on employees whether it is working from home; activities or concerns about job security, increments, mental health so on and so forth. HR has become the key flag bearer for both the CEO and the organisation. So, that's another big change. The third important change is at the strategy level. HR always has had a role, once an organisational strategy was kind of broadly agreed then HR would look at how the whole people piece fitted into that. But today any talk of strategy invariably involves HR right from the start.

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Do you think the interaction between HR head and business head has increased and has it become more meaningful?

Absolutely, they have not only increased but also the role of HR has become a lot more significant and important.

In the current situation when people are working from diverse geographical locations, and some are working from home, how to make virtual collaborations work?

That's like a big question which covers a very large ground. Let me start by saying that I'm not going to talk to you about all the things that are necessary for making collaboration work in general. But beyond that. We are talking about virtual collaboration.

The sense of shared purpose and a shared goal becomes even more important. The reason for that is if you were in a physical situation, the presence of a person, friendships, things that you could do, the fact that you could actually go out and resolve an issue, go together to have a coffee, put your hand on somebody's shoulder, I like this person that person likes me... all of those things often played a major role in collaboration. You could assume that these four people can work together as a team. But when it comes to virtual collaboration, all of this is gone. To a large extent, if you were buddies, it helps in the virtual world, like it does anything in life. But the comfort of all of this, the ability to talk to resolve this, that etc is gone to a large extent. Therefore, the role of shared purpose and goal becomes even more critical. So, in a virtual collaboration, there must be a reason why



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collaboration has to result and that it has to bring. That is shared purpose and shared goal. I think it is one very key important distinction.

The other thing to make this virtual collaboration work is to ask, is this meeting necessary? Every meeting, you must question, is this meeting necessary? What is the cost of having this meeting, who all actually need to be in this meeting? If we are still operating from the mindset of the physical space that we were, it doesn't work, because as it is, people are working from home, they're dealing with different kinds of challenges, the office comes into the home. It is very important to ask whether or not some meetings are necessary.

Communication is very important, but over communication is not. What is important is that you're communicating the right things and because it's virtual, clarity is important. It becomes very important that what you are saying is what the other person is hearing.

And then, I guess, to make this virtual collaboration work, processes have to be very clear and agreed upon. You put your empathy into action. Otherwise you will think that empathy is ok but how does it translate into action? To make virtual collaboration work, the process has to take the person's individual situation into account, something that if you were in office, you didn't need to do because you're supposed to be in office between A and B time but in virtual collaboration this is very important.

So, in terms of process, what are the factors that one should keep in mind while scheduling meeting?



One, as I said, putting empathy into action — finding what works for me — timing of meetings/deliverables. Second is to ask yourself the question, is the meeting necessary? Third is what is the purpose of this? What do you hope to achieve? What is it that people must come prepared with, all of that needs to be clarified in advance. You might just have a brainstorming meeting. So, it must be clear that this is a brainstorming meeting about this topic. So, please come prepared. Because you want people to spend the optimum amount of time in that meeting, not less, not more. Because people also get fatigued with these kinds of virtual meetings, they are more tiring than the physical meetings.

Then the usual things like you've got to celebrate together some success together. You had some success, there must be acknowledgement of each other. Because this is the way in which you keep that emotional side, that emotional connect. People must, at least the leader must, do individual, personal check-ins with other members of the team. Stuff like that, which you would do in a physical world, you need to continue to do in an online world as well.

What are the skillsets required for winning a job opportunity in the new normal?

One, of course, is that if you happen to be somebody who has the skills for the industries that are growing then you will get an opportunity. Let's talk about people who are in professions like media, communication, hospitality sectors which have been adversely affected by this [pandemic](#). I think the first thing is a given, it's like hygiene factor to me, you must have the skills to be able to work virtually. You

it's Zoom or Teams, whatever it is that you're on, you need to be able to work on that. If you want to make a presentation, you need to know how to create that presentation and load it and make it. That's like a hygiene factor.

Then the next thing that is required is that you have to be somebody who has a demonstrated history of being accountable on their own note, who take responsibility on their own, because that's very important in the virtual world. There is nobody who can really keep a tab. And if somebody has to keep a tab, it becomes a bit of a mess, which is what we are seeing in many places now. You have to be somebody who takes initiative, does things on their own, you have to be personally very organised in keeping, storing information; if there's something being discussed, you should be able to access your stuff very quickly. These things were different in physical world, somebody often organised it for you. Here you have to do all of it alone. Life will be very difficult if you're not organised. So that's like another very general skill that is required.

You have to be dependable. You have to be a good communicator, you have to be very clear about what you say, your articulation has to be clear, because you don't have the comfort of people around you know; and in a limited time, you have to say things which are very clear. Therefore, clarity of communication is required. These are the general skills that are required to succeed in the virtual world.

Do you think organisational development has received the attention it deserves in India?

It has begun. I'll tell you something very

believe. There was a set of people who actually have done a lot of work on organisational development at another time and those are the public sector companies. They've had HR practice, and they've had organisation development. And then it became like, it's a bureaucracy. So, they had their own issues and challenges, but they've done more than private organisations in terms of looking at organisation development. For private organisations, this is more sort of, you know, late 90s onwards, it has started happening. It's something that is certainly gathering steam, a lot of entrepreneurs, businesses of the larger sectors have gone for it, medium and small sector benefit hugely when they practise, though the numbers could be better. The New Age organisations, those that were new 10 years ago, they certainly have adopted the organisation development as a key aspect of the way to think about organisations and business. But a lot of older firms, a lot of people in the SMEs could actually gain a lot. I think they still have some distance to cover.

What is the power of purpose?

In today's world, without a purpose, it is very difficult to get anywhere... without a common purpose, because that is what really keeps people together. If you want to be attractive to your consumers, you have no option but to be purpose driven. In a profit versus purpose fight that has been going on in business for a long time, basically profit has always won. Today, that's not going to happen, you have to be authentically purpose-driven. Otherwise, people will reject you if they see you as profiteering, somebody who's not concerned about other people, or the environment, about equality. It's not just stated purpose; it is

In the pandemic, your business model changed, right? I mean, think of somebody like Disney; their whole big business of the theme parks. That's more or less gone, a very large part of the revenue is gone. But if Disney were to think through the lens of their defined purpose of 'making people happy', then that purpose remains relevant forever. So, that is the anchor around which they can build their future, their whole theme park, trying to reimagine what it would be and how to do it and all that. It has to take into account who they are and what they do. So, purpose is central.

With your experience of interacting with companies during leadership training, how often have you noticed that companies actually have a purpose? And have they communicated this purpose clearly with the employees? Do you see this happening?

More and more. This is the second phase of my professional life. I've been working with some organisations for over 13-14 years, my journey started in 2004. And we've done some work on purpose and values, because purpose and values work closely. In the beginning, the way it was communicated, and the belief and strength with which it was communicated and how it became all pervasive within the organisation, was very different. It seemed to be more about saying exactly the question that you're asking, but not so much in practice. But over time, and I'm very hopeful because I've seen it over time, these things began to change over the years. Actually, more and more organisations have taken these things into consideration and really started embedding them into their culture. This also had to do with younger leadership; things have changed. The younger leader

differently about what is it that takes people along? So, I have definitely seen it change for the better. Having said that it's still work-in-progress, which it will be. I mean, I don't think we would have a situation where it is 100-0 or 99-1.

Please say something about 'Here Today Here Tomorrow', not necessarily about the book, but the title, it's very interesting.

It is too. It is about the pandemic, which is something that is here and there are so many possibilities on how this could pan out. What is definite is that no matter how it pans out, meaning that if you have a vaccine now, that if you could get vaccinated in another six months' time or if there is a medicine that came out, or the virus itself mutated and became so weak that it became just another virus, all these are possible, right? So, no matter what happens, what is definite is that this whole thing is going to leave its impact and its imprint. So, it's here today and here tomorrow. So, that's the concept.

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when everything else fails, the culture helps an organisation to perform and deliver: Experts

"Career stints have shortened like never before, hiring for specific projects is already on the rise – is there any relevance for the concept of culture anymore? I am of the opinion that culture is more deeply seated in the minds of employees and their behaviours that a simple change of place of work cannot really alter it," says Anitha Kaveri, Manager - Sectors and Special Projects, IET India.

ETHRWorld September 21, 2020, 10:55 IST

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Without creating a culture of innovation, a company cannot grow: Suchita Oswal Jain, Vardhman Textiles

Innovation and Entrepreneurship at workplace are very relevant, says Suchita Oswal Jain, Vice Chairman and Joint Managing Director, Vardhman Textiles. "We



and scenario of innovation, a company cannot grow," Jain told ETHRWorld in an exclusive interview.

Rajesh Barnwal ETHRWorld September 09, 2020, 16:02 IST

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ETHRWorld Contributor September 06, 2020, 17:37 IST

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Rajkumar Trikannad

Excellent summation and agree all points. Thank you Rgds , Capt TR Retd Trg and Adm

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Most apt in summary ref Here Today Here Tomorrow'--Honestly the Pandemics has left all absolutely neither here nor there--esp Lock down

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Crisis is a great leveller, a strict teacher, a consistent normalizer and it is also a great drama when it comes to behaviours that manifest in a variety of ways.

ETHRWorld Contributor October 05, 2020, 07:43 IST

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