Chapter 6

HUMAN RESOURCES COMMUNICATION

The emerging trend in human resources management is clearly toward the adoption of the human resources (HR) approach, through which organisations benefit in two significant ways: an increase in organisational effectiveness and the satisfaction of each employee's needs.

Some of the principles which provide the basis for human resources approach are: (a) employees are instruments that will, if effectively managed, and developed, provide long-term rewards to the organisation in the form of greater productivity; (b) policies, programmes and practices must be created that satisfy both the economic and emotional needs of employees; (c) a working environment must be created in which employees are encouraged to develop and utilise their skills to the maximum extent; and (d) HR programmes and practices must be implemented with the goal of balancing the needs and meeting the goals of both the organisation and its employees.

In this chapter, communication is viewed as an instrument for achieving or facilitating to achieve the HR goals. Thus typical HR functions like training, induction, performance appraisals, as well as upward communication systems like suggestion scheme, employee grievance redressal machinery, exist interview and even employee letters in the in-house magazine are discussed. The idea behind
this is to study how information and knowledge are shared mainly in the top to bottom and bottom to top directions.

6.1 Performance Appraisal System

The Annual Performance Appraisal System is an important tool for managing human resources in an organisation. This is a process of evaluating an employee’s performance in his job in terms of its requirements. It also refers to all formal procedures used in organisations to evaluate the personalities, potential and contribution of group members. It is an assessment of the characteristics, traits, skills, experience, and performance of employees. It is a process of determining how well the employees perform their jobs vis-a-vis a set of standards, and communicating that information back to them.

The performance appraisal system has three functions: (a) to provide adequate feedback to each individual for his or her performance; (b) to serve as a basic for improving or changing behaviour towards some more effective work habits; and (c) to provide data to managers with which they may judge future job assignments and compensation.

The communication value of the performance appraisal process has to be considered here. Each manager knows clearly what specific assignments are undertaken by those whom he supervises. The responsibilities, in general, have already been communicated in job descriptions. While job descriptions reflect an effort to achieve overall co-ordination, are too broad and do not provide the
required integration and balance in the short-term application of the limited resources allocated to each job.

The performance appraisal process provides a way of thinking about, and approaching of, the task of informing participants about the organisation's goals to be achieved, how these goals relate to overall objectives, and the relative priorities that consequently should be assigned to the various goals. In terms of organisational communication, this provides an ideal opportunity for the manager to effectively communicate such plans, objectives, goals, and assessments that can facilitate delegation of work as well.

In the human resource management function, the performance appraisal is useful in making decisions regarding various personal aspects such as promotions, transfers, increments, promoting morale and motivation, training and development for individual needs, and identifying strengths and weaknesses. Hence the system ensures a two-way communication process in which the manager gets the views and perceptions of the appraisee and he gets a feedback on his performance in the designated position. In KRL the appraisal of officers is done in two parts. Part one is self-appraisal and part two consists of the evaluation of performance by the reporting officer.

Self appraisal is a step towards participative performance appraisal system. In KRL it is giving an opportunity to each individual for introspection and to assess his performance objectively. It is expected that the officer highlights his
achievements and non-achievements. It describes the present tasks and responsibilities assigned to him. It also acts as a reminder for the reporting officer as to the extent of his achievements and non-achievements. In addition, it helps to reduce the disparity and misunderstanding between the appraiser and the appraisee.

The self appraisal consists of a description of the following aspects: the duty presently assigned for the year, major achievements, important activities or targets that could not be accomplished, evaluation of his communication with colleagues, subordinates and supervisors, communication skills, and assessment of ability to get along with others, self development achievements during the year, contribution to subordinate development, areas of strength, and areas where help is required.

In KRL, the performance appraisal form is filled in by the reporting officers (who are in grade D and above). The reporting officer has to clearly record the training needs as well as his views on job rotation plan and potential of the assessee to take up higher position. The reporting officer suggests whether the employee needs any job rotation and the recommendation on the employees’ potential.

The employee’s views are also recorded by the reporting and reviewing officers.
In the next phase, the performance attributes of the officers are described. Attributes are based on a 5-point scale. The rating scales are ‘outstanding’, ‘above average’, ‘average’, ‘below average’, and ‘deficient’. Only if the reporting officer feels that a particular attribute is relevant for the officer, he will consider that attribute for assessment. An attribute which is not relevant to the officer is marked as non-relevant. The various attributes being assessed in KRL are: knowledge of work relevant to the present position, cost consciousness, problem solving ability and innovativeness, foresight, resourcefulness and initiative, adaptability, leadership by example, subordinate development, ability to work in a group, moral courage and stability, working under pressure, and assessment of target-setting.

The reporting officer gives the final evaluation of the officers of his position. In short, it is the summary assessment of the effectiveness of the officer during the year. Here also the reporting officer rates the appraisee on a 5-point scale - ‘outstanding’, ‘more than adequate’, ‘adequate’, ‘barely adequate’, and ‘inadequate’.

Another important phase of the performance appraisal system is counselling. It is perhaps the most important part of the system. KRL attaches high importance to this. It is conducted at a prescribed date and time. Often, about half an hour is set aside by the reporting officer for each employee for this purpose. In certain departments where there are large number of employees, that too in rotating shifts, the time taken for counselling is normally less.
The performance appraisal discussion is conducted by the reporting officers who are in grade D and above. The minutes of the discussion are recorded in the appraisal form. These completed forms are countersigned by the reviewing officer who is normally the head of the concerned department. The counseling interview is conducted by section heads for officers up to grade C and by the head of the department for officers from D to F. The points discussed are: achievements, non achievements, employee viewpoints and counseling comments.

The last phase of the appraisal is the target setting which is filled up by the reporting officer. In this the key tasks including the deadlines are agreed for the next year and the personal action plan is also recorded.

6.2 Suggestion Scheme

One of the bottom-up communication processes which fosters innovativeness of employees is the suggestion scheme. This involves employees identifying ways to improve the activities or systems and putting forward the suggestions to a committee for consideration. Employees are to identify what the problem is, how it can be solved, what the benefits are expected to be, and any other problems. If adopted, the employee making the suggestion is usually rewarded with cash or gifts. Some organisations given such an employee a percentage of the resultant savings. But the feeling or recognition is what employees generally weigh more than the money.
KRL has a systematic programme by which employees of all grades and departments can make suggestions for the improvement of the functioning of the company. The suggestions could be on minor improvements in the technical areas or other non-technical functions. The scheme encourages all employees to examine the functioning of the organisation critically and make use of their creativity for the development of the organisation.

It is intended to make use of the knowledge, creativity and innovativeness of all employees which could be harnessed for improving the organisation's performance. It also helps to make employees feel that they play an important role in the organisation irrespective of their positions. Besides building trust in the organisation the employees could feel that their voices are also heard and that the management is seriously considering their worthy suggestions which may be of innovative nature.

The company has announced that the scheme is “to encourage all employees to put forward new and constructive suggestions which will improve the operations of KRL”.

The scheme covers all the activities of KRL including manufacturing, productivity, economy in expenditure, improvements in methods of working and procedures, rationalisation and simplification of working systems and methods, technology, safety, employee welfare, environment, community development and the image of the company.
The scheme does not include the following activities: a) any complaint about an existing method/system, etc. without suggesting an alternative, b) any individual grievance regarding wages, promotion or any other related matter, c) complaint about another employee and d) any suggestion regarding the company’s personnel policy and other policy matters requiring negotiations with recognised unions, government authorities or any other external agencies.

All permanent employees of the company are eligible to participate in the scheme. They can send suggestions not only in their own area of work, but also in other areas of the company.

The procedure for participation is as follows: 1) Suggestions are to be made in writing in the prescribed form available at all the departments at the reception counter. The completed forms are to be put in to suggestion boxes prominently kept at the entrance. 2) Suggestions from the suggestion boxes are collected on the first working day of every calendar month. Separate forms are to be used for separate suggestions. 3) All suggestions are serially numbered and entered in a register maintained by the co-ordinator of the scheme. 4) Acknowledgements are sent by the co-ordinator to the employee concerned within five days of collection of suggestions from the boxes.

The suggestions are grouped into five areas, as given below, for the purpose of evaluation:
Area 1: Manufacturing department
Area 2: Maintenance, Technical Services, Materials and Stock & Oil Movement departments
Area 3: Finance department
Area 4: Project department
Area 5: Human Resources department

For evaluating the suggestions there is a high-level committee with the following members: director (finance), general manager (operations), general manager (human resources management), deputy general manager (finance & accounts) and the concerned deputy general manager of the department to which the suggestion pertains.

In addition to these members, the committee can co-opt other deputy general managers to act as an additional evaluation members, if considered necessary.

The procedure for evaluation is also clearly laid down. At the outset, the co-ordinator sends two copies of the suggestions received to the deputy general manager of the area concerned. Then the deputy general manager concerned would co-opt another head of the department in any related department for comments on the suggestions, whether they are fit, useful or practicable for implementation. If the suggestion is not fit or useful, nor practicable for implementation, and therefore for the award, the head of the department concerned
would send a report to the co-ordinator for the same within seven days stating reasons for non-acceptance of the suggestion. The co-ordinator in turn would inform the status to the suggestor.

The evaluation committee would assess within 15 days all the suggestions and if found fit or useful or applicable would be granted an award ranging from Rs.200/- to Rs.5,000/-. In respect of suggestions where any proposal is to develop any experimentation model and the suggestor is not in a position to furnish sufficient details on paper, the committee can, if necessary, call the suggestor for a personal presentation of the suggestion. On being satisfied about the feasibility of the suggestion, an expenditure upto Rs.10,000/- can be sanctioned by the committee for implementation by the concerned department. However, suggestions requiring funds for more than Rs.10,000/- for developing such models it would require prior approval of the chairman & managing director. But in practice KRL had received only a couple of such serious suggestions for experimentation ever since the scheme was introduced more than a decade back. Another lacuna in the system which is observed is that the scheme has attracted only workmen and junior officers only. There has not been many suggestions from middle and senior management members during the 3 year period.

The overall administration of the scheme is done by the HRM department. An officer from this department duly authorised in this regard is the co-ordinator of
the scheme. At present it is the deputy general manager (personnel). It is the responsibility of the co-ordinator to ensure that the valuation is completed within the stipulated period. For implementation and follow-up of approved suggestions, the responsibility is with the DGM of the concerned group to which the suggestion recommended for award relates and shall be required to do systematic follow-up of the same. Quarterly progress reports have to be submitted by them to the chairman and managing director with a copy to the scheme co-ordinator.

As per the policy, a monthly report is to be submitted to the CMD by the co-ordinator by the 7th of every month on details of suggestions received, evaluated, awards given to the suggestors, implementation and follow-up of approved suggestions.

Table 6.1
Details regarding the Suggestions Received during 1997-1999

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No. of suggestions received</th>
<th>No. of suggestions accepted</th>
<th>Total amount spent (in rupees)</th>
<th>Maximum amount given to a person (in rupees)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1100</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1250</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Kochi Refineries Limited Database of the HRM department

As shown in Table 6.1 only very few suggestions were received and the total financial expenditure during the three year period 1997-99 was only
Rs.4350. An examination of the rejected suggestions and discussion with members of the suggestions committee revealed that most of the suggestions lacked innovativeness and creativity. Almost all of them were on trivial matters. In practice neither the committee members nor the top management have high opinion on the way this upward communication channel is functioning.

6.3 Employee Grievance Redressal

KRL has a regular mechanism to enable employees to ventilate their grievances. Communication could be of an individual nature where a particular employee feels that he has been denied justice by a management action.

Once an employee has a genuine complaint, he can approach his immediate reporting officer or section head or even the head of the department where he works. If he still feels that his complaint is not mitigated, he can approach the grievance committee.

To avail this facility the employee has to lodge the grievance in writing in the prescribed form and submit it to his immediate supervisor. This formal grievance will pass through different stages in a time-bound manner. In extreme cases it passes through five stages.

In the first stage the immediate supervisor records his views on the matter with his signature and the date. The employee’s reaction is recorded beneath that. If the employee is convinced and his grievance is redressed a reply will be sent to him and the grievance is treated as closed.
If the grievance is not redressed in the first stage, the document is forwarded to the head of the concerned department. The head of the department (HOD) makes a personal hearing and his comment is recorded as in the case of the first stage. The HOD is supposed to examine the matter thoroughly without fear or favour and come to an objective conclusion after applying his mind. The decision is then communicated to the employee in person and his views are recorded and signed. If the grievance is redressed, then the matter is treated as closed and a communication is sent accordingly. If not, it goes to the third stage which is the grievance committee level.

The grievance committee consists of four members, two representing the management, the other two are members from each of the two trade unions of workers in KRL. The issue is discussed by the committee thread-bare. Very often there are sharp differences between the two rival unions. The management representatives might have a third view on the matter. But at times grievances are redressed at this level. Once the grievance is redressed the file is closed and a communication is sent to the employee accordingly.

If the employee is still not satisfied with this decision he can go to the next level where he gets a personal hearing by the director (refineries) who in turn examines the case independently and a decision is taken by application of his mind. Still if this decision is not acceptable to the employee either, he can avail the last stage which is called the appellate stage. The grievance is presented to the
CMD and he personally hears the complainant. He, after serious discussion with colleagues and examining all original records, takes the final decision. There are occasions where decisions are taken by the CMD in favour of the employee deviant from the decision of the members at various stages the grievance had passed through.

The grievances redressal machinery in KRL is working effectively and employees do have credibility in the system. The management also takes the grievances seriously and they spent quite a lot of time in discussing and studying the different aspects of the grievance with an open mind. This has been proved to be an effective bottom-up communication channel in KRL.

6.4 Exit Interview

KRL has a systematic method to elicit the views and impressions of an employee just before his superannuation. This personal interaction between the employee and the head of the department is called communication interview. In the organisation it is a solemn activity which is considered as very important by both the management and the employee.

A couple of days prior to his retirement the employee gets a formal communication inviting him to attend the exit interview at a stipulated place, date and time. Normally it is chaired by the general manager (human resource management) and attended by the head of the department where the employee is working. He is given opportunity to freely express his feelings about his job,
organisation, grievances if any, or suggestions for improving the working of the organisation. Normally it lasts an hour. The observations are recorded in the exit interview report which covers the retiring employee’s impressions on the company, the job, salary and perks, career development, department colleagues, superiors, subordinates, team work, co-operation, recognition and retirement benefits.

After completing the report the chairperson signs it and submits it to the HRM department, which is supposed to take follow-up action. But in practice there is no action taken once the reports are submitted.

6.5 Letters in House-magazine

‘Letters to the editor’ page is a forum in a publication where readers can express their opinions, ideas, suggestions, complaints for the attention of authorities or other readers. Ideally it reflects the aspirations and expectations of the common people.

The monthly inhouse magazine of KRL JwalaDhwani devotes one page for letters to the editor. During 1999 the magazine published 83 letters to the editor and in 2000 it was 77.

Even though this is a forum for readers who are employees of the organisation to share their appreciation and complaints, almost all the letters published are of a positive nature either appreciating the contents of the publication or at times suggesting improvements.
In spite of the fact that there are nearly 2000 employees in the company the magazine is finding it extremely difficult to get letters for publication. To fill up the page the organisers of the magazine manage to collect letters from employees using follow ups and compulsions. Those letters are normally reflections on the literary work published in the magazine.

Even though it is a good forum where complaints and suggestions could be aired which would function here as a corrective to the official dogmatism the letters often do not reflect such sentiments.

At the same time it cannot be viewed as a situation where all employees are content and satisfied. The high number of grievances lodged formally in other forms show that there exists a large number of issues the employees like to ventilate. Hence it can be seen that this page is not effectively made use of by the employees.

An investigation was carried out whether letters containing negative reactions or criticisms are actually received and if they were rejected by the editorial section. It has been found that such letters are not received by the section. When asked about whether such letters would be published if received, the members of the editorial section of the house magazine answered in the negative.

A cross section of employees stated that they did have other platforms where formal interactions were possible when they had grievances, like the
grievance committee and the trade union system, and hence the one way communication system like letter in house magazine was not necessitated. The lack of receipt of letters was also due to the feeling among readers that there is no use in sending such negative letters as they feel that such letters would not be published.

6.6 Employee Training

KRL believes that its greatest assets are the human resources. The philosophy of the company is as follows: "We believe to develop and maintain a human resource which is motivated from within and to facilitate fullest expression of potential for self and organisational excellence. We also believe that organisational growth will be materialised only by harnessing human potential available with us and through continuous learning."

Emanating from this approach KRL has firmed up its approach to training. The KRL management hold the view that training is a continuous process by which they can improve the performance of the employees.

To put this mission into practice, the company has specified the implementation scheme into a more practical language. The salient features depicting the approach to training are: (a) training should be considered as a developmental tool to acquire new knowledge, skills and capabilities and attitude, (b) it should ensure that all officers and workmen receive at least minimum quantity of training measurable in terms of man-days as envisaged,
(c) adequate budget should be earmarked for imparting state-of-the-art training, and (d) supervisors are primarily responsible to train their subordinates.

Accordingly KRL is providing job-specific functional training to all its employees. It provides managerial or supervisory training to its officers. Also it gives opportunities to its employees to acquire skills and capabilities for personal growth and self-development by nominating them for a number of training programmes on self-development. KRL conducts a variety of in-house functional as well as behavioural programmes for its employees at different levels. In addition, the company has been nominating its employees to training programmes conducted by various professional institutions scattered all over the country and at times abroad.

The training starts on the day a person joins KRL. In an employee’s career in the organisation, between the initial induction programme and the retirement training or rather the exit interview he or she passes through a series of training programmes. In a year one employee spends at least three days for training.

**Induction**

KRL has a planned, deliberate and systematic induction programme for anyone who joins the organisation at any level or grade.

Along with the appointment order a copy of the same is sent to the candidate selected for appointment which he has to return along with that his signature as a token of acceptance of the offer for appointment. Once the
acceptance letter is received the company informs the candidate in writing as to the date and time on which the candidate has to report for duty along with the name and designation of the officer the person has to meet.

Normally the candidate is asked to report for duty at 8.15 am on the first working day of the succeeding month. In rare cases they are asked to report on the mid of the month. This is to facilitate planning and careful implementation of the induction programme. Hence the newcomers can be grouped in such a way the common calendar of activities can be implemented which saves time, energy and cost.

Immediately on completion of the joining formalities the newcomers are put into a 5-day induction programme. This is a structured activity which is intended to make them familiar with the culture, style and systems in the organisation. It is a sort of acclimatisation exercise. Another major objective is to give an opportunity for the new employee to meet a cross-section of the employees working in various departments and listening to them to know what those departments or sections are engaged in. Hence it provides a chance for the newcomers to establish contacts with the existing employees and also vice versa.

On the first day of the induction programme each newcomer is given a copy of the *Induction Manual* and a copy of the schedule of activities to be completed in the next five days. The *Induction Manual* is a 88-page printed handy booklet which describes in detail as to what an employee should know
about the organisation. It also explains the duties and responsibilities in a lucid, simple, comprehensive and interesting manner. On the one side of each page there is description and on the other an illustration reinforcing the key message on that page. (Appendix 3) The content titles of the booklet are as follows:

a) Introduction: KRL - a look back, product and product movement, process growth, effluent treatment, employment, working results, manpower, and our mission, philosophy & objectives

b) Company policies: Getting a job in KRL, method of selection, working hours, time sheet, unauthorised absence, payment of wages, communication, promotion policy, leave, holidays and safety

c) Pay and allowances: Pay structure, dearness allowance, house rent allowance, self leave accommodation, maintenance, daily allowance

d) Advances: House building advance, vehicle purchase advance, furnishing advance and festival advance

e) Terminal benefits: Provident fund, gratuity, superannuation benefit fund, and post retirement medical scheme

f) Benefits and welfare measures: Medical centre, medical benefit plan, group personal accident insurance scheme, employees' education, schooling for employees' children, merit scholarship, company housing, company transportation, canteen, consumer co-operative society, recreational facilities, ambulance, funeral expenses, uniforms, safety shoes and helmet, training

g) Company discipline: Public utility service, continuous operation of the refinery disciplinary rules, no smoking, and entry and exist

h) Services: Personal cheque cashing, petrol, diesel and LPG

i) Procedures: No objection certificate, notice periods, change of name, coupons, and company cars
k) General Information: House journal - JwalaDhwani, visitors, car, scooter or motor cycle stand, medical claim, salary payment, employee’s suggestion scheme, overseas assignments, and oil territorial army.

Copies of the schedule of induction are sent to all departments in advance, at least a week before, to enable the departments aware of such an appointment made which they cannot postpone or cancel. High importance is attached by the departments to make short oral, informal presentations of what they are doing in that department/section. After that the newcomers can ask questions and clear their doubts. Normally they meet the head of the department to start with and then they are taken to different sections under him.

By the end of the 5-day induction programme a newcomer gets to know of the various activities the organisation is engaged in. This enables him to have a general understanding of the scope and magnitude of activities. It also helps the new employee to get a holistic picture of the organisation and its culture.

KRL has a well defined training system a procedure details the system for identifying the training needs, providing training and evaluating the training.

The scope of training encompasses all levels of employees, both supervisory and non-supervisory staff on various aspects of work and attitude. Hence there are technical programmes so as to impart training on the latest trends in executing a job with a view to updating their job knowledge and improving their skills. These are essentially grouped into different categories based on the work they do.
There are other programmes that are behavioural in nature, intended to make the employees think positively and prepare them to face challenges. These are aimed at preparing the right mindset to make them better human beings.

The procedure with budgetary estimate and details of programmes of the year is prepared by the head of the training section who is normally a senior manager or chief manager. It is reviewed and approved by the general manager (HRM). The section head is responsible for the effective implementation of the programme.

The training calendar prepared by the inhouse training section is schedule of programmes with details on the dates, venue, faculty, target group, topics and the number of seats. Even though the calendar for a financial year is expected to be released much before the commencement of the year, often the calendar is prepared on a quarterly basis, with details of programmes coming up in the next couple of months only. The calendar however facilitates every department head to have a glimpse of the nature of programmes both skill training and behavioural ones so that they an nominate himself or his subordinates for programmes he thinks should be of use to them.

Inhouse training programmes are conducted using external or internal resource persons.

At the end of each training programme conducted inhouse, feedback forms are distributed to participants and the completed forms are collected back then and
there. For the external programmes, feedback forms are given along with nomination forms and collected back on return after the programme.

The HRM department utilises the feedback for modifying, planning, revising and repeating purposes of the programmes.

The records of all external training programmes undergone by the employees during their career are maintained by the HRM department as a database. Regarding the internal training, records of employees during the last two years are maintained as a database. Registers and correspondences concerning internal and external training programmes are maintained for a period of two years.

Training Targets

KRL, every year, signs a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas, Government of India detailing targets to be achieved during the particular financial year relating to various activities of the company. As part of this MoU the company has been setting targets for training man-days for its employees. Over the years, KRL has successfully achieved its training target in terms of training days per employee per year.

During the past seven years under study KRL has exceeded the planned training mandays target except for the year 1995-96. The drop during that year was due to certain industrial relations problems when the workers decided to boycott all training programmes. In 1998-99, the training targets have been
substantially increased as compared to earlier years. A total of eight days of training was achieved per employee for the year 1998-99. This compares well with the prevailing norms for training man-days in India as well as abroad.

**Training Need Identification**

The training needs of officers at KRL are identified as part of the annual performance appraisal system. An officer and his reporting officer identify the nature of training required, and this is recorded in the appraisal form. This is often done in consultation with the appraisee. A copy of the form giving details about the training needs of officers is sent to the training section. This section in turn attempts to nominate officers based on the training needs listed for them. In addition, the training section sends the brochure on different training programmes being organised by various institutions outside to department heads for recommending the relevant training programmes. The responsibility for identification of training needs is entrusted with the concerned department heads by the training section. Being persons not properly trained themselves in training need identification the system is not managed in an ideal manner, and employees generally feel that all are not getting enough opportunities to get themselves trained in the state-of-the-art disciplines of their choice.

**Training for Promotee Officers**

In KRL about 40 per cent of the vacancies in grade A (i.e. first level officer position) are filled up by internal promotions. It has been found that the
effectiveness of promotee officers is rather low, and that they find it difficult to perform effectively in their roles.

Till recently, promotee officers were trained in a supervisory development programme of a two-day duration. Many times even this training is not provided immediately after the promotion and gets delayed by as much as an year. However the company has started a five day training programme exclusively for this group during 1999-2000.

Management Training

Engineers, and officers in the non-technical categories are mostly recruited at the entry level as management trainees, and they have to undergo a one-year management training. The trainees are given inputs on management concepts, statutory requirements and a thorough on-the-job training by the concerned departments.

The programme structure is as follows: Induction programme of three weeks duration for engineers and of two days for non-technical trainees. The statutory training for engineers has three modules of about one week each. The training, consisting of three modules of about one week each, is conducted as laid down under the Section 41c(b) of the Factories Act, 1948. A written examination is administered after the statutory training and the successful participants are issued a certificate. KRL is one of the two organisations approved by the
Government of Kerala to conduct statutory training. The examination is conducted by the Cochin University of Science and Technology, Cochin.

**On-the-job Training**

The department heads are responsible for the effective conduct of on-the-job training. It involves an initial three-week working in different departments on a rotation basis. After exposure to different technical departments, a pre-placement interview is conducted for all management trainees.

On the basis of the aptitude and learning levels of the individual from the training they had, they are posted in different sections. Thereafter, a seven-week departmental training is provided to them about the fundamental technical concepts relating to the department. On completion of seven weeks, a panel of three section heads interviews the trainees. Once they qualify this absorption interview management trainees are assigned to work in different shifts under the close supervision and guidance of the concerned section-in-charge.

**Safety Training**

KRL attaches great importance to safety training and is reported to be the only refinery in the country which plans to cover all the employees for safety training every year. This practice of safety training reminds the employees of the importance of safety in a hazardous plant like a refinery. More importantly, it communicates the message to all the employees working in the company that they all have a role in safety management irrespective of their departments or grades.
Training which includes classroom lectures and practical training is conducted every week. Each employee is duty-bound to get safety training at least once in every year. Classes are conducted by the internal faculty. There is systematic planning, implementation and evaluation in the safety training which is managed by the safety section itself.

**Hindi Training**

Apart from conducting training programmes in technical as well as behavioural areas, KRL is regularly imparting training in the use of Hindi. Being a public sector undertaking, the company has to comply with the rules relating to popularisation of the national official language within the organisation. Besides regular classes in Hindi for those who have not learnt the language at school and others who are interested, are conducted by the Hindi section which is manned by five post-graduates in Hindi.

In addition, Hindi workshops are conducted at regular intervals involving all grades and categories of employees. These include spoken Hindi workshops. Special training programmes are also organised in-house on bilingual operation of computers.

Besides book-lets and other printed literature, a quarterly Hindi magazine, *JwalaDhwani Trimasik*, is also published for circulation among employees. Other learning aids like linguaphone courses with audio cassettes and booklets are also employed by the Hindi section.
As a part of the Hindi language popularisation, literary and cultural competitions are organised every year. A large number of employees participate in these competitions for which prizes are presented at a colourful ceremony organised as part of 'Hindi Fortnight’ celebrations.

**Job Description**

Every officer in the organisation is given a description of his specific duties and responsibilities in writing. Hence the officer knows what he is expected to do at the workplace. While he is served this description normally by the head of the concerned department or section, he can seek clarifications on the nature and scope of his specific tasks.

**6.7 Professional Updation Scheme**

KRL has a special scheme to encourage the officers of the company to regularly update their professional knowledge by making use of any knowledge capturing activity of their choice.

The policy of the company states that KRL has been concerned with the pace of development taking place in all spheres of its operations. Presently, the management cadre staff is involved in discharging their obligations in the various operations like different branches of engineering, finance, human resource management, computers, administration and R&D. To update a professional continuously they have to read journals and books on the areas they are working.
The company scheme is to give financial support for officers to undertake activities to procure latest information and knowledge. The extent of reimbursement is subject to the annual monetary ceilings for various categories of executives. For grades A, B and C, the annual monetary ceiling is Rs.3000/- and that of grade F, E and F is Rs.4,200/- For grades G and above the ceiling is Rs.5,400/- per annum. All officers of KRL had availed this facility during the financial year 1999-2000. The effectiveness of the facility is not being evaluated by the company.

Training for Outsiders

KRL considers it as a social responsibility of the company to extend available training facilities in the company to unemployed persons, mostly students, to equip themselves for gainful employment elsewhere. However, considering the limitations for such training infrastructure the following guidelines are established to regulate demands of such trainees:

Application for unpaid training will be entertained from the children of employees as well as students sponsored from other institutions. Children of employees who have passed diploma in engineering as well as graduates or post graduates in any discipline will be admitted for such training. In case of students sponsored by institutions they shall be imparted training as part of their curriculum for their professional or post-graduate courses. The duration of training and rotation in various departments will be decided by the company. Trainees will be issued
with a certificate showing the duration, performance and conduct during the training.\textsuperscript{4}

In addition to this the company provides facility for regular students of professional colleges to do internships and project works in the company. Normally about 10 students are permitted at a time.

Beyond the social responsibility angle, this programme has a bearing on the knowledge sharing part of the employees themselves. It provides an opportunity for the employees to get to know of the latest curriculum and sometimes new information from the fresh students. This also accelerates their thinking and analytical capabilities as they have to suggest suitable topics to the trainee students and guide them throughout. In fact this is in reality a learning and sharing experience enriching both the employees and the students.

6.8 Critique

From the above discussion it is clear that some of the HR communication activities are not properly being utilised by the employees and the management. One example is the letters page published in the house magazine. This is in a way similar to the suggestions scheme, grievance redressal mechanism and evaluation systems. In addition to such forums for free exchange of opinion there is another function of 'whistle-blowing'. It means employees making public the wrong-doing of an organisation. Forums like grievance mechanisms cannot mould public opinion as their deliberations are done often in camera or in small-group
meetings involving a small section of employees. Hence it can be seen that the letter to the editor mechanism is a potentially powerful tool for bottom-to-top and horizontal communication and it is underutilised if not unutilised in KRL.

The organisation has a systematic performance appraisal system for the officers for actively involving in the communication process which is affecting his worklife. The self appraisal system provides the facility for upward communication. But whether this self appraisal is made by the officers are done in a highly honest and responsible manner is doubtful. Hence the self appraisal is not often taken with the degree of seriousness it should get as most of the self appraisals are reflecting perfect, overrated performance levels. However, the appraisal system has a built-in provision for recording the comments of the appraisee in addition to the opportunity given through the self-appraisal sheet. This surely provides the employee with a formal situation where his voices are heard and recorded.

The suggestion scheme of KRL is also a ‘well-oiled’ and well-conceived machinery for bottom-to-top communication. But the small percentage of employees participating in the scheme indicate that the scheme is not effective. The management feels that most of the suggestions received are too trivial and that very little value addition is got out of the suggestions. It is an opportunity lost in triggering innovative culture among employees, which is a prerequisite of a knowledge-managed company.
The exit interview system is considered as an important activity in KRL, and is conducted in a serious manner. It does provide valuable suggestions from an employee who has put in long service in the organisation is retiring. Though these reports are carefully made and meticulously filed, virtually no follow-up action is taken. In spite of the fact that no systematic follow-up action is taken on the suggestions made it gives a chance to the employee who can express his mind freely, and it gives him a feeling of being heard. The lack of serious follow up action is blow to the knowledge management process.

However, the commitment to training reveals that KRL is committed to making itself a learning organisation by encouraging continuous education among its employees. Its insistence on the minimum number of mandays for training every employee must undergo is a testimony to this. Not only in formal classroom learning sessions but also in informal on-the-job training through talks and lectures the company creates opportunities for learning as an on-going process.

At individual levels employees are encouraged to upgrade their knowledge by joining part-time courses for which the company sponsors the candidature and reimburses the expenditure they incur on tuition fees and books.

Another interesting aspect of the training in KRL is the personalised way in which learning opportunities are created. Officers are allowed to take individual memberships in any two professional bodies of their choice and the company reimburses the membership fees. This should be viewed as an attempt by KRL to
provide a chance to the officer to gain knowledge from the similarly placed professionals working in other organisations. Such a networking can result in enhancement of their own knowledge levels.

However it is doubtful whether the professional updation cost reimbursed by the company based on simple certification is really made use of for the purpose it is meant. There is no mechanism to test what the officers do with this money. Often such facilities are in practice treated by employees as a financial benefit and nothing beyond that.

Another noteworthy feature of KRL training programme is the continuity of training sessions throughout an employee's career. Many employees are seen undergoing training in entirely new fields, like computers, at the fag end of their career. It enhances their employability even after retirement. To prepare the employees and their spouses to face the retirement and to lead a worthy life they are given intensive training in post retirement possibilities much before their superannuation.

All these consistent efforts to make employees learning, are leading the company towards its aim of becoming a learning organisation. However the in-house training section should concentrate on improving the quality of training-in terms of training need identification, selecting the faculty, designing the course-content, follow-up programmes and assessing whether trainees are leveraging the knowledge they could acquire for the organisational development. In short the
focus should be shifted from the narrow view of training to the wider concept of total education of employees befitting that of a learning organisation.

KRL is making use of communication in small groups which is of a face-to-face nature. The organisational practices are discussed in the next chapter.

References

2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.