

EMPLOYING PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES (PWDs) IN THE INTERNATIONAL QUICK SERVICE RESTAURANT INDUSTRY: A CASE OF PIZZA HUT SRI LANKA

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Abstract: It is nearly 8.7% of the Sri Lankan population is identified as persons with disabilities (PWDs) who are more likely to be economically disadvantaged and have limited access to employment. It is mandated to allocate 3% of the government jobs to the PWDs; however, no such guideline is applicable for the private sector employees. Scarcity of labour is a critical challenge in Sri Lankan industries. More than ten international quick-service restaurant (QSR) brands operate in Sri Lanka, with an active workforce of 15,000 employees. There are about 10,000 vacancies created in the QSR industry every year, arising from employee resignations and business expansions, which have become challenging for employers to fulfil. In such a context, Pizza Hut Sri Lanka has launched an outlet that PWDs exclusively operate to strengthen their diversity and inclusion agenda. In this case study researcher focused on the virtue model on which Pizza Hut Sri Lanka has built its diversity and inclusion strategy while exploring the steps involved in setting up this unique outlet for the first time in the world. Further, the researcher has analyzed the critical operational parameters of the said outlet compared to the overall performance of Pizza Hut Sri Lanka to understand the impact of employing persons with disabilities in Pizza Hut on its operational performance.

Keywords: Persons with Disabilities (PWDs), Diversity, Inclusion, Employment, Quick service restaurant industry (QSR)

I. Background of the Study

Today, the world's population exceeds 7 billion people. Over one billion people live with some form of disability which amounts to 15% of the global population, where 80% of the said demography live in developing nations (United Nations, 2020). According to the Department of Census and Statistics statistics, the total number of persons with disabilities in Sri Lanka is 1,617,924, which amounts to 8.7% of the total population (Department of Census and Statistics, 2012). However, the World report on disability estimates that 12.9% of the Sri Lankan population has a disability. They are more likely to be economically disadvantaged and have limited access to education, skills development services, and employment (WHO and World Bank, 2011)

The Sri Lankan government has shown commitment to improving the quality of life of people with disabilities by introducing the 'Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, No. 28 of 1996', which was limited to access to education, employment and physical accessibility to public places. The National Policy on Disability was introduced in 2003 to promote and protect the rights of persons with disabilities (PWDs) in the spirit of social justice. The policy promotes a framework that allows the PWDs to enjoy a whole and satisfying life and contribute to national development with their knowledge, experience, skills and capabilities as equal citizens of Sri Lanka. Also, with the ratification of UNCPRD (UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities) in 2016, the government was accountable to formulate local legislation in line with UNCPRD. Accordingly, the Disability Rights bill was formulated with public participation in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCPRD) and enacted by the Parliament by 2020 (Sri Lanka Action Plan, 2019).

In Sri Lanka, persons with disabilities have been marginalized and frequently denied opportunities to engage meaningfully in the public sphere (UNDP Sri Lanka, 2018). In 1988, the Ministry of Public Administration, Sri Lanka issued a Circular on the employment of persons with disabilities, allocating 3% of government sector jobs to them. This quota was expanded to the private and semi-governmental sectors in 2004 (National Human Resources

and Employment Policy, 2012). UNDP Sri Lanka (2018) states that there is no evidence of the execution of the said actions; as a result, Persons with Disabilities consider that this circular was not implemented in accordance with the intended timeline as well as employment opportunities in the private sector are limited and available only to a minute fraction of the PWD community. This is a result of employers' negative perceptions, which are exacerbated by a lack of sensitivity and practical understanding of disabled people's talents and abilities and their needs and rights to employment (UNDP Sri Lanka, 2018).

1.1 Overview of Quick Service Restaurant Industry & Pizza Hut Sri Lanka

More than 10 international quick restaurant brands operate in Sri Lanka with a diverse product range of pizzas, pasta, burgers, tacos, and fried chicken. All these brands are members of the Association of International Restaurant Franchisees of Sri Lanka (AIRFOS). The said industry segment employs more than 15,000 employees in their outlet networks. On average, the labour attrition rate is 70% per annum, where there are more than 10,000 employment opportunities created every year to backfill the vacancies due to resignations. Also, the industry is expanding at a steady rate which further creates employment opportunities. Quick service restaurants aim to provide faster service to their customers. There are three transaction categories: dine-in, takeaway, and delivery. In-store time is a critical operational parameter that measures the time taken from order placement until it serves the customer or is dispatched as a delivery. The in-store time is varied from 3-14 minutes based on the nature of the QSR brand. In international QSR brands, customer experience and customer complaints are also vital operational parameters in running a successful restaurant operation. All the international QSR brands expect their employees to be multi-skilled, where a team member is expected to carry out all the activities involved in the operation.

Founded in 1958, Pizza Hut has become a dominant brand in the global quick-service restaurant industry, with more than 18,000 outlets spread over 116 countries at present. In 1993 Pizza Hut was launched in Sri Lanka and is currently managed by Gamma Pizzakraft Lanka Pvt. Ltd. as the single franchisee. 85 Pizza Hut outlets are presently operating in Sri Lanka, with a workforce of more than 2,250 employees. Pizza Hut Sri Lanka is paying a greater emphasis on its people practices. It has been selected as a great place to work in Sri Lanka by Great Place to Work Institute for seven consecutive years and ranked as the 18th best workplace in large organization category in the Asian region.

1.2 Purpose and Significance of the Case Study

The main objective of this case study is to understand the impact of employing persons with disabilities in Pizza Hut on its operational performance. It is essential to understand whether the employment of PWDs has any adverse effect on the operating parameters in the QSR industry as the case study could be considered a positive influencer for the other QSR brands to consider PWDs for employment, which will undoubtedly address a pressing social issue of unemployment among the PWD community.

The research has suggested that persons with disabilities (PWDs) are more likely to be unemployed when compared with people without disabilities (Kalargyrou & Volis, 2014). Baker et al. (2002) suggest that persons with disabilities are marginalized as a stigmatized minority group due to negative beliefs and these social barriers that will limit their career opportunities. Despite decades of social and legal efforts to better integrate persons with disabilities into the workplace, employment rates for adults with disabilities have gradually declined over the last two decades (Burkhauser et al., 2012). Disparities in hiring can be reduced through increased employment prospects for persons with disabilities. Furthermore, increased employment is linked to better social and community inclusion, which can help alleviate negative attitudes toward persons with disabilities (Barnes & Mercer, 2005). Also, the case study will provide confidence to the prospective employers to hire persons with disabilities as an integral part of their active labour force.

II. Empirical Review

Virtue, which has traditionally been debated in philosophical contexts, is now a concept and notion in organizational research. While initial studies on virtue conducted on ethical managerial behaviour (Whetstone, 2003), there are researchers in the positive organizational study movement who are exploring the role of virtue contributes in key organizational performance areas such as innovation, turnover, quality and profitability (Cameron et al., 2004). Current virtue theory research suggests a relationship between virtuous behavior, corporate leadership, and organizational performance (Barclay et al., 2012). Barclay et al. (2012) have further suggested that the application of virtue theory could be helpful in the study of meaningful employment experiences for people with disabilities.

It is necessary to define virtue before adopting a virtue ethics framework. Virtue, according to Whetstone (2001), virtue is a "qualitative trait." He also claims that virtue (ethics) is a learning process that motivates people to act in the social community. Integrity, compassion, and courage are examples of virtues (Caza et al., 2004). According to Chun (2005), organizations apply virtue ethics to discover "what kind of organization they should be." This is comparable to Aristotle's discussion of what it means to be a decent person (Flynn, 2008). (Chun, 2005) suggests that organizations could identify virtues in order to differentiate themselves in the marketplace. Organizations that have taken proactive measures in the inclusion of persons with disabilities at work have found that such behaviour has helped with the overall business strategy (Barclay et al., 2012).

Organizations will be able to better offer meaningful career opportunities for PWDs by facilitating and practicing virtue. Theories assert that virtue arises from higher-order phenomena, such as an individual's values or an organization's actions toward a greater purpose (Barclay et al., 2012). According to Arjoon (2000), virtues, organizational mission, and the environment in which it operates are interlinked. He further suggests that virtue theory allows for "sensitivity and appreciation of conditions and possibilities which are not highlighted in traditional approaches." As a result, when organizations engage in virtuous conduct, PWDs are better integrated into the workplace. Cameron (2003) suggests that an organizationally virtuous setting boosts social capital. People share more information, develop stronger relationships, and trade valuable resources. Applying the virtue construct and related theory to the integration of PWDs into the workplace would focus the discussion on proactively identifying and exchanging the required knowledge to assist employees to thrive in their workplace. This is in contrast to typical approaches in the disability literature, which emphasize the costs of accommodations, the social isolation of the disabled person, or unequal treatment (Robert & Harlan, 2006). Meanwhile, Barclay, et.al (2012) proposed that if an individual respect an organization's essential values, they are more likely to accept the employment of a PWD rather than engage in stereotyping and stigmatization, where they will not consider someone is incapable just because of a disability.

III. Methodology

Research team was able to associate the project team that launched the world's first Pizza Hut, which persons with disabilities exclusively operate since the main author is a full time senior employee of the company. Being a leadership team member of the organization, the main author of this study interacted with the senior management team of Gamma Pizzakraft Lanka Pvt Ltd who played pivotal roles in launching diversity and inclusion initiative in Pizza Hut, Sri Lanka. As a result, it was able to determine the information in the secondary source framework to release some managerial-level information for the case study content, in line with the information disclosure ethics. It has collected secondary data from the organization's management information system pertaining to the critical operational parameters. Also, the main author conducted interviews with selected senior management professionals of Gamma Pizzakraft Lanka Pvt Ltd to gather information on the challenges encountered, perceived success and the future direction of the diversity and inclusion agenda of the organization followed by the organizational procedures. The overall research team main focused the undermentioned areas as the key drivers to examine the case study.

Labour Turnover (LTO) - Labour turnover is a crucial operational matrix used to evaluate the operational excellence of an outlet equal to the number of employees left the organization/ outlet, divided by the average total number of employees.

Employee retention rate (ERR) - It is visible that there is higher attrition during the first 90 days of employment in the QSR industry. Hence, Pizza Hut considers employee retention rate as a key people parameter. ERR is computed by dividing the number of employees who stayed with the organization through 90 days by the headcount of the starting day of those 90 days.

Customer Satisfaction Index (CSI) - CSI is the most critical performance parameter used to measure the overall satisfaction of the customers on the products and services offered by the outlet. The CSI is a cumulation of customer survey scores on overall satisfaction, the taste of food, speed of service and staff friendliness. The data is voluntarily collected on a daily basis using an online survey from a respondent group of over 10,000 customers.

Operational Efficiency Index (OEI) - OEI is used to measure the efficiency of the outlet operation where the time taken to obtain an order and prepare an order is measured.

2. Discussion of Case Findings and Data Analysis

4.1 Diversity and Inclusion Initiative Launched by Pizza Hut, Sri Lanka

In order to introduce diversity and inclusion initiatives, Pizza Hut, Sri Lanka, launched the world's first-ever Pizza Hut outlet exclusively operated by persons with disabilities. The outlet was launched in November 2018 at Thimbirigasyaya. This outlet caters for its customers in all three channels, dine-in, take away and delivery. The total outlet comprised 23 team members, and 15 of them were persons with disabilities who were hearing and speech impaired. Only the outlet manager, shift manager and the delivery riders were persons without disabilities. Pizza Hut, Sri Lanka, partnered with The Ceylon School for the Deaf and Blind and recruited a batch of students in May 2018 who had completed a course in the bakery industry. These recruits were trained in the Pizza Hut training Centre and outlets to orient them for the outlet operation.

4.2 Recruitment and Orientation of PWDs

A special project team was set up in January 2018 to drive the diversity and inclusion strategy of Gamma Pizzakraft Lanka Pvt Ltd. During the brainstorming stage, the project team was skeptical of the ability of PWDs to obtain an order from a customer and to prepare the pizza within the standard order preparation time. In 2018, none of

the QSR brands had operated an outlet with persons of disabilities; hence the team had to draw learnings from other industries that have employed PWDs. The research provided some level of confidence to the project team, but they could not find an operation where the PWDs are directly interacting and servicing customers. There were multiple industries that employed PWDs in production lines and back-office operations. This made the project team doubt the ability of PWDs to be exposed as frontline staff to communicate and service the customers as the Pizza Hut operation does not practice segregation of duties at the team member level. The team members are expected to carry out all ground-level activities, including cashiering, serving customers, food preparation, stock management, and outlet cleaning. However, the project team was determined to overcome the challenges associated with the initiative by implementing a robust execution plan.

The initial challenge was for the Pizza Hut staff and the trainers to communicate with the recruited PWDs using sign language. In order to counter this challenge, a unique training programme was conducted to enable them in communicating using sign language. During the process, it was found out that there were no standard signs available for some of the terms used in day-to-day outlet operation. This resulted in the Pizza Hut trainers working collaboratively with the PWDs to invent signs which are unique for the outlet operation. These recruits hadn't worked anywhere before and required a greater degree of support to settle in. While the trainers were equipping them with necessary operational skills, the project team realized that the families of these recruits had a significant role to play in the success of their careers. Hence, a special orientation programme was conducted to the parents of the PWDs, explaining to them the organizational policies on attendance, leave, rewards and career development. The parents were explained the importance of motivating and assisting their children in having a long and successful career with the organization. Also, both the parents and the recruits were trained on the importance of saving and essential personal financial management tips.

4.3 Developing Customer Communications

While the recruits were trained in the essential outlet operation, the project team started working on customer communications as it would be a novel experience for the customers. It was decided that the look and feel of the Thimbrigasyaya outlet located in the Colombo city limit remaining consistent with all other Pizza Hut outlets in Sri Lanka, except for a notice board at the entrance to educate the customers that the outlet employs persons with disabilities. Also, a tabletop was designed with frequent signs required by a customer to communicate with a team member enabling customers to have a greater level of interaction (Annexure 01). Also, the recruited team members were trained to obtain customer orders using the tablets.

4.4 Providing Equal Opportunities for PWDs

The employees with disabilities are equally treated as the other employees with similar pay levels, working hours and career development opportunities. Also, employing persons with disabilities has not incurred any additional cost to the organization by way of training, insurance or employee welfare.

4.5 Creating a Positive Brand Image

The initiative of providing employment opportunities for persons with disabilities have been highly recognized by multiple stakeholders, namely the existing employees, customers, government institutes, Pizza Hut International and various social groups who have an active interest in diversity and inclusion. With the proven success of the Pizza Hut outlet in Thimbrigasyaya, Gamma Pizzakraft Lanka Pvt Ltd has decided to focus on diversity and inclusion agenda as their long term corporate social responsibility strategy. The organization has developed a communication strategy that focuses on creating awareness for the work done among the community and general public, as opposed to direct advertising. The organization has not carried out any paid advertisements to talk about this initiative, but it has gained significant momentum in print, digital and audiovisual media. Employees with disabilities employed at the Thimbrigasyaya outlet were even featured in BBC news due to the uniqueness of this initiative. The media coverage and interest generated thus far, combined with potential coverage generated from future activities, will help to drive and emphasize the diversity and inclusion strategy of Pizza Hut Sri Lanka, displaying the brand's commitment towards equity, opportunity and unity. This initiative has resulted in a positive brand image as a socially responsible employer.

4.6 Medium-term Diversity and Inclusion Strategy

In 2020, Pizza Hut International revitalized its diversity and inclusion agenda under the theme of 'An Equal Slice for Everyone'. The diversity and inclusion efforts carried out by Pizza Hut Sri Lanka received a high level of recognition from Pizza Hut International. Further, Pizza Hut Sri Lanka was highlighted as a proven case study for the other end markets to conceptualize their action plans. Many Sri Lankan organizations sought the learnings of Pizza Hut to deploy diversity and inclusion practices in the respective organizations by including persons with disabilities in their active workforce. Pizza Hut Sri Lanka has decided to launch two more outlets that PWDs exclusively operate to maintain the required visibility for the initiative to drive a powerful message to the interested parties. To further strengthen the diversity and inclusion strategy, the organization has pledged to provide employment opportunities to PWDs, amounting to 10% of its total cadre. This exercise will make the entire organization an inclusive workplace where every Pizza Hut outlet in Sri Lanka will employ 2-4 persons with disabilities.

4.7 Descriptive Data Analysis

Data pertaining to the operational indicators were obtained from the management information system for the years of 2019, 2020 and 2021. The Pizza Hut Thimbirigasyaya outlet's indicator scores were compared with the average scores of the overall Pizza Hut operation in Sri Lanka to ascertain whether there is any adverse impact of employing persons with disabilities on the overall outlet performance.

Labour Turnover

The labour turnover records for the period of review indicates that Pizza Hut Thimbirigasyaya outlet has a lower level of employee resignation rate for 31 months out of the 36 months compared to the national mean. Further the annual mean of Thimbirigasyaya outlet records a lower labour turnover rate compared to the national mean for the period in review.

Table 4.1 : Analysis of labor turnover figures for 2019, 2020, 2021

2019	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
National Mean	4%	3%	6%	8%	8%	7%	7%	8%	6%	7%	8%	6%
Thimbirigasyaya	0%	0%	4%	0%	9%	8%	6%	0%	6%	5%	5%	5%

2020	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
National Mean	8%	7%	2%	2%	4%	3%	3%	4%	4%	3%	4%	6%
Thimbirigasyaya	0%	5%	0%	0%	0%	3%	11%	6%	0%	3%	0%	6%

2021	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
National Mean	6%	7%	4%	6%	4%	4%	4%	4%	3%	8%	5%	7%
Thimbirigasyaya	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	7%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Table 4.2 : Analysis of annual mean values of labour turnover for 2019, 2020, 2021

	2019	2020	2021
National Mean	6.43%	4.04%	5.08%
Thimbirigasyaya	3.93%	3.20%	0.98%

Employee Retention Rate

The employee retention rate for the review period indicates that Pizza Hut Thimbirigasyaya outlet has maintained a higher level of employee retention for 29 months out of 36 months compared to the national mean for employee retention. Further, the annual mean of Thimbirigasyaya outlet for employee retention records a higher rate than the national mean for the period in review.

Table 4.3 : Analysis of employee retention rate for 2019, 2020, 2021

2019	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
National Mean	81%	83%	82%	81%	76%	78%	76%	77%	78%	79%	78%	81%
Thimbirigasyaya	100%	100%	92%	96%	86%	86%	89%	88%	83%	70%	70%	71%

2020	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
National Mean	78%	79%	85%	90%	94%	93%	89%	86%	88%	92%	92%	91%
Thimbirigasyaya	84%	89%	100%	100%	100%	95%	89%	88%	89%	85%	89%	88%

2021	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
National Mean	87%	82%	80%	79%	83%	88%	87%	85%	81%	79%	74%	73%
Thimbirigasyaya	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	82%	100%	100%	100%	86%	73%

Table 4.4 : Analysis of annual mean values of employee retention for 2019, 2020, 2021

	2019	2020	2021
National Mean	79%	88%	82%
Thimbirigasyaya	86%	91%	95%

Customer Satisfaction Index (CSI)

The customer satisfaction index scores were not available for the months of May and June 2020 due to the limited operations resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic. The data suggest that Thimbirigasyaya outlet has recorded a greater CSI score than the national average for 32 months, where a lower CSI score was prevalent only for four months out of 34 months considered for the evaluation.

Table 4.5 : Analysis of customer satisfaction index for 2019, 2020, 2021

2019	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
National Mean	93	93	92	92	93	93	93	93	94	95	95	94
Thimbirigasyaya	98	94	96	97	95	98	95	100	100	95	90	100

2020	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
National Mean	90	90	89	N/A	N/A	89	92	92	93	93	91	93
Thimbirigasyaya	91	96	94	N/A	N/A	73	98	96	97	94	92	92

2021	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
National Mean	92	91	93	93	88	89	92	91	91	91	92	91
Thimbirigasyaya	99	95	92	93	95	86	98	91	95	93	96	91

To further elaborate on the overall performance of the outlet, the annual mean of CSI scores Thimbirigasyaya outlet was compared with the Annual mean of overall Pizza Hut operation in Sri Lanka. The data suggest that Pizza Hut Thimbirigasyaya outlet has recorded a better CSI score for the review period than the mean score of the overall Sri Lankan operation.

Table 4.6 : Analysis of annual mean values of customer satisfaction index for 2019, 2020, 2021

	2019	2020	2021
National Mean	93.33	91.20	91.17
Thimbirigasyaya	96.50	92.30	93.58

Operational Efficiency Index

Analyzing the operational efficiency index scores for the 36 months from January 2019 till December 2021 reveal that only for six months, Thimbirigasyaya outlet has scored a lower operational efficiency compared to the national mean. However, the Thimbirigasyaya outlet has recorded a significantly higher annual mean value on operational efficiency than the other outlets' mean score in Pizza Hut Sri Lanka.

Table 4.7 : Analysis of operational efficiency index for 2019, 2020, 2021

2019	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
National Mean	95.8	87.3	91.6	90.5	86.8	86.7	86.4	90.5	87.8	86.4	88.5	86.0
Thimbirigasyaya	98.7	93.4	100.0	100.0	91.8	93.8	85.5	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	98.4

2020	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
National Mean	85.1	85.5	87.7	91.1	89.9	89.3	89.6	89.2	88.7	86.5	89.2	83.3
Thimbirigasyaya	92.5	95.5	87.4	100.0	96.2	95.9	86.5	87.0	88.7	86.7	90.1	87.9

2021	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
National Mean	85.4	88.3	94.5	95.6	94.6	92.7	97.1	91.2	93.0	92.9	93.0	87.2
Thimbirigasyaya	93.0	93.0	90.7	99.0	94.9	92.2	92.0	94.7	100.0	95.3	94.6	93.5

Table 4.8 : Analysis of annual mean values of operational efficiency index for 2019, 2020, 2021

	2019	2020	2021
National Mean	88.69	87.93	92.13
Thimbirigasyaya	96.80	91.20	94.41

IV. Conclusion

The findings of the case study strongly justify the efforts of Pizza Hut Sri Lanka in employing persons with disabilities in their outlet operations. The key operational parameters have proved that the disability of such employees has not resulted in any hindrance to the overall operation where the specific outlet, which is exclusively operated by PWDs, have recorded superior performances compared to the national mean value on key operational parameters. Also, the views shared by the senior management of the organization outlined the steps taken for the successful implementation of diversity and inclusion initiatives and the benefits derived, such as customer loyalty, high recognition and greater brand visibility. Also, it is proven that there are no additional costs involved in providing employment opportunities for PWDs. Pizza Hut Sri Lanka is envisioned to provide inclusive employment opportunities for persons with disabilities in the international quick-service restaurant sector to create a youth community equipped and empowered to live with dignity, purpose, pride and hope. Further, the case study's findings align with the virtue model's theoretical framework where virtue arises from higher-order phenomena, such as an organization's actions toward a greater purpose. The findings of this case study could essentially justify the quick service restaurant industry or any related industry to include PWDs in their active workforce, which will ensure a win-win solution for both organization and the employees while addressing a pressing social concern.

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Annexure 01

