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Managing Employee Relations in Blended Workforce with Special Reference to Ashok Leyland Ltd, At Hosur.

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the operational and relational dynamics of blended workforce models in the manufacturing sector by examining Ashok Leyland Ltd.'s Hosur Plant 1. The findings emphasize the importance of strategic workforce integration, inclusive communication practices, and equitable treatment across permanent, temporary, contractual, and outsourced employees. Using qualitative observations and organizational analysis, the study investigates the impact of vertical (manager-employee) and horizontal (peer-to-peer) interactions on team cohesion and productivity. The case demonstrates how a well-managed blended workforce can enhance responsiveness, innovation, and operational efficiency in complex manufacturing environments..

Key words: Blended workforce, Employee relations, Organizational culture, Contract labor, Team cohesion, Vertical communication, Inclusion.

INTRODUCTION

The landscape of the manufacturing industry has undergone profound changes over the past few decades, driven by technological advancements, shifting workforce dynamics, globalization, and evolving business needs. One of the most notable transformations has been the rise of the blended workforce model, where companies combine full-time employees with blended workers. This shift reflects broader changes in the labour market and the ways organizations manage human resources to remain competitive and adaptable.

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

The concept of a blended workforce has gained significant traction in the manufacturing industry, especially as companies seek to adapt to changing economic conditions, technological advancements, and shifting labour market dynamics. A blended workforce model integrates full-time employees with temporary, contract, and remote workers, offering organizations flexibility and access to a broader talent pool. In manufacturing, where operational efficiency and productivity are paramount, the ability to leverage a diverse workforce becomes a crucial competitive advantage.

IDENTIFIED PROBLEM

Managing a blended workforce of permanent and non-permanent employees presents several challenges that impact organizational effectiveness and culture. Differences in tenure and job security often hinder team cohesion and integration, while disparities in treatment and opportunities can lower morale and erode trust. Ensuring equity in performance evaluations and rewards is difficult, leading to perceptions of favoritism. Social comparison may foster rivalry, with permanent employees viewing non-permanent staff as threats to job security and vice versa, creating tension and disrupting harmony. Conflicts can arise due to status differences and perceived unfairness, while misaligned expectations reduce productivity and contribute to workforce fragmentation.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

To explore the challenges in integrating permanent and non-permanent employees.

To assess how unequal treatment affects the employees in the organization

To evaluate the fairness of current performance management system.

To investigate the psychological effects of employment status

To identify key sources of conflict between different types of workers and provide practical conflict resolution approaches

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Katz and Krueger (2019) : *"The Rise and Nature of Alternative Work Arrangements"*

This study highlights the rapid growth of gig and freelance employment and how it challenges traditional employee relations frameworks. The authors argue that organizations must adapt to maintain cohesion and engagement in a fragmented, flexible workforce.Deloitte (2020) – *"Global Human Capital Trends"* Deloitte's report identifies the blended workforce as a leading trend and emphasizes that although it enhances flexibility, it brings significant challenges in managing employee expectations, inclusion, and consistent engagement practices.

Armstrong, M. (2014) – *"Armstrong's Handbook of Human Resource Management Practice"*Armstrong defines employee relations as a process of managing relationships in the workplace through communication, trust, and mutual respect. In blended teams, these elements become critical yet harder to maintain.

Bratton, J. & Gold, J. (2017) – *"Human Resource Management: Theory and Practice"*

Bratton and Gold argue that traditional labor-management models fall short in hybrid work settings, suggesting that HR must shift towards personalized and dynamic strategies for diverse employee groups.

Spreitzer, G., Cameron, L., & Garrett, L. (2017) – "Alternative Work Arrangements*: Two Images of the New World of Work"*This study found that freelance and contract workers often feel disconnected from their organizations, leading to lower engagement and commitment. They recommend inclusive engagement strategies to address this relational gap.

Gallup (2021) – *"State of the Global Workplace Report"*Gallup found that only about 30% of remote and gig workers feel integrated into company culture. The lack of connection affects loyalty, collaboration, and long-term retention in hybrid teams.

Ulrich, D., Younger, J., Brockbank, W., & Ulrich, M. (2012) – "HR from the Outside *In"*The authors suggest that HR departments should transform their role to support workforce segmentation. Tailored policies for each employee type can lead to improved satisfaction and relations.

Society for Human Resource Management – SHRM (2022) – "Managing the Blended Workforce"SHRM emphasizes using digital tools and consistent communication strategies to unify permanent and contingent staff. Strong communication fosters trust and minimizes the divide among worker groups.

Zhang, D., Wang, X., & Li, H. (2021) – *"AI-Based Employee Sentiment Analysis in Remote Work Settings"*This research introduces AI tools for real-time sentiment tracking in hybrid workforces, helping HR detect disengagement or dissatisfaction early to prevent relational issues from escalating.

Marler, J.H. & Parry, E. (2016) – *"Human Resource Management, Strategic Involvement, and E-HRM Technology"*Marler and Parry found that digital HR systems (e.g., e-HRM) improve workforce integration by streamlining communication and performance management across remote, contract, and full-time staff.

Adams, J.S. (1965) – *"Inequity in Social Exchange"* (Equity Theory)Adams' theory suggests that employees assess fairness based on perceived equity between input and reward. In a blended workforce, inconsistent treatment of workers can lead to relational strain and disengagement.

Blau, P.M. (1964) – *"Exchange and Power in Social Life"* (Social Exchange Theory*)*

Blau explains that employee relations thrive when there is mutual trust and reciprocity. Freelancers and remote workers are more engaged when they perceive fair treatment and organizational support.

Gannon, M. & Boguszak, A. (2020) – *"Dual Identity in Freelance Workers"*The authors describe how freelancers often feel both part of and separate from organizations, creating identity tension. This impacts their willingness to collaborate and affects employee relations long term.

Bersin, J. (2018) – *"HR Technology Disruptions for 2018: Productivity, Design, and Intelligence"*Bersin emphasizes that strong internal communication through digital platforms helps bridge the gap between permanent and contingent employees, promoting consistent engagement.

Golembiewski, R.T. (2015) – *"Trust and Organizational Behavior"*Golembiewski emphasizes that trust is the cornerstone of effective employee relations, particularly in mixed employment teams, where transparency and consistent treatment are often lacking.

Milliken, F.J. & Dunn-Jensen, L.M. (2005) – *"The Changing Time Demands of Managerial and Professional Work"*This study found that ineffective communication between full-time and temporary staff leads to confusion, delays, and frustration, calling for streamlined communication strategies in blended environments..

RESEARCH GAP

The rise of hybrid or blended workforce environments—where employees work both remotely and in-office—has significantly reshaped organizational dynamics, creating new challenges for managing employee relations. This shift, driven by technological advances and evolving employee preferences, necessitates a revaluation of traditional management practices. As organizations balance the needs of remote and in-office workers, they must address

issues such as communication, trust, engagement, and organizational culture to foster positive employee relations across both groups. While existing research touches on remote work and hybrid models, there is a lack of comprehensive studies focusing specifically on how to manage employee relations effectively in blended work environment,

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To achieve this, a combination of **primary** and **secondary** data will be systematically collected. Primary data will be gathered through structured surveys and semi-structured interviews with employees and HR managers, focusing on key areas of employee relations such as engagement, satisfaction, and organizational culture. Secondary data will be sourced from company reports, industry publications, and existing literature on blended workforce management practices. The methodology also incorporates appropriate sampling techniques, data collection tools, and analysis methods to ensure that the findings are credible, reproducible, and relevant for practical applications within Ashok Leyland.

The study involves a cross-sectional representation of individuals directly associated with the day-to-day management of employee relations at **Ashok Leyland, Unit 1, Hosur**. This mix of respondents helps create a **360-degree view of employee relations** within a blended workforce, offering a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics from multiple perspectives.

➢ The research design adopted for this study is **descriptive** in nature, aiming to systematically examine and present the current employee relations practices within a blended workforce environment at **Ashok Leyland, Unit 1, Hosur.**

➢ It is also **analytical**, as the study goes beyond merely describing conditions by exploring relationships between variables such as communication, employee engagement, trust, and satisfaction among different employee categories (permanent, contractual, part-time, and remote).

➢ The study includes **both qualitative and quantitative methods**. Quantitative data is gathered through structured questionnaires to capture measurable factors such as job satisfaction, engagement levels, and perceived fairness. Qualitative data is obtained through interviews and open-ended survey questions to understand employee sentiments and management perspectives.

➢ A **cross-sectional approach** is used, capturing data at a single point in time from various categories of employees and managerial staff, providing a snapshot of the current state of employee relations.

Sample size refers to the number of individuals selected from the population to participate in the research study. It should be large enough to provide reliable, valid, and generalizable results

LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The study is confined to Ashok Leyland Unit 1 in Hosur, which may not reflect the practices and challenges of other units or locations of Ashok Leyland or different industries.

Limited access to internal company data, such as employee performance metrics, HR policies, and confidential communication strategies, may restrict the depth of analysis on employee relations.

The study may have time limitations that prevent a long-term analysis of the effects of blended workforce models on employee relations
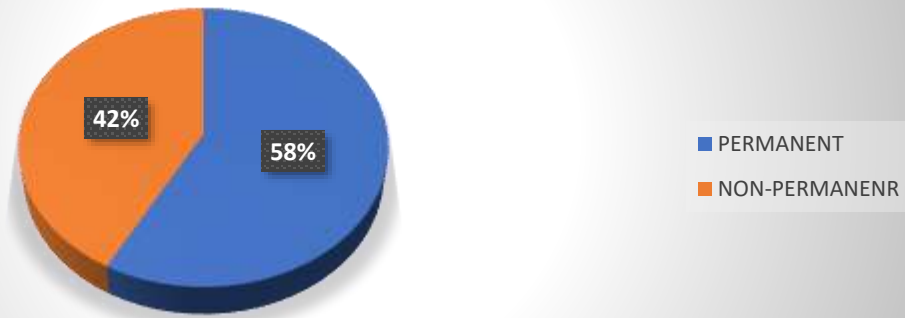
.The study may not account for all possible variations in work arrangements, such as specific freelance or gig economy models that can differ widely across industries.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Table 1. EMPLOYMEE STATUS

| PARTICULARS	NO.OF.RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGE
Permanent	58	58%
Non-permanent	42	42%
total	100	100%

INTERPRETATION

The data indicates that, out of the total respondents, 58% hold permanent positions, while 42% are employed in non-permanent roles. This shows that a larger portion of the respondents have stable, long-term employment, compared to those in temporary or contract-based positions. Overall, this distribution highlights a greater prevalence of permanent employment within the surveyed group, with a significant but smaller proportion working in non-permanent roles

Table 2. RESPONDENTS AGE GROUP

| PARTICULARS	NO.OF RESPONDENTS		TOTAL NO.OF. RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGE%
	Permanent employees	Contingent employees		
Below 25 years	2	37	39	39%
25-34 years	8	3	11	11%
35-44 years	15	2	17	17%
45-54 years	19	-	19	19%
55 years and above	14	-	14	14%
TOTAL	58	42	100	100%
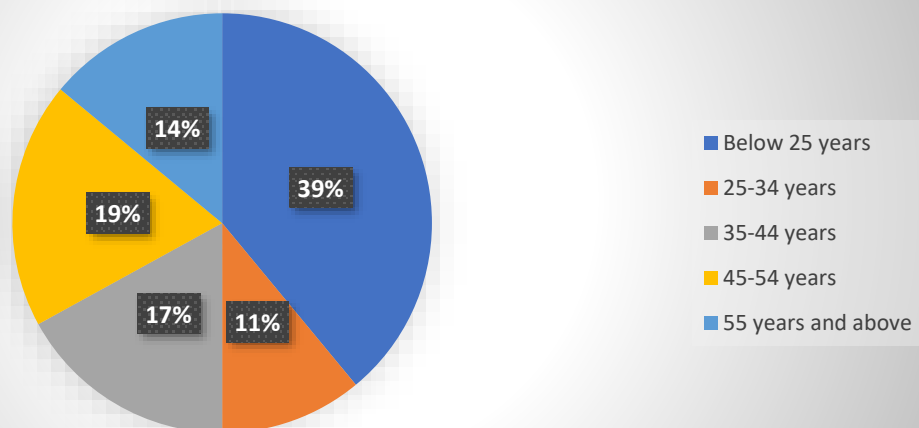
CHART 4.2.3

INTERPRETATION

The data shows that 39% of respondents are under 25 years, mostly in contingent roles. The 25-34 age group makes up 11%, with a mix of permanent and contingent positions. Respondents aged 35-44 account for 17%, with most in permanent roles. The 45-54 and 55+ age groups, representing 19% and 14% respectively, are entirely in permanent positions.

Overall, This distribution reflects a **generational divide in employment type**, where **younger employees are predominantly contingent**, and **older employees occupy stable, permanent roles**. It highlights potential age-based patterns in workforce structuring and career progression within the organization.

Table 3. How well do blended employees work together as a team

PARTICULARS	NO.OF RESPONDENTS		TOTAL NO.OF. RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGE%
	Permanent employee	Contingent employees		
Very well	15	8	23	23%
Well	25	15	40	40%
Neutral	6	8	14	14%
Poorly	7	9	16	16%
Very poorly	5	2	7	7%
Total	58	42	100	100%
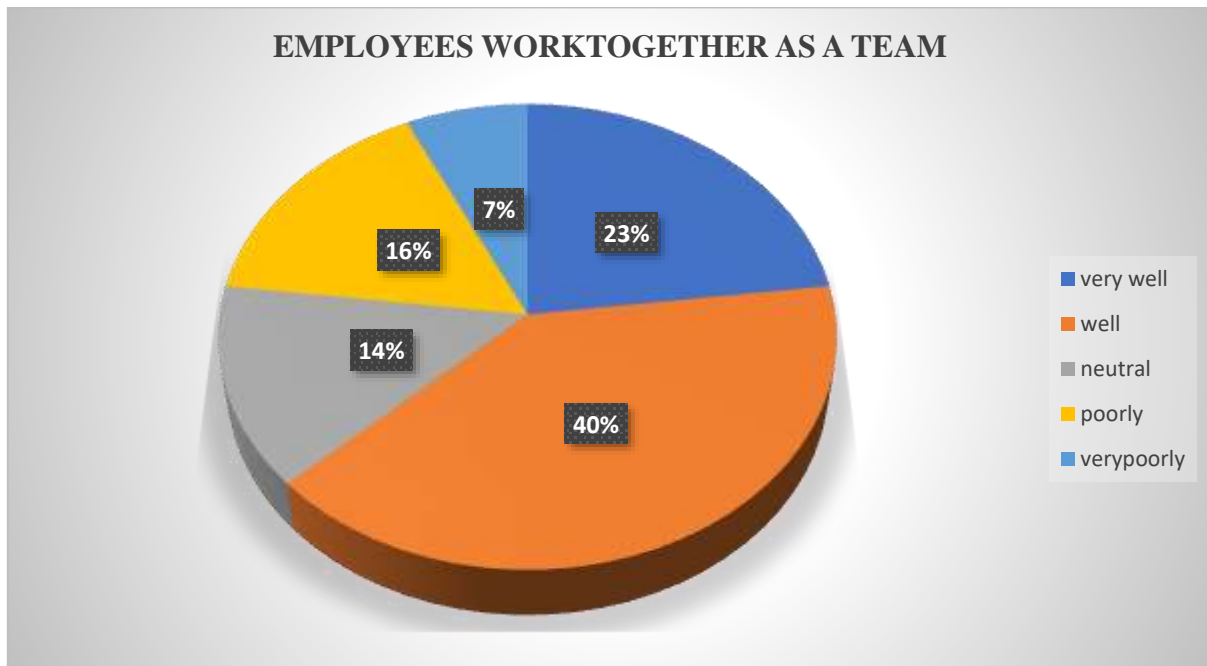
CHART 4.2.6

INTERPRETATION

The data shows that most respondents believe permanent and non-permanent employees work well together as a team. Of the 100 respondents, 63% feel that the teamwork is either "Very well" (23%) or "Well" (40%). However, 14% feel neutral about the teamwork, while 16% rate it as "Poor," and 7% believe it is "Very poor."

This data indicates that while collaboration is functioning fairly well overall, there is still room for improvement especially in addressing the **perceptions of inequality or disconnect** that may exist between workforce groups.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

1.58% of employees are permanent, and 42% are non-permanent, showing a balanced mix of stable and flexible labor.The significant proportion of permanent employees suggests the organization relies heavily on a long-term workforce.

2. 87% of the workforce is male, with only 13% female representation, indicating a significant gender imbalance. This highlights a need for more inclusive hiring practices to achieve gender diversity across all employee types.

3.Contingent employees are predominantly younger, with most under 25 years old, while permanent employees are older, especially those 45+ years.This suggests that younger workers are more likely to be employed in temporary positions, and older employees in permanent roles, reflecting generational differences across employment types.

4.48% of permanent employees have been with the organization for over five years, while 16% of contingent workers have been employed for less than six months.The higher turnover rate among non-permanent staff suggests more instability in temporary positions compared to permanent roles.

5.The P-15M/C Shop employs the largest share of both permanent and contingent employees (30%).Other departments, such as Tool Room and HRD, show higher concentrations of contingent staff, highlighting the varying reliance on temporary workers based on departmental needs.

6.63% of employees feel that blended teams (permanent and non-permanent) work well together, though 16% rate teamwork poorly.Despite generally positive feedback, the 16% with negative views indicates areas where team dynamics need improvement, especially among mixed-status teams.

7.72% of employees believe that employment status impacts trust among team members, with only 3% disagreeing. This suggests a need for initiatives to build stronger trust across employment types,ensuring collaboration is not affected by employment status.

8.72% of employees feel that the organization promotes an inclusive culture, though 10% disagree. Despite positive feedback, the small percentage of employees who feel excluded indicates room for improvement in creating a truly inclusive work environment.

9.70% of employees feel performance evaluations are fair, regardless of employment status, though 6% of contingent employees report perceived biases.While the majority feel evaluations are equitable, this suggests that temporary employees may feel overlooked or unfairly assessed in comparison to their permanent counterparts

SUGGESTION

Although most employees report good teamwork between permanent and contingent staff, there is still room for improvement. Ashok Leyland could introduce team-building exercises and collaborative projects that involve both permanent and non-permanent workers. This would foster stronger relationships, improve communication, and create a sense of unity within the workforce. To address the higher turnover rate among contingent workers, Ashok Leyland could explore strategies such as providing more job security or offering longer-term contracts to non-permanent staff. Additionally, offering contingent workers access to career advancement opportunities and training would increase engagement and reduce the likelihood of them leaving for other opportunities.

CONCLUSION

On Ashok Leyland has established a workforce that balances both permanent and non-permanent employees, which contributes to operational flexibility and stability. While the overall workforce dynamics show positive outcomes in areas such as job security, performance evaluations, and resource allocation, there are notable areas for improvement. These include gender diversity, inclusivity, trust between employment types, and fair access to training and career advancement opportunities Addressing the gender imbalance, fostering stronger teamwork and trust, and ensuring that both permanent and contingent employees feel equally valued and included can significantly enhance the work environment. Additionally, refining the performance evaluation processes, recognition systems, and improving job security for contingent employees will contribute to a more cohesive and satisfied workforce.

DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could track the reasons behind the higher turnover rate among contingent employees over a longer period. Understanding the key factors contributing to temporary staff leaving the organization, such as job satisfaction, career growth opportunities, or job security concerns, will allow the company to develop targeted retention strategies. A deeper examination into the causes of the gender imbalance and the effectiveness of any diversity and inclusion initiatives is necessary. Research could explore the barriers preventing women from entering or advancing in traditionally male-dominated roles and assess the impact of gender diversity on team performance and organizational outcomes.

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