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Leadership Is Measured By The Strength Of The Teams We Build: Vedanta's Group CHRO

Savi Khanna Aug 29, 2026

Vedanta # Neha Sharma # Group CHRO # industrial HR # mining and metals workforce # AI in HR
human intelligence augmentation # workplace inclusion # blue-collar workforce # frontline leadership # high

Neha Sharma on why a workforce spread across smelters, mines and corporate offices needs one culture but many different playbooks



Neha Sharma, group chief human resources officer (Group CHRO) at Vedanta, on why one-size-fits-all people strategies break down across a workforce spanning smelters, mines, oil & gas fields, technology centres and corporate offices. Sharma discusses using AI to augment rather than replace human judgement — echoing Chairman Anil Agarwal's view that AI is "not a substitute for human intelligence" — why urban inclusion playbooks don't translate to industrial settings, what separates leaders who can operate across frontline and corporate teams, and why "high-potential" talent looks different depending on the market.

Excerpts:

Heavy industries like mining and metals bring together frontline operations, manufacturing sites, and corporate functions under one roof, each with fundamentally different needs, risk profiles, and definitions of safety. Why does a one-size-fits-all people strategy tend to break down in this kind of environment, and how should HR leaders in industrial sectors rethink that approach?

One-size-fits-all people strategies rarely succeed in industrial organisations because the workforce itself is incredibly diverse. At Vedanta, our employees work in smelters, manufacturing plants, oil & gas fields, technology centres and corporate offices. While they are united by a common purpose and culture, their day-to-day realities, capability requirements and definitions of success are fundamentally different. The role of HR is not to treat these differences in silos, but to create a people strategy that is consistent in values, while flexible in execution.

This has fundamentally reshaped the way we think about talent. Rather than designing uniform programmes, we focus on creating role-relevant experiences across the employee lifecycle. At the same time, we are deliberate about creating opportunities for collaboration across businesses and functions. Through cross-functional collaboration, structured knowledge-sharing, leadership coaching and opportunities for experienced professionals and younger employees to learn from one another, we ensure that expertise and digital capability evolve together.

Industrial organisations are investing heavily in AI and digital HR platforms, but technology alone doesn't transform how people work. What's the difference between AI that genuinely builds capability and efficiency for a workforce, versus AI that simply digitises the same old processes faster — and why do so many organisations settle for the latter?

We believe AI should augment human intelligence rather than replace it. As our Chairman, Anil Agarwal, often says, 'Artificial Intelligence is not a substitute for Human Intelligence; it is an add-on.' That philosophy shapes how we approach technology across our businesses. Whether it is supporting predictive maintenance, strengthening safety through real-time monitoring, optimising industrial processes or enabling data-driven decision-making, AI is deployed to empower our people to make better decisions, improve operational excellence and focus on higher-value work. The same thinking guides our people's strategy. We are embedding AI across talent acquisition, workforce planning, personalised learning and capability development, not simply to automate HR processes, but to create a more responsive and future-ready employee experience. At the same time, we recognise that technology alone does not build capability.

Continuous learning, leadership commitment and a culture that encourages experimentation are equally important.

Inclusion conversations in India have largely been shaped by urban, white-collar workplaces. In industries like mining and metals, where the workforce, geography, and physical risks are entirely different, what does meaningful inclusion actually require, and what do organisations typically get wrong when they try to apply a tech-sector inclusion playbook to a blue-collar, industrial one?

One of the biggest mistakes organisations make is assuming that inclusion strategies developed for predominantly urban, white-collar workplaces can simply be replicated in industrial settings. While the principles of equity and belonging remain universal, the way they are delivered must reflect operational realities. In industrial businesses, inclusion begins with designing workplaces that enable people to perform safely and confidently, supported by appropriate infrastructure, role-specific capability building, leadership commitment and a culture of respect. It also means ensuring that frontline employees have the same opportunity to learn, grow and build long-term careers as those in corporate roles.

Leading people across large, diverse workforces spanning frontline, manufacturing, and corporate roles requires very different leadership instincts depending on which part of the organisation you're speaking to. What qualities do you think most consistently separate leaders who can genuinely grow talent across that spread, from those who are only effective with one type of workforce?

Leaders who are effective across this diversity recognise that there is no single leadership style that works everywhere. They adapt their approach without compromising on the values, culture and purpose that bind the organisation together. For us, the most successful leaders combine three qualities. First, they have the humility to listen and understand the realities of different workforce segments before making decisions. Second, they are committed to developing people rather than simply managing performance, creating opportunities for continuous learning, collaboration and growth across functions and career stages. And third, they are able to connect every employee - whether on the shop floor, at a mine site or in a corporate office, to a shared purpose, helping them understand how their contribution creates value for the business.

At Vedanta, we believe leadership is ultimately measured by the strength of the teams we build, not the authority we exercise. That is why we invest in developing leaders who are equally comfortable engaging with frontline employees, technical experts and corporate professionals, while fostering a culture built on meritocracy, trust, collaboration and continuous learning.

Having worked across India, the US, Mexico, Canada, and Europe, you've seen how "high-potential" talent gets defined very differently depending on the market. Where have you seen that definition break down most visibly when organisations try to apply a single global talent framework, and what should companies be measuring instead?

The definition of high-potential talent often breaks down when organisations try to apply a single global framework without accounting for differences in markets, cultures, business environments and workforce realities. Having worked across India, the US, Mexico, Canada and Europe, I have seen that the attributes that signal potential can vary significantly. In some markets, it may be entrepreneurial thinking and

adaptability, while in others, deep technical expertise, stakeholder management, or the ability to navigate complexity may be equally critical. The answer is not to abandon global frameworks, but to make them more contextual and dynamic.



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