

In conversation with **Kamlesh Dangi**
Group Head (Human Resources) – InCred Financial Services
K J Somaiya Institute of Management Alum Batch 1993-95



1. With a rich career of 25 years, what has been the most memorable moment so far?

- A. After all these years it becomes difficult to define things in a single moment. I vividly remember the time when I was called at 11 am by a consultant to appear for a lunch interview at ICICI, and by the evening 4 pm, I had the offer letter in my hand. I was amazed by the speed with which the industry and organization were functioning and the growth opportunities they unfolded for me. The other moment which has been with me is when I was asked to manage the HR for ICICI Bank based out of London. This role eventually led to me managing HR for the entire International and wholesale banking group. It was a start of a journey which led to me learning about various cultures and its impact on business environment. I think over a period of time this experience has made me more adaptable and less judgmental as a person.

2. You have worked as an HR Professional across various sectors ranging from finance, retail, pharma, etc., which one do you find to be the most challenging?

- A. Each industry has its own uniqueness so it is difficult to say which one was more challenging. I have been closely associated with the BFSI industry for the last 2 decades of my career. It has given me significant perspectives about vast business realities. Being a fast-paced industry, it makes it imperative for the HR policies and processes to adapt as per the ever-changing business environment. Apart from the BFSI industry, I really enjoyed working in the retail sector as well. Made some friends for life there.

3. You have headed HR function for UTI and Religare at group level. Both being financial services organisations, how do you feel the same profile under the same domain helped in your overall development?

- A. Every industry I have worked in has empowered me as a professional over the years. Particularly in BFSI, I was fortunate to have gained exposure in each of its sub-components, be it health and life insurance, asset management, wealth management, banking or equity broking. This gave me an understanding of how businesses work in correlation, how and why some companies succeed while some do not, and so on.

4. From working for companies like Shoppers Stop, ICICI, UTI etc. to joining a start-up like InCred, what made you take this jump?

- A. Actually, barring UTI, I have mostly joined companies in their start-up phase. First one was Shoppers Stop when retail industry wasn't really viewed as an industry. Most of the retail then, was in unorganised sector. Then it was ICICI Home Finance which was in its start-up phase in mortgage industry. Again, it was a start-up phase for ICICI's International Banking forays. As the HR Head at Religare, I led to their business build outs in almost every area of financial services. Now with InCred, we are in the process of building financial services conglomerate. Each of these start-ups have offered me different learning opportunities. Overall, I thoroughly enjoy shaping culture and thereby businesses in a start-up environment.

5. Do you feel diversity and inclusion at the workplace is an advantage for InCred Financial Services?

- A. Being just a 3-year old organisation, it is hard to completely dedicate our success to diversity as of yet. With reference to gender diversity there is a talent-supply issue in the market in the middle and senior level management, especially in areas such as investment banking, asset management etc. We are continuously striving to include as much diversity as possible to ensure higher performance.

6. The HR industry has changed dramatically in the pandemic. What are the changes that you have seen within your organization?

- A. Digitalisation has gained a major thrust from the current pandemic situation. The companies which earlier valued interpersonal interaction at offices as the drivers of productivity, have effectively switched to work-from-home model today. InCred, being an NBFC, could easily manage our operations with the employees working remotely. Even our customers have quickly adapted to the

digital ways of connecting with us. Citing the utmost safety of employees in our organisation, we would ensure a right mix of working from office and working from home, post the pandemic situation.

7. What are the most important skills an HR professional must have in the current times?

- A. The COVID-19 has dramatically changed the way of our work life. Both the pre & post-COVID era are different. Functional competencies matter more than behavioural ones like that of a team player in these pandemic times. Attempts have been made to groom the skills of employees digitally within an organisation, but entire success is yet to be achieved. HR professionals have to unlearn some of the old ways of operating and learn how they can facilitate higher employee productivity and manage employee morale during and post pandemic times.

8. Mental health has been a major concern during the pandemic. What could be done at the HR level to help employees maintain stress-free mental health at the workplace?

- A. Stress means different for different people. Everyone is trying to cope up with this, and I believe that giving excess attention to the same can lead to higher stress. Talking about the Indian context, we are still more socially connected as compared to the Western culture. At our organization, we have conducted some sessions to keep the employees motivated, but the biggest stress buster, as we all know, would be when the vaccine of COVID-19 is announced.

9. How extensively is AI being used for recruitment in the pandemic?

- A. Big players in the BFSI market, such as banks and insurance companies certainly deploy AI for recruitment purposes on a large scale. However, being a relatively new technology, the use of AI does not justify the cost for smaller companies. With a significant rise in the talent pool, the adaptation to new technologies is bound to happen in the coming times.

10. If you have to relive your days at K J Somaiya Institute of Management, how differently would you like to live them?

- A. At the risk of sounding cliched, the two years I spent at K J Somaiya Institute of Management were probably the best days of my life. I have my best friends and memories associated with those times. We are still closely connected with each other over WhatsApp groups and chats. Looking back, I wouldn't want to change anything but only cherish the pleasant memories I had made.

11. What are some of the significant learning you had in your two years at K J Somaiya Institute of Management?

- A. We had some great professors and learning was always fun. I still remember the Cost & Accounting Professor Hari Haran, who had inspired me to take HR as a career option. Also, some of the most important learnings came from peer discussions, both within the class and outside. The MBA life helped me gain confidence in my own abilities, and HR as a course helped me gain technical knowledge in the field. K J Somaiya Institute of Management is a good Institute in creating a right kind of environment.

12. What would be your advice for the students/young Alumni who are starting their career?

- A. Be a problem solver. If you are working in a corporate, think about the problem your boss or department is trying to solve. As you grow higher up, think about the other stakeholders you interact with, including your customers and try to solve their problem. There are boundless opportunities all around you. The best way is to focus on your strengths and keep learning throughout your journey.

Rapid Fire Questions

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| 1. Favorite hangout spot on campus: Canteen | 5. Favorite book: Who Moved My Cheese |
| 2. Favorite movie: Sholay, Behind enemy lines | 6. Success Mantra: Always be a problem solver |
| 3. Favorite holiday destination: Windermere | 7. Biggest Strength: Fairly adaptable & calm |
| 4. Favorite cuisine: Goan & Malwani | |

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