

CASE STUDY • PEOPLE MATTERS INFINI-T AWARDS INDIA 2026

Building a Globally Recognized Exceptional Workplace Through Technology

Aarti Industries

Infini-T Awards Category: First-Mile Employee Experience Innovation • Employee Experience



Executive Summary

5,969 Employees, ~70% in manufacturing and frontline roles	3.95 → 4.60 Gallup engagement score, 2020 to 2025	97% Participation in the 2025 Gallup Voice Survey	86th Percentile globally on the Gallup benchmark
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Aarti Industries Limited is one of India’s leading specialty chemicals manufacturers, serving global customers across pharmaceuticals, agrochemicals, polymers, dyes and pigments, with integrated operations spanning manufacturing, R&D, engineering, projects, procurement, commercial and corporate functions. We employ **5,969 people across Pan-India plants, R&D centres, corporate offices and project sites**, and **approximately 70% of that workforce is in manufacturing and frontline roles**: shop-floor associates, engineers and project teams working in highly regulated, safety-critical environments, far from any corporate inbox.

As we accelerated business transformation, we recognised that a high-performing manufacturing organisation needed more than operational excellence. It needed every employee, from the shop floor to leadership, to feel informed, heard, recognised and connected to the company’s purpose. The problem was never an absence of communication: **it was ensuring communication translated into alignment and action**. Engagement initiatives existed and worked in pockets, but they ran through a mix of emails, townhalls, offline recognition programmes, manual surveys and location-specific practices, without a unified digital platform to bring communication, listening, recognition, wellbeing and employee communities together.

The defining decision was to stop treating those as separate HR initiatives and integrate them into a **single Employee Experience Operating Model**, a closed loop in which listening produces action plans, action plans carry leadership accountability, and progress is communicated back visibly. Darwinbox is the digital backbone that makes that loop deliverable consistently and measurable at scale, carrying ARJAN Rewards & Recognition, Vibe communities, employee communications, engagement campaigns, surveys, wellbeing programmes, analytics and adoption dashboards on one platform.

Over five years, our Gallup engagement score rose from **3.95 to 4.60**, recognition culture moved from the **36th to the 90th percentile**, and Voice Survey participation reached **97%**. We now record **179,000+ digital recognition moments across FY24—FY26 and 400,000+ since the programme launched**, with 65% of employees classified as thriving against a global benchmark of 35%, and an engaged-to-actively-disengaged ratio of **43.5 : 1**. In 2026 we were awarded the **Gallup Exceptional Workplace Award**, placing us in the **84th percentile in India and the 86th percentile globally**.

 36th → 90th Percentile on recognition culture, 2020 to 2025	 400,000+ Lifetime digital recognition moments on ARJAN	 65% Of employees thriving, against a 35% global benchmark
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Effective in Pockets, Inconsistent at Scale

Before Darwinbox, employee listening relied largely on periodic engagement surveys, with limited visibility into how action plans were executed. Recognition was predominantly manual and event-driven and varied significantly from one location to another. Leadership communication depended heavily on scheduled forums and emails. Employee communities, wellbeing initiatives and engagement activities operated independently across sites, which made it difficult to deliver a consistent experience or monitor adoption in real time.

None of that was for want of effort. The initiatives existed and were effective where they landed. The difficulty was **consistency across nearly 6,000 people and multiple manufacturing locations** and the group least well served by a model built on emails, townhalls and desk-based tools was the 70% who spend their day on a plant floor.

What made this hard

The challenge we faced	The consequence it caused
Aligning a predominantly manufacturing workforce with business strategy. Nearly 70% of employees work across plants and project locations, making it difficult to communicate priorities, changes and strategic objectives consistently	Employees understood their functional responsibilities but often lacked visibility into how their work contributed to enterprise goals, affecting alignment, speed of execution and ownership during rapid transformation
Transforming employee voice into visible action. Surveys and listening mechanisms existed, but employees needed confidence that feedback would translate into time-bound improvements rather than remaining a one-time exercise	Without a structured action-planning mechanism, trust and participation could decline over time, reducing the effectiveness of engagement work and limiting frontline innovation
Building a recognition culture across diverse businesses and locations, where practices varied by function and site and relied on manual or event-based appreciation	Inconsistent recognition reduced opportunities to reinforce desired behaviours, collaboration, innovation and organisational values, affecting engagement and motivation
Delivering a consistent employee experience across the lifecycle, as onboarding, communication, wellbeing, recognition and leadership interaction differed across businesses and locations	Employees experienced varying levels of support depending on where they worked, making a unified culture and employer experience hard to build at enterprise scale
Balancing business transformation with employee engagement while navigating market volatility, cost optimisation, capability building, digital transformation and organisational restructuring simultaneously	Any decline in trust, communication or collaboration during transformation could directly affect productivity, innovation, operational excellence and the execution of strategic initiatives

One Operating Model, Not a Portfolio of Programmes

We were not looking for another HRMS. We wanted a digital employee experience platform that could connect every stage of the employee journey, and Darwinbox stood out because it unified communication, Vibe communities, ARJAN Rewards & Recognition, surveys, campaigns, wellbeing initiatives and analytics into a single ecosystem. That let our leadership move beyond **measuring engagement annually to managing employee experience continuously**, through real-time participation, recognition, listening and actionable insight.

Internally we describe it plainly: *“Darwinbox is the platform through which our employees connect, communicate, recognize one another, participate in wellbeing initiatives, share feedback, and stay aligned with business priorities. It has become the organization’s digital hub for building an engaged, connected, and high-performing workforce.”*

Rather than positioning employee experience as a standalone programme, we embedded it into everyday work through interconnected initiatives: **ARJAN, Vibe, Voice Action Planning, Metamorphosis, Monthly Manufacturing Connect, CHRO Connect, Nirvana Wellbeing, Cheers for Peers, Acclaim and APPLAUD**, together forming one journey spanning onboarding, communication, recognition, wellbeing, continuous listening and leadership engagement. Gallup provides the Voice Survey framework, benchmarking and action-planning methodology; Darwinbox carries the delivery.

The loop is the design. Listening produces insight; insight becomes time-bound Manager and Vertical Action Plans; those plans carry leadership accountability through quarterly governance reviews; and progress is communicated back through the same channels employees used to raise it. Feedback that visibly closes is what turns a survey into a habit.

Feedback that visibly closes is what turns a survey into a habit.

Designed Adoption on a Plant Floor

Adoption was driven through leadership sponsorship, structured governance, manager accountability and continuous enablement rather than mandatory usage:

- **Visible leadership sponsorship** through CEO Connects, CHRO Connect, Monthly Manufacturing Connect, townhalls and regular CXO communications
- **Year-round communication campaigns** on Vibe promoting wellbeing, recognition, employee communities and engagement initiatives
- **Manager and Vertical Action Plans**, making engagement and recognition measurable leadership priorities
- **Quarterly governance reviews** supported by platform dashboards and adoption analytics to identify gaps and improve participation
- **HRBP-led Samwaad sessions** enabling shop-floor employees to adopt digital communication and recognition confidently
- **Real-time Vibe leaderboards** celebrating top recognizers and encouraging participation across business units
- **Voice of Employee, heard monthly:** DB Pulse insights from plant employees are segregated into issue buckets and reviewed at senior leadership level, and the bucket with the highest volume becomes the next action priority, so people see their input steer decisions
- **Aarohan and Kaizen suggestion campaigns**, where shop-floor employees propose improvements that are first validated on a simulator and, once proven, implemented on the line, turning frontline ideas into working practice

The evidence that this was design rather than mandate is behavioural. Recognition through ARJAN became part of everyday leadership behaviour rather than an HR campaign, and communication, communities, surveys, wellbeing and appreciation all run through the same platform. The result is **97% Voice Survey participation** and **5,500 to 6,600 employees recognised annually**, enterprise-wide reach, not head-office adoption.

Enterprise-wide reach, not head-office adoption.

The First Rollout Reached the Offices First

Adoption was not uniform in phase one. With nearly 70% of employees working across manufacturing locations, digital participation was significantly stronger among corporate teams than frontline employees. Building familiarity with digital recognition, surveys and employee communities required sustained communication and local enablement, not a one-time platform launch.

Embedding recognition into everyday leadership behaviour also took longer than expected. Recognition was initially viewed as an HR-led initiative, which produced inconsistent manager participation across locations. And while feedback was actively collected, employees wanted greater visibility into how their suggestions translated into tangible action. Reinforcing that collecting feedback alone was not enough.

The bigger realisation was that technology adoption alone would not create the cultural shift. So, we stopped measuring success through platform usage and reframed the programme around **behaviours**: leaders communicating more frequently, recognising employees consistently, and visibly acting on feedback. Those learnings produced the interventions that now define the model: stronger leadership sponsorship, expanded HRBP-led enablement, institutionalised Manager and Vertical Action Plans, and quarterly governance reviews.

We stopped measuring success through platform usage and reframed the programme around behaviours.

Five Years, Measured Against Our Own Baseline

Measure	Before → after	Window • source
Employee engagement score	3.95 → 4.60	2020—2025 • Gallup Voice Survey
Recognition score	3.23 (36th percentile) → 4.55 (90th percentile)	2020—2025 • Gallup Voice Survey
Voice Survey participation	97%	2025 Voice Survey • Gallup Survey Dashboard
Employees thriving	65%, against a 35% global benchmark	2025 • Gallup Wellbeing Report
Engaged to actively disengaged ratio	4.8:1 → 43.5:1	2020—2025 • Gallup Benchmark Report
Cross-functional recognition	47% → 52%	FY24—FY26 • ARJAN Dashboard / Darwinbox Analytics
Spot recognition	+130%	FY24—FY26 • ARJAN Recognition Dashboard
Hall of Fame recognition	+50%	FY24—FY26 • Recognition Dashboard
APPLAUD recognition	2.4× increase	FY24—FY26 • Recognition Dashboard
Digital recognition volume	Largely manual and event-based → 179,000+ recognitions	FY24—FY26 • ARJAN Recognition Dashboard
Lifetime recognition moments	400,000+	Since programme launch • Darwinbox ARJAN Reports
Gallup benchmark position	84th percentile India; 86th percentile globally	2025 • Gallup Benchmark Report

THE IMPACT

The Business Context This Ran Alongside

Over the same period, our business transformation delivered measurable operational gains. These are presented as **enablement, not causation**: a workforce that is aligned, heard and recognised executes better, but no employee experience programme can claim sole credit for a production number. The engagement work is one of several contributors, and the honest claim is that it strengthened the organisational capability these results were achieved through.

Business measure	Before → after	Window • source
Production output	1,616,829 MT → 2,620,085 MT, a 62% increase	2020—2025 • Manufacturing Dashboard
Project delivery cycle	36 months → 9 months	2020—2025 • PMO / Business Transformation
Customer complaints	55% reduction against a 100% baseline index	2022—2025 • Quality Dashboard / Operations
Debottlenecking value	₹3.5 crore → ₹150 crore	2020—2025 • Operations Excellence / Finance
Margin Defence business value	₹200 crore value enabled	FY25—FY26 • Business Transformation / Finance

When the Loop Visibly Closed

One of the most defining moments came after the Gallup Voice Survey. Rather than treating the survey as a reporting exercise, we turned every significant insight into structured Manager and Vertical Action Plans. Employees didn't just receive a "thank you for your feedback" message, they saw leaders discussing findings, sharing action plans, and regularly communicating progress through CEO Connect, CHRO Connect, Monthly Manufacturing Connect and Vibe.

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At Aarti, my suggestions and ideas are valued. Many of my ideas have been converted into actions that resulted in business success. This gives me immense satisfaction, and I am going to contribute more to Aarti's success.

An employee, Aarti Industries

*That visible closure of the feedback loop fundamentally changed employee trust. Participation continued to rise; managers became more accountable for engagement outcomes, and employee voice evolved from an annual survey into an ongoing dialogue that shaped business decisions. That sustained commitment ultimately contributed to 97% survey participation and recognition as a **Gallup Exceptional Workplace Award 2026 winner**.*

Gallup Exceptional Workplace Award 2026 winner: Aarti is the first Indian manufacturing company to win the award, and only 4 Indian companies won it this year.

Why We Believe This Stands Apart



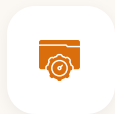
A closed-loop operating model, not a set of programmes

We integrated employee listening, action planning, leadership communication, recognition, wellbeing and governance into one continuous cycle on a single platform. Listening produces action plans; action plans carry accountability; progress is communicated back through the same channels. The loop, not any individual initiative, is the innovation.



Built for the first mile, where it is hardest

Approximately 70% of our 5,969 employees are in manufacturing and frontline roles across plants, R&D centres and project sites. Delivering a consistent experience to that population (rather than to a head-office majority) is what made this one of the most complex employee experience transformations to attempt at this scale.



What is genuinely hard to replicate is the operating model

CEO and CHRO sponsorship, manager accountability through action plans, HRBP-led adoption, quarterly governance and continuous action planning, all resting on a people-centric ecosystem, a hierarchy-less culture and participative decision-making. The technology can be bought; the governance discipline that makes 97% participation possible on a plant floor cannot.



Designed to reinforce, not to coexist

Listening, recognition, communication and wellbeing were deliberately built to strengthen one another through a single digital experience rather than introduced as independent HR initiatives. That is why recognition moved 54 percentile points while engagement rose in parallel, they were never separate levers.

Benchmarked Against the World

We were awarded the **Gallup Exceptional Workplace Award 2026**, a global employee-engagement recognition. On the Gallup benchmark we sit in the **84th percentile in India** and the **86th percentile globally**. Both positions and the award are independently determined by Gallup from our own Voice Survey data, which is what makes them worth citing: they are not self-assessed. The scale of the field makes the recognition sharper still: **only 4 of the 75 winners worldwide came from India**, from a pool of **more than 10,000 participating organizations** across the globe, and we are the **first Indian manufacturing company** to win it.

|| 84th

Percentile in India on the Gallup benchmark, 2025

|| 86th

Percentile globally on the Gallup benchmark, 2025

|| 2026

Gallup Exceptional Workplace Award: one of only 4 Indian winners

Both 84th and 86th percentiles and the award are independently determined by Gallup from our own Voice Survey data: they are not self-assessed.

From Our Leadership

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At Aarti Industries, HR technology has enabled us to bring our leadership philosophy to life by making listening, recognition, collaboration and continuous conversations a part of everyday work. When digital capability is combined with trust-led leadership and our values of Care, Integrity and Excellence, engagement becomes a way of working rather than an initiative.

Sudip Das

Vice President, Talent & Corporate HR

CONCLUSION

The Benchmark We Set

In a specialty chemicals business, the people who matter most to the product are the hardest to reach. Roughly five thousand of our six thousand employees work on plant floors, in project sites and R&D centres; in regulated, safety-critical environments where an email is not how you reach anyone. For years our engagement work was real and effective in pockets, but it ran through channels built for desks: townhalls, mailers, manual surveys, and recognition programmes that looked different at every location.

What changed was not the addition of another initiative. It was the decision to stop running them separately. Listening, recognition, communication, wellbeing and employee communities were integrated into **one operating model on one platform**, with a loop that closes: employees speak through Voice, insight becomes time-bound Manager and Vertical Action Plans, leaders are held to them in quarterly governance reviews, and progress comes back through the same channels. Feedback that visibly closes is the only kind people keep giving.

The numbers follow from that. Engagement from **3.95 to 4.60**. Recognition from the **36th to the 90th percentile**. **400,000+ recognition moments**, 65% of our people thriving against a global benchmark of 35%, and an engaged-to-disengaged ratio of **43.5 : 1**. And the number that proves the first mile was actually reached: **97% participation** in a voluntary survey, in an organisation where 70% of respondents had to stop work on a plant floor to take part.

This is the standard we set: employee experience treated not as a portfolio of HR programmes but as a business capability, where every conversation, every recognition and every employee voice strengthens culture, leadership accountability and performance, and where the measure of success is whether it reached the shop floor, not the head office.