

THE EMERGING ROLE OF THE HR PROFESSIONAL

Purpose

To open a dialogue on the emerging role of the Human Resource Professional.

Background

There is pressure being placed on the Human Resource professional to move from a transactions expert (hiring, pay and benefits, job classification) to that of the internal consultant. The pressure originates:

1. In the need of internal customers for more strategic Human Resource services such as facilitation, mediation and organization development;
2. From the increased involvement of line managers in many Human Resource transactions;
3. From the increasing use of Human Resource Information Systems (HRIS) which are changing the role of the Human Resource person through the architecture of the information gathered; and
4. From the inability of many managers to perform the interventions needed to make their organizations work well.

The Challenge

The challenge for the Human Resource professional is to be in the vanguard of the change from transactional to consultative and carry their respective organizations into increased productivity. This means moving the Human Resource role more closely to the line operation and supporting the delivery structure of the organization more directly.

Ten Principles for a Dialogue

Principle 1: The Human Resource professional is a change agent

The Human Resource professional has always provided guidance, advice and support to management and staff. What they have not done is tie themselves more closely to the large change processes of the organization, e.g. its business plan, its operational roll out, its change management processes, even the bringing of product to market. Understanding the role of change agent and involving oneself fully as one, tends to move the Human Resource person into a more vital role.

Principle 2: Human Resources is a service function

There are still a lot of people in organizations who will say "Human Resources won't let us do that," or "Let's check with Human Resources." The desire to check with Human

Resources is useful only if Human Resources is seen and operates as a service and not as a control function. This doesn't mean that managers should be able to do anything they want with their people but rather that the Human Resource person is the guardian of the process by which Human Resources are managed in the organization. The Human Resource person thus trains users in the most appropriate ways of managing people and maintains the motivation to do it well.

Principle 3: Transactions are still necessary

Notwithstanding the movement from transactional to consultative, there will always be a need for administrative procedures to be carried out. The Human Resource professional will seek the organizational means to simplify and expedite these procedures to free themselves up for more strategic duties. In other words, transactions are not bad things. They are often necessary and the HR professional designs the means to deal with them most effectively.

Principle 4: The Human Resource professional crosses all boundaries

By times, Human Resource professionals have lived in a ghetto imposed by their organization and by themselves. The transactions needed in Human Resources often impose this limitation, which needs to be replaced by a more free-ranging involvement across the organization. The Human Resource professional needs to be visible, useful and welcome across the organization, rather than a staff person interfering with the hard work of line people. This may run counter at first to the line perspective which may be one of turf protection caused by years of neglect by staff people. There may even be a case for blending line and staff people when it comes to such priority processes as HR management.

Principle 5: The Human Resource professional sees needs

Of all the people in the organization, the Human Resource professional is best placed to observe the needs of its people at all levels and to recommend the ways of meeting those needs. These needs are responded to in the context of the organization's strategy and value system, and connect to ongoing growth and renewal.

Principle 6: The Human Resource professional is a model, mentor and coach

The Human Resource professionals are looked up to and need to understand how important it is for them to be models for organizational behaviour. They will be called upon to mentor others and to provide coaching and advice on the processes by which the organization manages its human and also its technological resources. The HR professional can also be instrumental in connecting all of the time spent on leadership development to concepts of modeling, mentoring and coaching as organizationally valuable skills.

Principle 7: Process, not content

There is nothing constructive about a Human Resource person involving themselves in the content of their internal customer's job. The Human Resource professional may have a very fruitful role in providing the process however, e.g. teambuilding, change management, core competency identification, roles and responsibilities definition and conflict resolution. Thus, the Human Resource professional builds up skills as a Process Consultant and builds demand for much needed services, e.g. that of facilitator.

Principle 8: The Human Resource Professional is a learner

The Human Resource person needs to be in tune with the changing views and trends in the management of people. This prevents senior managers from reading a book or seeing a television program and from that instituting an approach which may be, on balance, inappropriate to the organization. Being on top of new approaches will ensure that the Human Resource professional is in a position to deliver timely, appropriate and objective advice on applicability and fit. The HR professional does this not by being painted as the road block but as the person who suggested and set up adequate and accurate piloting and testing procedures for a new initiative.

Principle 9: Change must be progressive

Changes in the role of the Human Resource person can't happen overnight. However, it can happen as a result of careful planning, support from senior management and in tune with the broad range of stakeholders in the organization, who should be fully involved in the shift of emphasis.

Principle 10: The Human Resource professional loves the job

The constant challenge of change, the satisfaction of helping individuals, teams and the organization at large and the feeling of being needed and appreciated all feed the motivation to be the most knowledgeable and skilled Human Resource professional you can possibly be. The consultative role moves the Human Resource person into a zone where there is a better chance to feel fulfilled. Human Resource people who say " I have the best job in the world", have been successful in making themselves into positive drivers for their organizations.

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