



The Future of Human Resource Practitioner

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(Received: 06/07/2015; Accepted: 18/02/2016)

Introduction

In recent VUCA (volatile, uncertainty, complex and ambiguous) economic scenario, the HR landscape has been changing rapidly in alignment with the market and business need. The evolution that has been taking place with the profession over the last two decades or so has reached to a place where the day to day operational role of HR professional has changed. The challenge is that a few years ago, many personnel departments simply rebranded themselves as Human Resources Departments without necessarily transforming or repositioning themselves in the business. The inconsistency and low standards in HR practice (not aligned with international standards, competencies and best practices as like CIPD, ICF, SHRM, etc) that is delivered by such practitioners has led to many questioning the credibility of HR and has placed the profession in a position where it has to prove its worth as HR business partner (HRBP). The outcome has been a reduction in the ability of the HR practitioners to contribute to and influence strategy creation and execution. Three most important insights (positioning hr & expectations of customers, a marketing approach in hr and the employee centric organization approach) will help the aspirant HR practitioner to add value into strategic HR and business excellence.

Positioning and Expectations

In today's world, the positioning of the HR function and the corresponding expectations of the function has also changed. HR practitioners now have a seat at the table not at the cubicle! The value HR brings to the table should therefore be visible to all, with the kind of impact that is clear for all to see. However, there is still a view today that HR is a cost centre and the value it creates is not as significant as the contribution to the employee cost line. Previously, the profession was more administrative and maintenance - operational role and the expectation was that all HR would do is just deliver responsibilities like; salary payment accurately and on time, process and maintain leave and travel policy, administer medical benefits, enforce disciplinary action; ER (employee relations) procedures and maintain HR policies. In summary, the view of HR practitioners was that they were merely policy administrators in the business.

The current and old positioning of HR is giving way to a future where instead of having human resources or human capital departments, more of culture departments and people

management departments will be seen. This transition is driven by a need to bring back the “human” aspects in to people management and treat employees as people and not just resources. The concern here is that when the profession is referred to as human resource, there is an expectation that the professionals that manage the function have to exploit and extract value in the shortest possible time and at the lowest cost.

The transition to people management brings back the “human face” and provides an opportunity to restore dignity and respect in the way business treats the people that create organizational value. In line with this new positioning in future the people management function would be held accountable for bottom line results. The department provides guidance during innovative talent acquisition process, has massive input in the talent management and development process, determines the reward that is paid to people and drives performance management and coaching –culture. If all this processes are carried out well in alignment with strategic business need, audacious business goal, specific vision –mission & values; the business is highly likely to succeed. With the function having so much influence on business performance, why isn’t it held accountable for business results? It is just a matter of time before the accountability for business results will be as much the responsibility of HR as it is for the customer facing functions.

A Marketing Approach – the Future of Human Resource Practice

The ongoing transformation in human resource practice seems to mirror the marketing discipline. In marketing, the customer is king; therefore the focus is on developing products, sales and services than not only meet customer needs but anticipate and exceed expectations. Communication is meant to emotionally connect with the customer and enhance the capability of distribution channels and ensures that the customer can access products almost anywhere and at any time.

Moto of HR Professionals would be to engage employees (bottom-to-top and top-to-bottom approach) emotionally and get them to go above the contractual obligations as translated on their service contract. Within the profession, the question is how well the concept of the internal customer has taken root. This would mean that HR policies, procedures and practices have to be tailored to meet employees’ needs aligned with business goals. This marks a shift in the mindset of HR practitioners to begin positioning policy and practice requirements from the eye of employee and not just from the perspective of merely a business. This shift will require an artistic balance that ensures that HR policies and practices meet the needs of both the business and more demanding employee of 21st Century.

Once employee takes the position of customers in the eyes of HR practitioners, HR initiatives need to be positioned like products and services that are subject to employee choice. Customers normally patronize those products that meet their needs and the future, employees will demand the same –variety and choice of the offering made by HR. HR practitioners would then re-examine how they design the products and services they offer to employees. A lot more research will need to be undertaken to ensure that HR products & services are developed based on adequate insight from employees.

Focused group discussions and feedback sessions will be necessary to ensure employees’ views are encapsulated in the final product. Although a lot of consultations take place today before HR introduces new products and services; the process is expected to evolve even faster in a place where these employees are at the core of product design.



When HR initiatives are viewed as products, it becomes easy to package and brand them. Employees understand the specific attributes of each product or service and the benefits encapsulated in each offering. Every single HR initiative can be viewed as a product and service: the introduction of a recognition scheme, a savings scheme, a coaching programme, a news letter, an incentive scheme or a cascade of company values or change intervention (organization development /design).

To push to automate HR Services and introduce e-HR options ensures employees an access to the information they need from the remote locations. Virtual HR is becoming a reality and remote access to HR systems offers the kind of flexibility that is aligned to the employees of the 21st century. HR functions that don't prepare well for this value addition will find it increasingly difficult to attract and retain types of talent and may compromise their competitive edge.

Promoting products and services and providing adequate publicity is at the core of marketing functions as they understand the impact that has on product and service uptake. Human resource 'marketing' would ensure that a communication plan is put in place every time a new product or service is introduced or even at specific intervals to remind employees of the products and services on offer.

The Employee Centric Organization

At the centre of human resource practice is the employee. Most organizations will declare that employees are the most important resource or asset they have but how many truly put the employees at the centre of their operations? Good customer service is often a reflection of the employee experience. Research indicates that engaged employees deliver higher levels of customer experience and satisfaction as compared to apathetic or disengaged employees. With the increasing use of balanced score card to measure the performance of executive teams, the customer satisfaction index and employees engagement score are gaining high visibility with share holders.

In order to improve the employee experience, HR can implement specific initiatives at every employee touch point (the points where employees emotionally connect with the employee) in the business. As an example, the employee entry point as experienced through the entire recruitment process, the induction as well as on boarding process are the key touch points for an employee. Whether it is receiving a birthday card, a welcome cake after a long absence from work or a congratulatory letter from the line manager on exceeding a target; all these actions create a feeling of a "great place to work in". The HR professional that will succeed in an employee centric organization will have the necessary technical skills to translate company strategies in to HR practices leading to the design of products and services that are aligned with the organizational priorities.

In this era of e-HR, the function can utilize technology to communicate and deliver a big portion of HR services through self-service-online systems. An HR professional with great soft skills will influence employees and create a culture that is receptive to the products and services that HR delivers.

HR practitioners that will succeed are those that keep up with the changing HR landscape and remain ahead of the evolution curve by up skilling on soft skills (e.g. coaching, mentoring, consulting, counselling, transformational leadership, change management. etc) and adopting employee centric approaches to human resource practice. Therefore, soft skills of the HR professionals will make or break the impact of the HR function. Soft skills are truly the deal breaker and most desirable HR competency in this complex and volatile business environment..!

Author's Profile

Subir Ghosh is a thorough HR Professional, for over 19 years. He has rich and varied experience in HR across nations like India, Tanzania, Kenya, Mozambique and South Africa; and across industries like automobile, pharmaceutical, healthcare -medical devices, steel, textile and education. He is experienced in performance coaching, counseling, consulting, employee relations management, behavioral training, international recruitment (expatriate management), capability development strategy and employee engagement. He has exposure in implementation of value based culture aligned with behavior based safety (partnered with DuPont-Best Practices) He also has a flair for designing and implementing effective HR Policies & OD tool as per organization's needs.
