Role of HR in the 21st Century

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Under his leadership and guidance, JSPL has won various awards in HR like RASSIC "HR Leadership Award", SAIL HR Award for "Outstanding HR Professional", JSPL was also rated amongst the top 20 "Best Companies to Work For in India" by Business Today and Mercer.

After successfully leading the HR functions of the organization for four years, in 2010 he was entrusted with another challenging role of Head – Education. He currently heads various educational institutions like JSPL which includes Jindal Global University (JGU); Jindal Institute of Technology (JITC); Institute of Technology (JITC); Jindal Institute of Power Technology (JIP), four Community Colleges of Technology and Skills (OPJICTS); three ITI's and four high schools.

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This is an account of the growth and development of HR function in India. What started in mid 1970s as a conceptualization of an integrated HRD system to change the performance appraisal system in large engineering company, resulted in establishment of HRD departments in many firms. Further, dissemination and perseverance resulted in establishment of center of HRD and subsequently the birth of professional body and later, an academic institution. Usually, at least in the past, HR, has had the misfortune of being considered as a necessary, but yet unessential or unproductive department in an organization. It was considered an administrative doer rather than a strategic partner and catalyst. HR in that context merely meant regular administrative and record-keeping functionalities. This perspective though, has rapidly changed in today's knowledge era.

What made the perspective change? Just as every era had a primary source of wealth creation, as in land agrarian era; the primary source for wealth creation in the knowledge era is Human capital. Although technology and other resources have dramatically changed the way business is conducted; it is, nevertheless, the people who utilize it, that make all the difference. Human resource initiatives are a reflection of what we are seeing in today's highly volatile and competitive business environment; where technology, trends and consequently workforces are in a state of constant flux. It is in this light that HR is being perceived differently and its
being elevated to a leadership role and that of a key business partner.

In this new model, HR assumes a more strategic role. It contributes towards the planning, formulation and accomplishment of organization objectives. It then creates its own objectives in line with the overall business objectives, thereby impacting every aspect of its services.

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One of the synonyms of this knowledge era is change and consequently unpredictability. Here, HR plays a key and pivotal role in identifying the capability gaps that consequently arise. A capability gap is the difference between the ability of existing systems to meet operational requirements and what’s expected of it. It’s the lack of knowledge, skills and abilities in the current system to meet set organizational/individual goals or expected capability.

It identifies these gaps and works closely with the management to fill these gaps by obtaining the appropriate resources, training available resources and through other means. Successful organizations are those that are flexible and are quick to adapt; needless to say the HR team plays a crucial role in this process of adapting.

As a link between the employee and the employer, the HR manager, plays a key role in advocating cordial relations between the two. The professional is required to have a deep understanding of people and of their roles, so as to create a work environment that’s friendly, motivating and productive.

The HR advocates the objectives of one group to the other. As an advocate of the employee, the professional creates development and growth opportunities, benefit plans, assistance programs etc. for the benefit of the employee. He/she is also expected to develop strong employee relations, to not just spot problems early, but also to work collectively and solve them.

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Now, although some of these duties have always been performed by the HR department, it’s in the increasingly consultative & strategic partnership role that we find the new and changing role of the HR.

Some industry commentators call the Human Resources function the last bastion of bureaucracy. Traditionally, the role of the Human Resource professional in many organizations has been to serve as the systematizing, policing arm of executive management. Their role was more closely aligned with personnel and administration functions that were viewed by the organization as paperwork.

When you consider that the initial HR function, in many companies, comes out of the administration or finance department because hiring employees, paying employees, and dealing with benefits were the organization’s first HR needs, this is not surprising.

In this role, the HR professional served executive agendas well, but was frequently viewed as a road block by much of the rest of the organization. Some need for this role remains — you wouldn’t want every manager putting his own spin on a sexual harassment policy, for example. Nor can every manager interpret and implement the employee handbook as she chooses. Payroll and benefits need
administration, even if they are now electronically handled.

In this role, employees regarded HR as the enemy and going to HR was the kiss of death for your ongoing relationship with your own manager. Employees believed, and were often correct, that the HR function was in place solely to serve management.

Stories shared on this website by readers for years are hard on HR professionals. They criticize everything from their education to their professionalism to their support for employees. More importantly, they accuse HR professionals of misleading employees, failing to keep employee information confidential, and exhibiting poor practices in areas such as investigations, benefits options, and hiring employees.

If the HR role in your organization is not transforming itself to align with forward thinking practices, executive leadership must ask HR leaders some tough questions. Today’s organizations cannot afford to have an HR department that fails to contribute to and even lead, modern thinking.

In this environment, much of the HR role is transforming. The role of the HR manager, director, or executive must parallel the needs of his or her changing organization. Successful organizations are becoming more adaptive, resilient, quick to charge direction and customer-centered. Within this environment, the HR professional, who is considered necessary by managers and executives, is a strategic partner, an employee sponsor or advocate and a change mentor.

The HR professionals who understand these roles are leading their organizations in areas such as organization development, strategic utilization of employees to serve business goals, and talent management and development. Let’s take a look at each of these roles and their impact on HR functions and practices.

Strategic Partner

In today's organizations, to guarantee their viability and ability to contribute, HR managers need to think of themselves as strategic partners. In this role, the HR person contributes to the development of and the accomplishment of the organization-wide business plan and objectives.

The HR business objectives are established to support the attainment of the overall strategic business plan and objectives. The tactical HR representative is deeply knowledgeable about the design of work systems in which people succeed and contribute.

This strategic partnership impacts HR services such as the design of work positions; hiring, reward, recognition and strategic pay; performance development and appraisal systems; career and succession planning; and employee development. When HR professionals are aligned with the business, the personnel component of the organization is thought about as a strategic contributor to business success.

To be successful business partners, the HR staff members have to think like business people, know finance and accounting, and be accountable and responsible for cost reductions and the measurement of all HR programs and processes. It’s not enough to ask for a seat at the executive table; HR people will have to prove they have the business savvy necessary to sit there.
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Employee Advocate

As an employee sponsor or advocate, the HR manager plays an integral role in organizational success via his knowledge about and advocacy of people. This advocacy includes expertise in how to create a work environment in which people will choose to be motivated, contributing, and happy.

The constant evaluation of the effectiveness of the organization requires the need for the HR professional to frequently champion change. Both knowledge about and the ability to execute successful change strategies make the HR professional exceptionally valued. Knowing how to link change to the strategic needs of the organization will minimize employee dissatisfaction and resistance to change.

Organization development, the overarching discipline for change management strategies, gives the HR professional additional challenges. Consistently helping to create the right organization culture, monitoring employee satisfaction, and measuring the results of organization initiatives fall here as well as in the role of employee advocate.

The HR professional contributes to the organization by constantly assessing the effectiveness of the HR function. Also sponsors change in other departments and in work practices. To promote the overall success of the organization, the champions' identification of the organizational mission, vision, values, goals and action plans. Finally, that helps to determine the measures that will tell organization how well it is succeeding in its entire goal.

Fostering effective methods of goal setting, communication and empowerment through responsibility, builds employee ownership of the organization. The HR professional helps establish the organizational culture and climate in which people have the competency, concern and commitment to serve customers well.

In this role, the HR manager provides overall talent management strategies, employee development opportunities, employee assistance programs, gain sharing and profit-sharing strategies, organization development interventions, due process approaches to employee complaints and problem solving, and regularly scheduled communication opportunities.

Change Champion

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"It's not the size of the dog in the fight, it's the size of the fight in the dog." — Mark Twain

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