

Talking about HR

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Traditionally, the personnel administration department or as we all know, the Human Resources (HR) department was regarded only as a support function. More recently, employers have identified HR as the connecting link between the management and the employees. They have added HR to the organizational decision making as well as strategic thinking process. Few organizations today consider the value of the HR Head not less than their Managing Director and CEO. However, HR roles and responsibilities vary depending on the size of the company. In some organizations, the HR professional will typically work across several disciplines, whilst in others there will be both generalist as well as specialist. Few others, mainly the smaller ones, prefer to outsource the activities of HR work and turn to management consultants for activities like writing their company strategy, Organizational Development (OD) plan, managing staff trainings and so on.

The modern era is witnessing the importance of HR with its strong practices that shall build strong corporate cultures, develop effective trainings for the staffs, develop leaders to run the organization and create conducive environment to perform better. In addition, they have realized the value of creativity and innovation and the HR department is not an exception to this; rather a product of it.

An organization to run effectively needs its employees to have the right skills, function at the right place, fully charged (motivated), possess the drive to succeed against all odds and commitment to serve the organization for a longer term. Finding creative ways to build a workplace where people want to work hard at the same time, feel loyal can really drive productivity and growth for the organization. This is the core job of a HR professional in the present times. However, the challenges for HR are constantly evolving. For instance, more flexibility is needed for employees especially in terms of their working. So, the Human Resources Development (HRD) is more crucial than the Human Resources Management (HRM). In this sense, HRD is responsible to find new ways to engage and motivate employees with the changing needs.

For choosing HR as a career, you need to have a strong desire to study elements that make the business a success, and if so, develop a deeper understanding in the way people behave and work, the various ways to handle them but HR is not the job for you if you are not a 'people person' and liking people will not be enough. More precisely, you have to be interested in getting the best out of people. Remember, you will not get the best people readily available but the skills you expect in order to perform the jobs can be inculcated in your employees through on the job trainings. In this context, the role of HR department is to identify the people who are willing to learn and adaptable to change. Moreover, an organization needs to value its staff on the basis of the adaptability than just the tenure of service. For e.g. a newly joined employee may add more value to the organization than an old adamant employee working having worked for long years.

The HR practitioner, today, needs to possess good level of numeracy and analytical skills, working knowledge of the labor laws, global HR practices like the equal opportunities, gender equality amongst others. Most importantly, the HR department needs to focus on employees Continuous Professional Development (CPD) by keeping them updated about the happenings in various parts of the world about their respective fields.

Areas like training, OD and employee relations rely on strong communication skills and a high level of emotional intelligence. Besides, IT skills are increasingly in demand across the board especially when an online culture is prevailing.

Which qualities are needed for an HR Practitioner today?

My research identifies some key behaviors into HR functions, necessary for being a successful HR Practitioner today. They are as follows:

- Innovative – discover new ways to make processes easier and faster.
- Creative thinker – be proactive, ‘think out of the box’.
- Skilled – academically qualified with adequate trainings.
- Desire to excel – willingness to learn and flexible.
- Ready for challenges – willing to accept more responsibilities beyond the job role.
- People’s person – Excellent skills in people management.
- Emotionally intelligent – understanding the colleagues and support them whenever required.

Conclusion:

The HR of today, I refer to as, the Next Generation HR, has an added element of creativity and innovation. Besides, changes in the society not just domestically but internationally demand for customized HR practices that adapt quickly and respond efficiently to the changing scenario. This demands a flexible HR in place that is uniquely positioned to both, support and encourage innovative behaviors and processes. But how innovation can be positioned as well as mapped to organizations is debatable. However, important enough is to consider that HR can help organizations to derive the best value, quality and performance from its people. In this sense, an innovative HR can bring about effective team work, new products and services, smooth processes and sustainability. I have observed employers, particularly here in Africa are gradually adapting to such practices. The shift from traditional to modern HR is the product of extensive research and needs of the organization for adapting towards the change. It is the outcome of concepts like ‘The Learning Organization’, ‘Leadership Development’ that originated in the US few years ago. Above all, HR is the bridge between employees and the management. It is the ‘captain of the ship’, just that management needs to realize this and act accordingly.

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