

WORK IN THE 21ST CENTURY: THE CHANGING ROLE OF HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGERS

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Abstract

This study examines the changing role of human resource managers in the 21st Century and the future of human resource management. There are an incredible number of pressures in today's organizations. To name a few: environmental pressures such as increasing globalization, rapid technological change, and tougher competition; organizational changes such as new organizational alliances, new structures and hierarchies, new ways of assigning work, and a very high rate of change; changes in the workforce, including employees' priorities, capabilities, and demographic characteristics. HR managers were given extra duties as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic, including ensuring that new regulations are followed, arranging for employees to work from home, redesigning the workspace to make it safer for both onsite staff and clients, and putting a greater emphasis on mental health issues among employees. The department of human resources has a vital role to play in assisting organizations in navigating through these transitions because of the pressures they face. But to fulfill this role, HR will need to add more perceived and actual value. This study concluded that the working environment may never be the same again as new situations arise and old ones are resolved, necessitating organizational-wide adjustments at the managerial and strategic levels. In order to guarantee that a proactive and effective approach is employed for present and future obstacles, HR department can successfully function as the link between staff members and higher management.

Keywords: HR managers, changing role of HR, changing workforce, COVID-19 pandemic

Introduction

It was the duty of all managers and staff to adhere to government agency directives and changing regulations. Human Resource (HR) managers were tasked with enforcing numerous mandates and altering work procedures, nevertheless. The focus and channel for a variety of initiatives and information, such as health and safety, shifting the company's operations to remote work, and addressing traditional HR tasks in novel ways. A survey of 1,000 HR

professionals revealed that 98% of HR leaders said the COVID-19 pandemic had changed their role. According to HR professionals surveyed, the role has evolved as a result of a greater focus on these priority issues:

1. Health and safety of the workforce;
2. Mental and emotional well-being of employees;
3. The necessity of technology to maintain communication between managers, HR teams, and employees (Massimino, 2021).

Scholars have observed this shift. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, several organizations never considered HR as an important strategic role (Rich et al., 2022). According to Farshchi (2020), prior to the pandemic, some people wrote off the role of HR as nothing more than hiring, firing, and compliance with regulations. Top HR Officers are now essential components of business response strategies to the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic. According to Horovitz (2022), in the old days, HR need to plead to be granted time before the entire board; these days, HR directors actively participate in board meetings. This is a reset moment and there has been an unprecedented shift in the field.

Human resources have always played a changing role in society. The change in terminology from "personnel" to "human resources", for instance, was a move to de-stigmatize personnel departments, bureaucratic departments and to recognize the importance of employees as organizational resources. This change in name was preceded by a request that HR take on a more strategic role alongside the company's executives, serving as a resource for important business choices, offering guidance during important transitions, and elevating the status of employees in other words, to be included at the table. This study examines the changing role of human resource managers in the 21st Century and the future of human resource management.

Review of Related Literature

Ulrich (1997) provides a clear path to the next generation of HR with "Human resource champions: The next agenda for adding value and delivering results". He describes a multi-faceted approach to delivering HR services that meets the needs of both employees and employers,

and positions HR as a significant contributor to organizational success. Ulrich outlines his methodology in the context of deliverables, or results, for which HR ought to be in charge of the implementation of the strategy, the effectiveness of the administrative process, employee involvement, and the ability to adapt. He outlines four corresponding roles that HR can play in a business while providing services in these four areas:

1. As a strategic partner coordinating HR with business strategy;
2. As an administrative specialist enhancing organizational procedures and providing essential HR services;
3. As an employee advocate, attending to and addressing the needs of staff members;
4. As a change agent overseeing change management procedures to boost organizational efficacy.

One of unique things about Ulrich's approach is that it includes all of the ways that HR can deliver value to an organization, rather than shifting focus from one area to another. Similarly, Johnson (1997) describes his experiences in executive search in which CEOs describe the HR leaders they want to hire. They want people who will be successful business partners, strategic thinkers, and people who will understand the pressures of running an effective business in today's market. He reports that, when hiring a leader for the HR function, most CEOs ask for someone who is, "not a typical HR person," and that most of the successful candidates describe themselves that way. This trend reflects the common perception that HR "business-as-usual" is not prepared to meet the challenges that today's businesses present. HR team that tries to transition to a new HR function will face different challenges, but there are certain common actions and procedures that will

improve the chances of accomplishment. Among these actions and tasks are:

1. Strong HR leadership: As with any major change effort, a strong leader can develop a clear vision, motivate others to share that vision, and help them work toward achieving it. In order to change the role of HR in an organization, the HR leader will need to work both within the HR group and with the organizational leaders to reshape everyone's expectations of what HR can and will deliver. The success of the change will depend upon HR's ability to meet the real needs of the organization and the credibility it develops.

2. A sharp focus on the future: Understanding how evolving organizational, workforce, and environmental factors will probably affect the business, anticipating the corresponding HR needs, and being ready to provide appropriate approaches to meet those needs are some of the means that HR can add value. By maintaining a focus on workplace trends, for instance, HR can prepare to evaluate the impact that particular changes are likely to have on an organization's people and processes, and be prepared to work with the business leaders to decide how to respond-being ahead of the curve, not behind it. For example, one movement that is likely to have significant impact on the way people are hired, managed, and valued is that of intellectual capital. A "new role" HR department is one that has learned about intellectual capital and its implications, evaluated the impact on current practice, and developed ideas and recommendations for changing HR practice and other business processes (Okolie *et al.*, 2017).

3. Flexibility and creativity: An HR group that is successful in the future will likely be one that is responsive to the changing needs of its client organization. Responsiveness in the changing world of work will require being flexible-as the organizations change, so will their needs and priorities. In addition, traditional activities and processes may not be sufficient to meet the unique needs of the future-HR leaders will likely rely on creativity of their groups to achieve effective results. Increasing globalization of the market will create a need for both flexibility and creativity as businesses try to succeed in new locations, with a new workforce, and with new customers.

4. Delivering value: Although this is not a new challenge for HR, it remains a critical one. Many people in today's organizations still view human resources as merely a non-revenue-generating function. Emphasize the benefits of collaborating with the leadership team to select the best candidates, manage them effectively, pay them fairly, and create a productive workplace. Beauty and Sclineier (1997) extended the concept of delivering value within the organization by arguing that HR must deliver economic value to the *customers*, as well as to the employees. Today, HR teams work to respond to environmental and organizational changes, become more valuable, and deliver results.

5. Business unit assignment: Some companies are assigning HR employees to specific business units as a way of enabling them to develop a focused relationship with a small part of the business. This relationship can be enforced when the HR person has a direct reporting

relationship with the leader of the business unit. In these situations, the central HR group usually provides information and services to the "distributed" HR representatives, who then deliver the service personally to the business unit. One advantage of this structure is that it fosters the flexibility and creativity mentioned above, as the local HR people can modify and tailor processes and services to meet the needs of their assigned business units.

6. Centers of excellence: As organizations grow by merger and acquisition, they often find themselves with multiple HR groups. These can be duplicative or complementary. Whenever HR teams become redundant, they may be the target of (painful) reorganization and downsizing, leaving a department that cannot support every facet of the organization as well as they had been accustomed, which can, in turn, undermine the credibility of HR. An effective response to this issue is to utilize the multiple HR groups differently (Okolie, 2018). One approach that seems to work well is to develop "centers of excellence," where the HR groups in different parts of the company develop their expertise in a particular area and serve the needs of the larger company in that area- HR groups operating within this model can see each other as resources rather than competitors, and the company benefits from high levels of expertise in a number of areas.

7. Consulting model and job rotation: A number of HR departments with whom I've

worked have adopted a consulting model of providing service. They view their internal customers as clients, learn consulting skills, and take their client satisfaction as a measure of their success. In one large high-technology firm, internal clients whose needs cannot be met by the internal HR group can go to external service providers directly- even for basic HR needs. One way to bring the perspective of the business into HR- and vice versa- is to rotate line managers into the HR function for periods of time. These individuals often serve as reality checks for the HR group, and then bring an increased understanding of the value of HR back to their line function when the rotation is over. This approach seems to work best when the duration of the assignment is sufficient to allow the rotated individual enough time to become proficient in some area(s) of HR and when he or she is working closely with experienced HR people who can help them learn. Sending HR people into other areas of the business can serve a similar purpose (Okolie, 2018).

8. Increasing line managers' capabilities. Part of the future HR model is that responsibility for HR activities is shared between line management and HR people. This approach allows the manager to be more fully involved in the development and direction of employees, with HR as a resource; it requires, however, that those managers have the capabilities needed to work through issues with employees successfully. Many companies are therefore increasing line managers' access to information. Many of today's HR information systems and integrated HR systems put tools and data on

each manager's desktop (Okolie & Airhunmwunde, 2018).

Novel Approaches to Current HR Functions

The idea of utilizing technology for HR tasks did not emerge during the pandemic. But the pandemic made it urgent to apply already existing technologies, acquire new ones, or broaden the use of already existing ones. It was imperative to maintain both business operations and public safety. Human Resource Information Systems (HRIS) equipped organizations were typically able to adjust faster. HRIS, according to Dessler (2020), is HR software that combines payroll, benefits administration, performance management, hiring, applicant tracking, and training into a single centralized platform. COVID-19 forced organizations to switch to virtual methods of hiring and choosing candidates. HR professionals heavily depended on modern technology to carry out the essential hiring and recruitment procedures, given the heightened emphasis on public safety (Votto et al., 2021). Zoom interviews have replaced in-person interviews as the norm for job interviews. Selection tests were frequently given online as opposed to in person. Maurer (2020) says, "We have found there are many meaningful ways to engage with people besides face-to-face", and adds that video calls can be used to measure facial expressions and engagement. To hire someone, you don't have to shake their hand.

HR and IT departments must work together to transition Human Resources to virtual on-boarding, virtual training, and document digitization for hiring and training (Bingham, 2020). The majority of the on-boarding paperwork for tax

withholding and employee benefits was completed online. Both new hires and current staff members now require more training of all kinds (Rich et al., 2022). When HRIS and AI were combined, employees could interact with software that could be completed anywhere and provided instructions on company policies, procedures, and benefits. Digital virtual assistants can assist staff members in completing required training and can assist new hires with the on-boarding process (Chowdhury et al., 2022). Increases in HRIS's capacity for staff development and training have resulted in more interactive training and the ability to track employee participation (Votto et al., 2021). In order to handle novel duties and learn how to perform their current jobs in a different way, current employees needed training. Employees who received training were able to adjust to new roles and modalities. Employee absences left many businesses with a shortage of personnel. Higher absenteeism rates were brought on by workers who had COVID-19 or had been exposed to it, as well as by family illness, quarantines, the need to keep schoolchildren at home, and fear of getting COVID-19. Several employees were transferred to new positions to make up for labor shortages. The duties of employees were sometimes increased, which could be problematic if the staff members lacked the necessary resources, encouragement, or training (Rich et al., 2022).

A growing number of employers are utilizing technology to keep an eye on their staff members by monitoring computer usage, staff communications, and time spent clocking in and out (Baker, 2021). According to Massimino (2023), over 50% of HR directors are choosing to evaluate team performance over individual employee performance. HR teams need to work together across

all departments to implement strategies that cater to the needs of the contemporary worker more than ever. Arora et al. (2021) claim that HR analytics simplifies the process of gathering, retrieving, and documenting different kinds of performance-related data from multiple sources; the services and benefits offered to employees are overseen by the HR departments. The pandemic altered people's preferences and perceptions of the value of different benefits. According to survey results, the top benefits of the year were retirement planning, family support, and health benefits. Life insurance became one of the top 5 benefits for the first time in a number of years (Meister, 2022). HR managers needed to improve and update a few of the employee benefit plans. Additional benefits for workers frequently included paid time off, financial aid, rearranged work schedules, and help getting childcare (Baker, 2021). One of the most popular trends in benefits is HR's shift to a more individualized benefits strategy, with the aim of fostering a culture of empathy that attends to the needs of every employee.

The Future of Human Resource Management in Post COVID-19 Pandemic

Expanded Roles for HR Management: Another vital function of HR is to serve as a liaison between leaders and employees, according to Dirani et al. (2020). They must speak up for workers' concerns about their jobs, offer solutions to managers, and ensure that managers pay attention to their staff members' concerns and offer them psychological support and supervisory assistance when they are in need. The pandemic brought the people component of HR's work back into focus, reintroducing the "human" in HR (Harbart, 2021). The rise in employment in the field of

HR management is evidenced by the fact that, as of early January of this year, there were 150% more HR jobs posted on Indeed than there were a year earlier (Horovitz, 2022).

Elevated Status for HR Management:

In the future, HR directors will be in a unique position to handle the conundrum that the COVID-19 pandemic has brought about. As a result, they will be at the forefront of organizational reactions to the crisis, and their performance will probably have an influence on both the sustainability of the organization and the lives of employees worldwide. This could permanently improve the HR function's standing, but how HR executives handle the situation will determine that (Collings et al., 2021). Numerous authors highlight the elevated status and increased responsibilities of human resource management and explain how COVID-19 has altered the field's future:

1. HR is now in the public eye due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and how HR leaders handle the situation will affect the function's future standing and profile (Collings et al., 2021).
2. In addition, according to 80% of chief HR officers, they are currently actively collaborating with their CEOs on corporate culture (Horovitz, 2022).
3. HR has solidified its place as the CEO's right hand, guiding him or her through difficult people-centric issues (Harbart, 2021).
4. HR's ability to sustain its influence at the board level and guarantee superior HR activity execution will be crucial to this (Collings et al., 2021).
5. Welcome to the brand-new HR industry. While pressure to do more with less grows, a confluence of cultural and economic trends is elevating the status, if not the power,

of HR departments across the country (Horovitz, 2022).

Conclusion

During the pandemic, HR management which was once largely seen as a transactional business function in many organizations became essential to developing and putting into practice strategic and operational changes, and it still has a distinct role today. With no end in sight, the COVID-19 pandemic has thrown employees and employers into a state of chaos and uncertainty. For the majority of 2020 and the first half of 2021, HR was in crisis mode. They were trying to figure out how to allow workers to work from home, trying to offer more support for their physical and mental health, and concentrating more than ever on the fundamental tactics that would keep their businesses operating. HR's role has changed significantly as businesses get used to the new normal and the dust settles.

The human resources field is in dire need of a revolution, and industrial and organizational psychologists who work with those in HR can help facilitate this change by paying attention to organizational pressures for change, assisting in the development of metrics for evaluating the value that HR provides, and carrying out insightful research on all facets of employee performance in the organizations of the future. In conclusion, as new situations emerge and old ones are resolved, the workplace may never be the same. The entire organization must make adjustments at the managerial and strategic levels. In order to guarantee that a proactive and effective approach is taken for present and future challenges, HR management can successfully function as the link between staff members and higher management.

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