Human Resource Department must play a much BIGGER role

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I have worked in the Information Technology sector for over two decades primarily in the areas of Software Quality Assurance & Testing, Process/Project/Program Management. As part of the Leadership team, I've also had the good fortune to have worked in areas outside of my core competency. I've had the opportunity to work and learn from some of the best minds in the industry. I was also blessed to have had a terrific team that was one closely knit family. I've made mistakes, learnt from them individually and/or as part of the team. Working on flagship products with some tight deadlines, amicably solving problems as part of software development, meeting project management principles etc. have been a regular feature throughout my career. As a Manager, I've hired some of the brightest minds and have mentored and trained them for success. I've tried to carry out responsibilities to the best of my abilities.

Regardless of where I worked, small, mid-sized or large organizations, start-ups or reputed companies, few questions always lingered in my mind:

- Why is HR department not as strong as others?

- Why is the field of Human Resource Management so underrated?

- Why is that employees talk highly of a Chief Technology Officer (CTO) or a Chief Financial Officer (CFO), Chief Operating Officer (COO), but not a Chief Human Resource Officer (CHRO)?

In team meetings and in 1-1s, my staff would always find fault with HR policies, complain about HR not doing what they are supposed to. I always felt that HR function/HR Leaders were NOT as powerful as other functions in the organization and their peers, so much so that some people even labelled HR leaders as toothless tigers or merely a support function.

As part of the Leadership team, I had the opportunity to work on a number of key projects outside of my main forte which was Quality Assurance & Testing and Program Management. This included, designing company's extranet, intranet, employee orientation for new hires, job evaluation/analysis/rotation and employer branding. That is when, I first sensed that Human Resource needs to be one of the most proactive functions in order for a company to prosper.

From making the Quality Assurance team a force to reckon with, to making an organization an 'Employer of Choice' and a 'Centre of Excellence' is one thing I would like to add to my repertoire. I have always felt that the field of Human Resources has largely been untapped. No other field provides so much of variety. If you look at the key accountability of HR function, there are many when compared to fields like, Software Development, Quality Assurance, Marketing, Finance, Operations to name a few.

Many B-School students prefer Marketing, Finance as their specialization. Then there are other students who choose Operations, International Business. While it is completely upto the prerogative of the student as regards what specialization to choose, HR is by and large side-lined. It is not the preferred option as many students either do not know about the field and/or have made their own preconceived assumptions about HR. A student with specialization in HR can tremendously grow in the field of Human Resources by gradually learning the following functions of Human Resource Management (HRM):
1. Recruitment & Selection
2. Compensation & Benefits
3. Payroll Management
4. Performance Management
5. Training & Development

It does not end here...

HR Planning, Job Analysis, Designing Organizational Policies & Employee Orientation program for new hires, Job Evaluation, Employee Communication, Welfare, Health & Safety, Disciplinary Action, Ethics in Recruitment, Employer Branding are some of the other areas where an employee can immensely contribute. Looking at the HR functions and the areas as mentioned above, it is only apt to call it as Strategic Human Resource Management or SHRM. Considering the many options to choose from, can an employee working in HR field feel his/her job to be monotonous? Definitely not, definitely not so soon!

For a project to be deemed successful, it has to be ensure that the scope, functionality, budget, schedule and quality are met. What about a successful organization? What defines a successful organization and who is the driving force? An organization to flourish and become the most sought after company, the functions of HRM and the other areas I've listed needs to be looked at diligently. Communication is one of the building blocks of an organization. Planning is another pillar and this is where Human Resource Management holds the key. It binds the organization and it all starts with hiring the right resource with the right skills and at the right time.

Unfortunately in India, Human Resource Management is thought of to be a low-level job. It is considered as an extension to administration. Many of my students from Marketing, Finance have a feeling that HR is all about short-listing resumes, making offer letters, coming up with a holiday list for the year, organizing events like annual day, decorating cubicles during festive seasons etc.

Now let us look at some of the functions of HR in brief and its significance.

1. Recruitment & Selection

If 'Recruitment and Selection' are given its due importance, hiring managers are likely to make fewer mistakes. There is a good chance of companies hiring the right resource by asking the right questions. They will ensure that there is a cultural fit and that umpteen rounds of interviews are not necessary to select a candidate. Last but certainly not the least, having the right forms of recruitment and selection process and interview techniques are vital to hiring at all levels.

2. Compensation & Benefits

Not every company can offer handsome remuneration, benefits, and employee friendly policies. But if the induction program is robust, employees will start to feel attached with the company from day one. 'Compensation and Benefits' should be decent enough for an employee to think thru before deciding to part ways with the company. Another company may offer a better package, a better title, better benefits, may be closer to where the employee lives, but these are NOT the only parameters for a job seeker.

3. Payroll Management

An organization can keep the morale of its employees by paying salaries on time. During the month of India's biggest festival, Diwali, salary (or a part of it) can even be disbursed ahead of time. An effective Payroll Management system ensures that correct percentage of applicable taxes (TDS) are deducted from the salary. Decent amount of time may be given to employees before an organization starts deducting any amount for which loan or salary advance was taken.

4. Performance Management

There are lots of mistakes made by Managers during performance appraisal. Employees often complaint about biasness. Human Resource Department must ensure that performance goals are well understood by the entire workforce. HR Department must clearly define the guidelines for Managers to ensure that they have productive performance appraisal meetings with their respective employees and that biases are eliminated.

5. Training & Development

How will you identify the training needs of your organization?
Who should participate?
What are the objectives of training?
Does the organization has a training budget?
How often do you have trainings in your organization?
If you have regular training programs, does it get evaluated?
What was the outcome of the last training you attended?
Did it achieve the objectives?
Were you happy with the trainer?

These are some of the questions to ponder when you hear the term, 'Training'. Training is required because it addresses the 'gap' – where you are currently and where you should be eventually. What are employee's current skills and what are the organization's requirements?

In my opinion, Training & Development is by far the most neglected functions of HRM. Unfortunately, very few companies invest in Training programs. Employees are busy working on projects and once a project is over, they move on to another. HR should work closely with Functional Managers to identify the training needs.

Leaders in an organization need to work closely with HR folks to ensure that the above functions are given their due importance. Other areas like, Work Satisfaction, Rewards & Recognition and Advancement Opportunities, Empowerment etc should not be ignored. Speaking of empowerment, I personally believe that every employee in an organization should be empowered to make the organization better.

Every forward-looking Manager strategically plans to come up with objectives for his/her department. His/hers endeavour should be to make his department perform to the best of his abilities. Nothing wrong with that except that the endeavour should be to work with Human Resource personnel to make the 'Organization' better, not just the 'Department'. Who better than Human Resource Department can take the initiative to make the organization, an employer of choice, a centre of excellence?

Human Resource department also need to play a key role during exit interviews. Reasons behind an employee leaving the organization should be given a serious thought to minimize attrition. With good communication, people

management, decision-making skills and an eye for details, HR can redefine how organizations can optimally perform and get the best out of each and every employee.

Human Resource Management emerged as an extension of Personnel Management. Now there is an emergence of Strategic Human Resource Management or SHRM. It is all about linking the functions of HR in order to achieve the strategic objectives of the organization. SHRM is the process that is put in place to clearly define the goals of the organization and how it will be achieved by employees.

SHRM focuses on increased performance from its workforce. This can be achieved through, effective management of recruitment & selection, bringing them upto speed, providing training to upgrade their skills and getting quality output. It is important to keep in mind that since strategy is about long-term planning, organizations must be crystal clear on what they plan to achieve and by when. Goals needs to strategically fit into the organization's culture. Strategic HRM is definitely going to give the competitive edge, there will be long-term benefits. However, to reap the benefits, employees need to be patient and embrace change.

Why should employees wait for the CXOs or some other Executive Manager to conduct Town Hall or All-Hands Meetings? Precisely why I feel that HR function need overhauling and HR Leaders should step up.

Employees working in HR department should be empowered to do more and must be given a free hand to make the organization, better and bigger. HR is a good career choice…worth considering.

Human Resource Department can and must play a BIGGER role and SHRM will surely pave the way!