

HR needs to speak the language of business

People are at the top of the agenda in many a company with the war for talent intensifying in many business sectors. It is crucial for the Human Resources (HR) department to recognise the value that it brings in terms of helping the business to compete in finding the right talent.

The future of HR, however, depends on its business presence. You need to have the mindset of a business role-player first, and then an HR professional, to understand the contribution that HR can make to the bigger picture. It boils down to how well you really know your business and who your clients are, be it employees, line managers, Exco members, external clients or even investors.

Do you understand your business?

Ask yourself the following questions, to establish whether you understand your business:

- What are the top-three priorities and concerns of your business leaders?
- Who is your biggest client and why do they use your service or product?
- Which product/service is the most profitable, and why?
- What emerging technology trends can influence your business?
- What socio-economic or political trends might be disruptive to your industry?
- What is the company's operating margin?
- What was the revenue and profit for the previous financial year?

If you are familiar with the needs of the business, your HR practices will reflect that knowledge. The answers to the above questions can help the HR practitioner to achieve business objectives through informed HR decisions.

There are many ways in which HR practices can support business performance. The principles and philosophies that you implement as an HR professional affect the workplace, the value chain, the company's value proposition as well as the technology that the company uses. The people represent the company's image and its ability to deliver its service or product adequately, and it is ultimately your responsibility to shape that image and to align it with the business needs.

The management of talent

The broader HR mandate far exceeds the mere administration of HR technology and policies alone. The focus has moved towards the management of talent, which includes recruitment, training and development, performance management, talent assessment and succession planning. As far as the organisation is concerned, HR practices will shape the business structure, rewards, internal communication and process design.

It is crucial that the organisation's HR strategy underscores that of the business. HR goals need to be consistent with that of the company's and need to be designed to make the business strategy happen. Likewise, HR also needs buy-in from management to mobilise its strategy.

It is, therefore, necessary to focus on building relationships of trust. To make an impact in the business the HR professional needs to be confident, have a commercial point of view, be able to speak candidly and influence others. A positive investment in their own personal growth will help any HR professional in this regard.

Key elements to focus on are to create a business presence, to learn the language of your business and to continue with an HR mindset. The ultimate goal is to empower your people and to focus on business results, as these are lifelines that keep your business alive.

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