

HR Power

Starting from within to win influence & strengthen impact

By Steve Bernard



As the world gets more automated and technology enabled, organisations will look more and more to their people - skilled, knowledge workers - for value adding contributions, new ideas, innovative practice and much more. Enabling and empowering people has never been so vital which is why HR professionals and Line Managers play a pivotal role. But many HR teams and functions are not fit for purpose, with either inadequate talent, poor team dynamics or a weak connection to the rest of the business. From this position their work or their reputation can be too easily discredited.

HR have arguably always had it hard; *caught between a rock and a hard place* is all too often their experience. Their sponsors are typically the MD or Board Member who is tasked with improving

performance and productivity while reducing risk and uncertainty. This can translate into a focus for HR teams with little or no direct reference to people driven performance initiatives; the day to day can easily be consumed by very practical considerations around measurement, policy and transaction management, e.g. payroll, employee records, pay and contracts, recruitment - resourcing and disciplinary matters.

If the HR capability is not strong and flexible, this practical portfolio, while critical, becomes the entire story. Unless top of their game, the ability to influence positive change and improvement washes away all too easily. This situation is common and if left too long, HR can become an inhibitor of change.

x5 key principles help to underpin a strong HR contribution:

1. Have a strong HR leader who is able to influence, delegate and shape the business (**the challenger brand**)
2. Set clear expectations so the purpose and priorities of the function are well known and understood (**getting to a shared view of what good looks like**).
3. Create a strong link to business priorities to maintain a clear rationale for both strategic and transactional work (**work from within the business context**)
4. Have a good understanding of the team's own capabilities; be realistic about what you can do well (**be self-critical and have high standards**)
5. Back up investments and plans with clear business cases to demonstrate value for people initiatives (**show others how to measure impact and educate where needed**).

Following these principles, creates its own adaptive framework for HR to work within. The key challenge is often contracting and expectation setting early on. Many business owners and managers feel time pressured and are reluctant to give the time and attention to contracting and prioritisation conversations. In the same way any other function would, this is the time when a confident HR professional should challenge and negotiate the plan, creating a compelling argument for a well thought out approach that is anchored in the business priorities.

Successful HR professionals know that showing genuine interest and asking the right questions is vital. Demonstrating understanding of a business problem and empathising with someone's position provides a strong relationship basis for robust two-way conversation. Showing an understanding of the business gives the HR professional the opportunity to reciprocate and offer new knowledge or awareness of key people concepts to



their peers. As well as being supported by data (facts and figures) it is useful to provide examples and case studies of how these initiatives will ultimately contribute back to the business goals.

When it comes to HR's own resource & capability, this is critical if the organisation is to succeed. Providing a supportive yet critical eye inside the HR team early goes a long way. All too often people have not been provided with the right guidance or been exposed to professional feedback. While this 'gap' can feel awkward at first it is important to bridge early. If you don't the team won't know what good looks like in your eyes and may be reluctant to step up and change. Clear expectation setting is key. Being ambitious yet realistic is the objective here – not ambitious enough, you don't create enough impact on the business and can't change perceptions, too ambitious and you risk dropping the ball or compromising on quality thus damaging your reputation.

In both cases, whether it's your peers and customers or your own team, there is never a good time to re-contract but the benefits of doing so are endless. Draw a line in the sand and be clear about why you want change.

With the right conversations, team members and support system everything is possible.

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