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The Primary Function of a HR Business Partner

MY Q&A ON THE #BUSINESSAMA (ASK ME ANYTHING) FEED

By ROWENA MORAIS

I launched a #BusinessAMA on Aug 27 that sought to address questions on how to become a more strategic HR business partner. The AMAfeed is a platform for knowledge exchange with an interview style format. My topic was aimed at better business partnering and to ensure that the people concerned had both the experience and expertise needed to help move the business ahead from a talent perspective. The AMA took questions in from the public and over the next few weeks, I will share a selection of the questions and answers here.

For those who are not familiar with your role, can you talk about the primary function performed by a Human Resources Business Partner?

Lornale

Let me preface with a short explanation for why we need to focus on defining the role well. HR has long had a history in administration and filing. It included things like compliance, salary slips, reward packages and personnel management. A look at the terminology tells you how boxed in we were in the earlier days about what the role meant and how its responsibilities were viewed - not just within HR but the business as a whole.

This affected not just how HR viewed themselves - it affected how management treated them and how peers regarded their significance. To be fair, HR grew out of necessity - employment laws

and government requirements needed to be observed and employee documentation grew more complex. So necessarily, this imparted a view of HR as transactional, administrative and in many ways, far from strategic.

Today, there is much less focus on compliance and administration. Typically, a mid sized to large organisation would have a HR Services Centre to provide this kind of support - policy development, benefits and more.

In this way, the role of the HR person has evolved to become a partner to the business. This is exciting in many ways. The HRBP is tasked with aligning business objectives with HR ones and this necessitates a more consultative approach to handling HR related issues. The HRBP is also both employee champion and change agent.

The best way to see the role is to regard oneself as a business person



in HR and not vice versa. With that approach, you are looking to develop integrated solutions. You're forming partnerships across the HR function so you can deliver value-added services that reflect the business objectives.

What does that mean?

It starts with first and foremost, a deep understanding of the business as a whole and then drilling down into an understanding of the individual business unit from many angles - the financial position, the unit's mid range to long term plans, the culture within, competitors, risks and challenges and much more.

This represents a shift from the old way of doing things, moving HR from a remote and decentralised way of working where they were isolated from the day to day challenges and now having them embedded within individual business units, thus better able to understand and therefore resolve issues as they crop up. Dealing more closely with real-world issues.

HR's primary functions relate to the core HR skills which are paramount - leadership, development, succession

planning, remuneration, performance, employee relations, compliance, health and safety. But these need also be supported by good communication and good assessor skills as well.

People - people management, people growth, people development, people recruitment, people engagement. And with a focus on people, it's therefore incumbent on HRBPs to do a fantastic job recruiting those who are aligned to their business units.

As Peter Wilson, National President of AHRI (Australian Human Resources Institute) explained in his article, The Role of the HR Business Partner, "They're now working in the middle of the business, they're talking to the boss who's running whatever division it is, and they can understand this is not just an off-the-shelf job description. This job needs this in this context and that's in the position description so you're getting a better probability around matching someone against what the job actually is on site. And so, in the whole recruitment process you're more focused about the relevance and what the person you're after should be."

Two resources to check out:

1 If you're interested, there's a great job description template as laid out by SHRM (Society for Human Resource Management)

2 A 2 minute video by Jack Welch on the role of HR - "If HR is relegated to forms and benefits, you've got the wrong game going".

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EDITOR AND PROGRAMME DIRECTOR at VerticalDistinct.com, a media and learning organisation, Rowena Morais focuses on curated learning, communication and content. An editor, LinkedIn profile writer, and most recently, a TEDx speaker, she supports Human Resource and Technology professionals in their career development through articles, podcasts, interviews and a range of internationally accredited, in-demand technical and professional courses offered throughout Asia Pacific and the Middle East. **Tweeting at @rowenamoraais**, she is a ghostwriter and can be found at rowenamoraais.com. Rowena runs monthly meetups for Thrive Kuala Lumpur, a networking and support group for career women. For more info, visit meetup.com/Thrive-Kuala-Lumpur