

HR is not just about late coming

Rohan completed his mechanical engineering and went on to pursue his MBA with Human Resources Management (HRM) as his specialisation. Ask him why he chose HR over others and he quickly retorts “I am a people's person”. However, his excitement did not last long. Post his MBA, when Rohan was attending job interviews for HR roles and was asked the same question (to which he gave the same answer), very few interviewers were impressed. When they asked him what he knew about HR in the organisational context, he had no clue. All he could mutter were definitions and concepts taught to him in his MBA. Rohan, like most other graduates believes that being good with people is synonymous with the HR function but it is best if one understands the realities of a career in HR before taking the plunge.

Until a decade or two ago, HR as an organisational function was not as predominant as it is now. Personnel Management earlier, was synonymous with HR and it used to focus its efforts on the paperwork around hiring and paying employees. Although the most commonly used terminologies are interchangeable and have evolved over the years to suit varied industrial and organisational needs, there are finer differences between them.

The macro view

HR can broadly be looked at from two perspectives. Firstly as Human Resources Management (A management activity) and secondly as Human Resource Development (A profession). HRM, on the lines of PM is more of an administrative nature with routine and reactive approaches to managing people. HRD on the other hand is more proactive, continuous and primarily aims at improving human processes. Suresh, the erstwhile HR head of a small sized services company was content in his role which involved arranging for offer letters to new joinees, completing the joining formalities and then ensuring that the salaries were disbursed on time. But when his company decided to move up the value chain and become mid sized company having twice the existing manpower, a new HR head was recruited who was responsible for instating processes and performance metrics into the system. Suresh was then given his new role as a team member of the core HR team. The focus clearly moved from HRM to HRD

Size does matter

With the growing size of an organisation with respect to its number of employees grows the importance of having an established HR function. Larger the size of the organisation, more are the chances of it having a well divided HR department. The most commonly seen sub functions of HR are recruitment, compensation, payroll, training & performance management and planning. These divisions are made to give the HR department more control over the process and ease of delegating work to the respective department. There are as many as 60 subfunctions within these broader classifications and each organisation picks and implements the one's most suited to its business model

Changing times

Gone is the time when technology and financial muscle provided organisations an edge over their competitors. Today, the only key differentiator between successful organisations and others is the

human capital and the return on investment on the same. Traditionally, the HR department used to focus on two roles – The operational role involving recruitment, employee relations and performance management and the developmental role involving culture, people and organisational development. Globalisation and the consequent international benchmarking have pushed HR to play a key role in the business plans of organisations across industry sectors. HR managers now work hand in glove with the business heads, have a clear understanding of the organisational goal, mission and vision and then work towards a common goal of aligning people and process with the overall business strategy.

New Trends

One of the outcomes of the increased focus on HR has been the outsourcing of the HR needs of an organisation, primarily the recruitment aspect, to external vendors. Recruitment consultants now work as an extension of the HR department of large organisations. They are briefed on the company policies, the larger business goals and the performance metrics, based on which they source the right talent. This outsourcing approach not only increases the efficiency and outcome since it's being handled by specialists but it also makes space for the HR department to focus on more crucial aspects like organisation development and culture building.

The need to specialise

Coming back to new entrants in the HR field, it is important for one to understand that making a career in HR involves much more than being a people's person. Having exemplary communication and interpersonal skills is a pre-requisite to being a successful HR person but the task just begins there. One needs to have expertise in the line of business of the organisation one intends to work for. A generic HR executive for instance, would not be able to add value in the recruitment function of an IT firm. An IT professional with basic knowledge in HR processes would be a better fit. An accounting student on the other hand would be more comfortable handling payrolls as opposed to organisational development.

HR may look simple an area to work in, but as the department deals with the fundamental issues that drive the organisation towards business goals attainment while consistently churning up profits, it needs people with heaps of attitude and strong knowledge in key areas of HR

So before you start your career switch to the HR track double assess where exactly you fit in.

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