

Strategic Human Resources

Human resources within a company is a complex, multifaceted position that requires professionals to have the ability to juggle priorities and excel at a number of tasks-from the sometimes tedious to the often strategic. It takes knowing what to hone in on and what to delegate, staying on top of the latest trends in compensation, law, and technology while always having a finger on the pulse of employee relations. Often, with so many misconceptions about HUMAN RESOURCE, it involves staying ahead of the curve through continuous education in an attempt to drive what the role will entail for the company. The role of Human resources brings with it the potential to make a big impact on the lives of individuals working within the company, and can leave managers feeling less than appreciated, when contributions to the bottom line are questioned. Perceptions of HUMAN RESOURCE as a cost center and others, explained below, are just a few of the myths that often surround HUMAN RESOURCE and can prevent practitioners and companies from getting the most from this important role.

Human resource as a cost center

The view of HUMAN RESOURCE as a cost center may be one of the hardest to overcome. How executives view the HUMAN RESOURCE department and its role often plays a huge part in its perception and function, including whether the job is managed in-house to begin with. Frequently HUMAN RESOURCE must take every opportunity to be its own proponent in providing greater education on the value of its offerings, and the impact to business.

Other companies realize that HUMAN RESOURCE managers contribute more directly in taking care of their most valuable assets, handling a range of responsibilities, including: recruiting; interviewing; providing, presenting, and delivering medical, dental, vision, life, and other ancillary benefits; job training; instituting programs for retention and growth of employees; establishing tools and guidance for management reviews; and reviewing and selecting technology to support HUMAN RESOURCE functions, to name a few. Each of these, in fact, contributes greatly to the bottom line when all hard and soft costs of doing business are considered.

Group benefits, for instance, are a major part of the compensation employers offer to entice and retain productive and reliable employees and maintain the organization's competitive nature. The methods by which these compensation elements are derived and presented are key to a company's success. In retaining good employees, companies can save thousands, if not more, in rehiring and training costs. HUMAN RESOURCE must be prepared to justify its case with a strong knowledge of its employee base and a rationalization of these types of obvious and not so obvious costs.

HUMAN RESOURCE's role: strategic and/or tactical

Whether dictated by management, assumed by the practitioner, a function of "fighting fires" on a daily basis, or a combination of the above, HUMAN RESOURCE's role in the organization is all too often tactical over strategic, often to the dissatisfaction of practitioners themselves. This point is illustrated by USC Professor Edward E. Lawler III, who noted that HUMAN RESOURCE professionals reported spending only 23% of their time in 2005 "being a strategic business partner" - no more than they reported in 1995. And line managers, he found, said HUMAN RESOURCE is far less involved in strategy than HUMAN RESOURCE thinks it is.

Though company culture often sets the stage, HUMAN RESOURCE practitioners must actively seek key areas for improvement for themselves, their roles and for the company and take action to defend their role where possible.

To help manage personnel costs, operate efficient business processes, comply with regulations and manage legal exposures, and optimize the value of human capital.

Another way that HUMAN RESOURCE can heighten its role and increase strategic input is by using technology to better access, manage, and report on information. But, as with any industry, it is hard to cut through the clutter and hype surrounding proposed solutions to select the best technology to meet organizational needs. Though one provider may declare it offers self-service capabilities, for instance, it may not be the same level needed or offered by others, providing disappointing results. For an HUMAN RESOURCE manager that has met with false promises in the past, doing the homework on proposed solutions is even more important.

Selecting the best tools requires assessing key factors, such as the ability to:

- A companies experience
- A companies longevity in the marketplace
- Grow and scale with the organization
- Provide full ownership of the data
- Simplify processes through automation and wizards
- Provide full security for backups, servers, added protective layers, etc. and transfer data within secure encrypted sessions, secure sockets layer (SSL) (128 bit encryption), or be encrypted prior to being sent
- Provide authority to decide who will be allowed access and to what degree

In conclusion HUMAN RESOURCE Professionals can participate in a more strategic role within the company attention to workforce, work process costs, and improved mitigation of costs utilizing workforce management technologies, and other business technologies.