

# Making HR part of "us"

20 August 2015 | By Mint Kang



The human resources department has a problem. When senior management figures talk about HR, they often refer to it as a resource sink; when HR teams talk about their work, they often refer to the rest of the organisation as 'the business', as though it had nothing to do with them.

On the surface, the misalignment seems trivial. But it indicates that the human resources (HR) function is disengaged from the rest of the company, according to Kenneth Leow, partner in charge of strategic talent advisory across Asia at

Asia-Pacific executive search firm The People At Work.

"HR teams don't perceive themselves as a core part of that business," said Leow, who was speaking at a sharing session organised by the American Chamber of Commerce in Singapore. "But then what is the appropriate role for the HR function?"

## The need to create value

The HR function is frequently relegated to an administrative role, disconnected from business strategies and sidelined by management. This can be attributed partly to the way it is viewed. HR is essentially perceived as a resource sink; it does not generate revenue or contribute directly to financial results. Its role is expected to be one of mediation and facilitation.

Heads of HR and their staff seldom act to change this image. Instead, HR teams often adopt an "us vs. them" mentality that distances themselves from business strategies and results.

"In boardroom interactions, HR often takes a passive, agreeable stance," said Leow, adding that when senior management asserts opinions or gives instructions, HR tends to go along without questioning or providing alternative suggestions.

This, he said, needs to change. HR needs to start actively championing the specific set of behavioural values that makes an organisation succeed. As people management specialists, HR should be intimately familiar with all the strengths and weaknesses of senior members of the team; it should know the competition, their management style and what makes them successful.

## A more significant role for HR

To create tangible value, HR must act as a strategic partner who pro-actively helps other departments achieve their goals. HR teams need to understand the motivators behind various departments and find ways to help these teams achieve their aims. In doing so, HR personnel themselves will be able to identify more closely with the rest of the organisation.

### 1. Increasing sales

HR can align itself to sales by helping build a suitable sales team through recruitment and training sales managers to use recruitment and retention tools. This requires an understanding of the type of sales that is important to the company and finding people with the corresponding skill sets.

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Leow shared an example of a luxury car maker that involved its HR department closely in its growth strategy. From day one, HR helped to certify the sales teams and trained sales managers from the recruitment process. HR even applied technology to make training smoother through pushing the training and assessment programme to sales team members' mobile phones.

## 2. Making sales channels more efficient

For companies that sell their products through distributors or resellers, HR can improve sales channels by building relationships with resellers in the same way they would assist an in-house sales team.

For example, HR can extend its competencies to the resellers, aiding them to recruit and train their own teams more effectively so that their performance is improved. By assisting them with the necessary training and assessment programmes, HR can help resellers meet certification requirements.

## 3. Enhancing customer experience

HR can support marketing and customer experience as well. The branding and positioning of Changi Airport as a premium customer experience, for example, was carried out with the extensive involvement of HR and other departments. The airport drew on HR's expertise to understand who its customers are and what they want, before adjusting its services accordingly.

"The people employed by the airport are the ones who deliver customer expectations," Leow observed. "That is where HR comes in. With its expertise, HR can find out what customers want and train frontline teams to deliver it. That is how HR plays a role in influencing the important touch points of customer experience."

### Learn the lingo

To be a more effective partner, HR must proactively step out, interact with other teams and learn their priorities, strategies and terminologies.

"People have told me that HR must at least learn some of the [business] lingo in order to help," Leow recounted, having heard this from people in various industries. He pointed out that often senior management may not make the first move because of the prevailing perception that HR does not create value. HR therefore has to take the initiative and show other teams what it can do for them – in other words, HR must first be willing to make itself part of "us".

*Edited by Claire Slattery and Goh Wei Ting*

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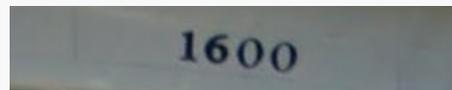
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