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### **Strategic Focus of HR**

One of the most difficult situations faced by HR managers is to get the co-operation of line managers and convince them of the utility of HR policies and decisions in enhancing the operational effectiveness of each employee and that of the department and organization as a whole.

It is a well known fact that synchronization of individual goals with those of the organization is the most effective way of optimizing employee performance levels. However, convincing the operational and line managers requires HR managers to focus on establishing strong relationships. This could be done with respect to various functions like recruitment, training and development, compensation and employee counseling. Once the line managers are convinced about the utility and effectiveness of HR policies, they would become more amenable to the same. HR managers need to have ample patience and diligence in building relationships with other managers. The reason – operational managers will wait to see the benefits and results over time before they agree to adapt to the HR recommendations.

HR managers also have the option of making one of the top executives of the organization declare the HR policies as mandatory. This is followed by training line managers on the HR processes and policies. Job aids must be offered wherever possible. Ensure that managers follow the HR policies by rewarding those who adhere to them and reprimanding those who do not. However, such a forced approach may not be an ideal long time option as it might lead to estrangement of managers with the HR department. A combination of the above options is likely to be the most effective in generating both short-term and long-term results.

More importantly, HR managers should always represent new policies in terms of tangible and intangible benefits from these programs and processes. Individual managers should be apprised of the financial or operational gain obtained by adhering to the new policies. This could be in the form of better hiring decisions, enhanced productivity and less turnaround time. The shortcomings of not adhering with the HR policies could be quantified in the form of higher employee turnover and higher risk of expensive discrimination charges.

#### **Providing the strategic thrust**

Despite taking the lead to frame the strategic thrust for the organization, HR managers often find it difficult to implement change management. The HR department is also often forced to prove their mettle on understanding and implementing any business decision before they are allowed to have any impact on critical decisions. At the same time, the HR team also has to assume responsibility for taking the organization forward.

Fortunately, in the present era of knowledge management, it has not been difficult for the HR functionaries to prove their worth and thereby earn their rightful place in the strategic framework of the organization. However, this has pushed the operational aspect of HRM

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into the background. This should be avoided at all costs, and HR executives and managers should try to strike a delicate balance between the administrative HR functions and the strategic initiatives.

### **Implementing it the right way**

To ensure the successful implementation of HR policies that would fulfill both the basic and strategic needs of organizations, the following measures need to be adopted:

- *Do away with avoidable measures:* HR executives and managers should be very cautious in striking the right balance between the basic HR operations and strategic thinking. This would ensure the optimal use of staff and financial resources apart from necessitating the HR department to do away with HR programs and policies that do not add value to the company's bottom line.
- *Use technology wherever possible:* With the rapid advancements in technology, HR executives and managers should adopt the same to automate administrative transactions and offer efficient, user-friendly self-service methods to employees and managers alike. Such technology-based automation includes e-mail (for communication), voice mail, Interactive Voice Response systems (IVRS), corporate Intranet, the public Internet and HR service points. Such e-HR initiatives would enhance the efficiency of the HR department, making them provide more satisfactory services to the employees. The main aspect that the HR team must consider while adopting new technology is that it is financially viable for the organization in terms of cost control and expected cuts in cost.
- *Clearly defined roles:* In addition to regular and effective communication, organizations must identify roles and expectations for HR professionals. Though the strategic role of HR should be given due importance, it should be conveyed that fulfilling operational objectives is the main priority failing which the HR function would become a disaster.
- *Become the role model:* The best way to convince line managers about the benefits of novel practices like flexible work arrangements or automated performance-management systems is to be the first to adopt it before urging others to follow suit.

In effect, the HR team should determine its strategic focus and role in the overall strategic framework of the organization, its activities should be based primarily on the operational activities. The HR team should also evaluate their success primarily by satisfying stakeholders' operational expectations. Such an approach would ensure the strategic success of the HR team in the organizational perspective.