Business Manager

Making HR People Complete

HR
Focus
2020

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Special Feature

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MOVING TOWARDS
A MORE HOLISTIC APPROACH

Once again, it's time to watch out for emerging HR trends in 2020. Based on a recent study, more than 47% of interviewed executives believe that by 2020, technology will have an impact on more than half of their sales as well as the future workplace trends.

Organizations will focus on embracing HR technology to their advantage, strengthening workforce capabilities, ensuring data security, improving candidate and employee experiences, and more.

Keep an eye out for -

1. Holistic HR

HR will be moving to a more holistic approach wherein -

a) Using advanced technologies and being human centric.
b) Adding value to all stakeholders, not only management.
c) Combining intuition and thorough analytics.
d) Internal and external focus.
e) Strategic and operational.
f) Short-term and long-term.
g) Action-oriented and reflective (fast and slow).

2. Less focus on process improvement

In different HR conferences I have listened to many presentations by various HR leaders. Generally, the focus is very much on process improvement. Old processes are redesigned, and new tools are introduced. On the surface it looks modern and state-of-the-art, but if you look under the hood, the real changes are minor. The solutions and programs are still very much organisational focused (we want something, how do we get our employees to get along). Real employee-centric solutions are scarce.

In the meantime, candidates, employees and managers do not see the clear benefits of the HR-initiatives. The processes are too complex, and too standardised. Although we have been talking about the consumerisation of HR for years, the user experience at home is often better than at work.

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3. Be Kind!

A couple of weeks ago I talked to the Head of HR of an FMCG major in India. "Let's be kind to each other" is a very explicit philosophy in that company, and HR is an important guardian and driver of the kindness value. Some simple measures were implemented, that reflect kindness, like a day off for employees on their birthday, a nice welcome package including company T-shirts for your family and high-quality headshots you can use on LinkedIn and elsewhere. If you are ill, you get a "Get Well Soon" basket.

My knowledge of the "kindness" movement is limited, but if you Google kindness a whole new world opens (for example the concept RAK, Random Acts of Kindness).

Kindness is in the air, and it is certainly a promising HR trend for 2020.

Warning : people can doubt

your sincerity when you are kind. I had put an old (but good) television on an online marketplace, for INR 5000. It had been there for two weeks without any reaction. I wanted to get rid of it, as it was blocking our hallway. Finally, a potential buyer reacted, and he asked : what is your minimum prize? I answered : you can collect it for free. His answer : Why for free? Is something wrong with it? I want to give it to my mother. My answer : it is a good set, and of course you are happy to give me some money. His reaction : ok, thanks. Would you accept INR 3000? Kindness pays.

4. More appreciation of complexity

In one of the management magazines, I read an interview with the new CEO of one of the companies I worked for. Of course, he had to make many changes as his predecessors could have done better. HR was not very good, as only 70% of the successors for key positions came from inside. He mentioned two important people KPI's : the percentage of internal successors (target 90%) and voluntary turnover (target 10%). I could imagine him giving instructions to the CHRO, who immediately started to revamp the talent identification- and development process.

Although it sometimes helps to simplify, it can also help to appreciate the complexity of organisations and of human behaviour. Why are internal successors better than external? Is there evidence to prove this? It might be better for some disciplines (technical areas, complex markers), but not so good for other areas (HR, IT, digital business, top leadership). The same is for voluntary turnover. Why the urge to keep people as long as possible? If you work based on evidence, you get a better feel for the complexity of the organisational systems. HR interventions can be very focused and tailored. High level crude KPI's do not make sense, you need more granular measurement.

5. Adaptive systems

When I booked my flight with Singapore Airlines, I am asked through which channel I want to receive messages from Singapore Airlines - e-mail, Twitter or WhatsApp. When I made my choice once, they remember my choice for the next time. Super simple and not very advanced. In many organisations even these kinds of choices cannot be made, let alone that a clever system tries to get to know the user, and adapt its behaviour to the user.

Last week, I was discussing pulse surveys in an organisation. They considered the non-response rate still high (around 30%). Their survey process was not very adaptive. All employees with an e-mail address received the link to the survey every month.

You could make some adaptations, for example stop sending the invite to people who did not react two or three times or decrease the frequency. The content of the survey can also be easily adapted depending on the response (Are you happy? Yes! Thx. Are you happy : No! Ok, what are the specific issues you are not happy about? Thx, you mention your boss. What could he/she do better?). Technology is not the issue, and there are solutions on the market that apply adaptive survey technologies.

There are many opportunities to make your systems more adaptive in 2020. You do not have to start very sophisticated.

Here are some ideas :

◆ Ask (or infer) if applicants want a fast or a slower recruitment process. Not everybody wants to go full speed. If you do this well, you will need less capacity in your recruitment team.

◆ Measure how happy the participants (both managers and employees) are with the different aspects of the performance review process. The feedback will allow you to offer different variants, which can be matched with the users (for example on the dimension support, offering support from low to high). If your organisation is not so rigid, you could also improve the matches between employees and managers/coaches (managers/coaches with low ratings get less people, very directive managers/coaches get employees who benefit from a directive approach).

6. From people analytics to analytics for the people

A lack of trust can influence many workforce analytics efforts. If the focus is primarily on efficiency and control, employees will doubt if there are any benefits for them.

Overall there is a shift to more employee-centric organizations, although sometimes you can doubt how genuine the efforts are to improve the employee experience.

Asking the question "How will the employees benefit from this effort?" is a good starting point for most people analytics projects. It also helps to create buy-in.

Just by measuring the "mood" of employees and other key people indicators (productivity, tenure) does not necessarily bring benefits to employees. It might actually backfire : employees feel that they are controlled, and their voice is not heard.

7. Learning in the flow of work

It makes a difference if an employee must search actively for a learning module that he or she needs, or if that the micro-learning module is offered at an appropriate moment in the workflow, based on real time observations of the behaviour of the employee. If there is a meeting with company X in your diary, your personal learning aid might ask "Do you want to learn more about company X?" If you are stuck in designing a difficult Excel macro, the Excel chatbot asks you: "Can I help you to design the macro?"

If you have a meeting scheduled with an employee with a low performance rating (the computer gets this information in the HRIS), you are offered a short module "how to deal with under-performing employees". During you online sales call, you receive suggestions in your screen on how to improve the conversation ("Ask some questions", "Try to close"), and afterwards your conversation is compared with best-in-class examples, resulting in some learning points.

The solutions become even better if your individual learning style and the level of your capabilities are considered.

8. A tougher approach to diversity and equal opportunities

In many countries, the differences between men and women in the workplace are still big. Same is for the differences between white people and people of colour. The differences are getting smaller, but very slow.

2020 will be a good year for more aggressive and impactful actions. A soft approach does not seem to work. Some organisations have taken brave measures, and more will follow.

Establishing quota for women in senior positions always causes heated discussions, but the "pro quota" group seems to grow.

Hope for a real breakthrough in 2020 with respect to this.

9. Inclusive leadership

The expectations employees and other stakeholders have of leadership, are often too high. Often you hear : "Change has to start at the top", and "Leaders have to lead by example". These types of statements can be paralyzing. If employees are waiting for instructions from the top and get demoralised if their leaders are not perfect human beings, organisations will be in a bad shape. Transforming leadership into more inclusive leadership can be beneficial to organisations.

Inclusive leadership has been focused on the traits of the inclusive leader. It is also about the traits of the organisation and the approach to leadership development. I still see many leadership development curricula that are built up very traditionally : an exclusive program for the top, a program for middle managers and the flagship program for high potentials. Set-ups like this do not reinforce inclusive leadership. Time is for HR to initiate new approaches.

10. Productivity

In the last years, there has not been a lot of focus on productivity. We see a slow change at the horizon.

Traditionally, capacity problems have been solved by recruiting new people. This has led to several problems. I have seen this several times in fast growing scale-ups.

As growth is limited by the ability the find new people, the selection criteria are (often unconsciously) lowered, as many people are needed fast. These new people are not as productive as the existing crew. Because you have more people, you need more managers. Low quality people and more managers lower productivity.

Another approach is, to focus more on increasing the productivity of the existing employees, instead of hiring additional staff, and on improving the selection criteria.

Using people analytics, you can try to find the characteristics of top performing people and teams, and the conditions that facilitate top performance.

These findings can be used to increase productivity and to select candidates that have the characteristics of top performers. When productivity increases, you need less people to deliver the same results.

Of course, the long-term mega trends do not change every year. Top trend areas are :

◆ From a collective to a personalised approach.
◆ From technology as 'nice to have' to technology as major transformational driver.
◆ From slow to fast to faster.
◆ From prejudice and biases to evidence-based working, based on solid analytics.
◆ From rigid hierarchical organisations to open, transparent network type organisations.
◆ From big long-term plans to experimenting using agile methodologies.
◆ From pleasing the boss to creating a meaningful employee experience.
◆ The increasing importance of efficiency in HR operations. **B**M