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Making HR People Complete

Thought Leadership & HR



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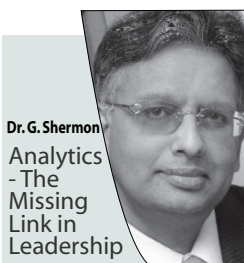
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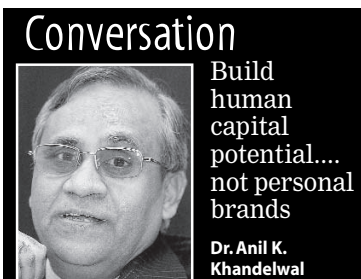
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For those organizations who want to thrive in today's tough business world, it is imperative for them to realize that "Thought Leadership" is about a big idea that will change how people perceive the world and the role of HR will be the key differentiator.

Cutting EDGE or just a WEDGE

Aparna Sharma
Country Head-HR
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A middle class middle aged woman is looking into her husband's eyes. He is coaxing her and saying, "Its fine. No one will say anything." She anxiously says, "What will my mother-in-law say? What will kids think?" Husband assures, " No one will say anything" and offers her a Cadbury Dairy Milk says, "Meri Maa keheti hai ki kuch bhi naya shuru karne se pehle mitha khana chaiye"(My mother says that before we start anything new, we must have some sweet). Wife takes a



bite and moves out of her home in her new jeans and shirt. While she walks, everyone who see her claps and she fondly looks into her husband's eyes.

You must be wondering why am I promoting Cadbury Dairy Milk. Believe me, that's the last thing I would want to. The next question would then arise as to what has this to do with "Thought Leadership and HR". It's simple.

Just like the way this advertisement has stayed in my mind and am sure many of you would have recalled the same while reading this piece, what made it have a connect with the audience? Typically, chocolate advertisements either show kids or are endorsed by a celebrity. Then why did Cadbury want to position Dairy Milk differently? Why did it want to say that anyone irrespective of age can make new beginnings through Dairy Milk? That was the differentiating strategy!

"Thought Leadership" for me is nothing but differentiation. Given our complex world, there are many things that need to be considered, so providing true thought leadership can be as valuable to a brand as the products or services it sells.

The evolution

Successful thought leadership does not arrive with a published idea linked to a hope that someone will recognize brilliance and sweep your organisation from anonymity into industry eminence. Establishing a firm or an individual as a thought leader requires consistent, diligent effort. It is cumulative. Although it can and should have tactical elements that reveal the evolution of an idea from concept toward implementation, all thought leadership should be strategic at the onset. Thought leadership should be about a big idea that changes how people perceive the world.

If an organization invests in the communication or "creation" of thought leadership, it should know what it wants from those who will consume that thought leadership. Most of the time, the answer will be respect and recognition. Thought leadership should also be an entry point to a relationship. It should intrigue, challenge, and inspire even people already familiar with a company. It should help start a relationship where none exists, and it should enhance existing relationships.

It has become the new competitive battleground not only in the consulting and accounting business, but also among other B2B firms that

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compete on the basis of experience and advice. From the customer's standpoint, choosing a product today is difficult than ever with too many "me-too" products mushrooming around. Much is riding on choice - market leadership, competitive advantage, sometimes even survival, not to mention promotions and personal rewards.

Similarly, with the stakes rising and the experience base growing, employees are becoming more and more sophisticated in choosing the organizations with which they want to get associated with. They consider many factors including: the organization's insight into the current issues, their demonstrated experience in resolving issues, the organization's image and reputation in the market place, current pricing strategy, the organization approach towards innovation, and the chemistry between the organization and the customers, i.e., brand recall.

Role of HR

Done right, it can create a whole new paradigm. This strategic approach brings in HR Differentiation. In this scenario, HR invests its resources on a differential basis relative to a position's potential to deliver value to the organization. Those roles or areas with higher potential to make a difference to the organization's strategy receive more focus and utilize different practices or processes designed to optimize their contribution.

This approach runs counter to the tradition of treating everyone the same based on level or title. It requires looking at all HR investments and initiatives through a different lens: one focused on maximizing the return through targeted and effective use of time, talent and money.

For those organizations who want to thrive in today's tough business world, predominantly based on knowledge, differentiation in HR will become the new norm. Two undeniable factors back this up. The first factor is the growing body of research and data which quantifies and identifies exactly how people contribute to organizational success. The cliché that people are our most important asset now has a significant body of evidence to support it.

However, research has also made it clear that some people and, more importantly, some 'roles' have more to contribute than others. As a result, business leaders and boards are beginning to understand and pay attention to how the organization's "Human Capital" is being managed. Some are even starting to report on how effectively the talent in the organization is being sourced, deployed and developed.

This leads to the second undeniable factor: The pressure is on for HR to deliver on the promise of human potential in the workplace. Expectations have been raised and organizations can no longer solve their challenges by simply hiring more people. Put simply, HR is being called upon to silence its "cannot deliver" critics and provide confidence to business leaders that its valuable 'human capital' is being engaged, deployed and refreshed to maximum effect. In short, HR is being challenged to deliver more with less and the squeeze is tight. The only way to ensure that people practices and investments are optimized for organizational success is to focus on the areas of highest gain whilst maintaining the other elements of the HR function at an appropriate level.

There is no one set of prescribed practices which means as Alfred Chandler said, *"You can't do today's job with yesterday's methods, and still be in business tomorrow"*. The advantage of this approach is that you differentiate relative to your organization, your market, your strategy and your competitive position. It's entirely possible for two competitor organizations to have separate approaches to differentiation and be successful. This is because they are competing using a different strategy and most importantly they have aligned their HR approach and deployed their HR resources to optimize the achievement of that strategy. This takes careful planning, debate, design, analysis, and action.

The key to success with differentiation in HR is not to follow the herd, but to carve a distinct path and create uniquely impactful HR practices. 