

HOW IS HUMAN RESOURCES EVOLVING?

Human resources, formerly known as Personnel, continues to evolve as organisations become more complex. In addition to the challenging economic and political environment, technological innovations are giving us, as consumers, new ways of doing things (some we don't know about yet) and making us want more for less.

Consumers are not only looking at the economics of purchasing, we want to align with a company's purpose and values. We are getting selective! Against this challenging backdrop, companies rely on employees to be inspired, to think differently and come up with new ideas to be competitive, and importantly, live and breathe the company values. To achieve success (both from a recruitment and commercial perspective) companies really have to get it right - and that's the reason roles are evolving not just across HR, but across all functions from PR/Comms, to broader leadership roles.

In turn, organisations want from the people function, 'people' experts to attract, retain and build environments where employees can thrive and organisations can transform. Leaders want a continued partnership, with the people team, solutions to the organisation's challenges alongside continued technical people expertise and flawless delivery. Thankfully, we're no longer debating whether HR should have a seat at the top table. Nowadays, amongst leading FTSE companies, Chief HR Officers are expected to be a catalyst for change, and it's possible that the new generation entering the field will never know that this battle happened.

We're also seeing startups begin as they mean to go on, and spending as much time building their cultural behaviours from their founding as they do on their business strategy - they're aware of how integrally connected strategy and culture are when it comes to growth. This shift means that the HR role has broadened from being focussed on providing technical insight (e.g adhering to employer law, organisation design etc.) to solving organisational challenges, to driving growth. Meeting these challenges requires extensive commercial and strategic knowledge of the business and the market.

So what does a modern, dynamic HR professional look like? How is this people function evolving? What should HR professionals/those hiring for HR roles be thinking about? And as a profession, how should we be developing our skills so we can keep a step ahead? Everything from our job titles to our way of thinking about business is evolving, but the key ingredient is approaching every aspect of our roles in an authentic way.

What's in a name? Well, a lot actually. Across industries and sectors, the name is changing from Human Resources to People Directors, Chief People Officers or in some cases, 'Employee Experience.' This signifies, I believe, the recognition that all people have different ideas, thoughts, and a variety of views. 'Resources' sounds like materials, the physical elements you would use to build a house, for example. You need cement, bricks and water. Depending on how many bricks you have you will know how the big a house you can build, there is a direct correlation. With people you can't predict, no matter how much you

plan, what the outcome will be. Employees will take different things from meetings. Different events will resonate with different people, different words will inspire them. This unpredictable, but necessary mix, is what leads to successful outcomes. Using the word 'People' in job titles and for departments contextualises the people-oriented work that we do. And, in a world where we want to be inclusive and promote diversity, it's important to remind ourselves that we are all different.

Brand is people. Your people are your brand. Employees are the ambassadors of companies and can build or break a company brand. Brand isn't just your logo or values published on a website and hung in your reception. Today, people expect authenticity from companies they interact with and that requires you to build your brand 'inside out' to have brand sustainability. It starts with your people living and breathing the company's purpose, the values and behaviours, authentically. This will in turn set the tone for the customers your employees work with. The People function plays a crucial role joining up the employee engagement strategy with the overall brand strategy. It's also worth remembering that in a world of viral tweets and 24/7 communications, it's essential that your brand's message is consistent and authentic across all channels, external and internal. Go bold, hire the best brand-building expertise you can for your team to drive change from the People team out.

Data is the key that unlocks successful strategy. Nowadays, when people have a question they can pull their smartphone out of their pockets, type it into a search engine and have the answer to virtually anything in seconds. In the world of algorithms, AI, and smartphone technology we have more data and information at our fingertips than ever before. We all use this information to help us make daily decisions, e.g. reading Yelp reviews to pick a new place to try for dinner. People teams should be no different.

The People team needs to be resilient. This is the team that is watching and working with the organisation through the highs and lows of change. The team that supports leaders and executives with difficult people decisions. Resilience and how to be resilient is personal but at its core it's about using time well, prioritising, and being clear about what is important, and what the end game is. It's also about knowing where to spend effort and knowing when you are being distracted. In our increasingly demanding worklife, it's also about knowing when you are tired and need to 'step away' before going back in. Coach individuals to build resiliency and to use their energy in the best way.

On a practical note, it's unrealistic to think that any one People Officer can do it all. To truly build an effective culture and deliver on growth, you need a great team of people who have different strengths and skill sets. It's also important to create an environment where being inquisitive is valued and where sharing your learnings is encouraged. And to do this in a way that others are interested in! Most importantly, be yourself. You don't have the luxury to spend energy on being someone else!