ORIGINAL ARTICLE

ROLES OF HR PROFESSIONALS IN DRIVING ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

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Abstract:

Organizational change is an essential concept to understand in our complex world. Organizational change is both the process in which an organization changes its structure, strategies, operational methods, technologies, or organizational culture to affect change within the organization and the effects of these changes on the organization. Organizational change can be continuous or occur for distinct periods of time. To remain competitive in this global business world, organizations often find it necessary to undertake major changes that affect their processes and people. Therefore, change management is seen as a permanent business function to improve efficiency and keep organizations adaptable to the competitive marketplace. Many organizations strategically use change to improve organizational effectiveness. But bringing about successful change in today's competitive environment requires thoughtful planning, effective communication and employee acceptance. The roles of HR Professionals are also changing due to dramatic rate of change in today's organizations. The role of the HR Professionals must parallel the needs of his or her changing organization. Successful organizations are becoming more adaptive, resilient, quick to change direction and customer-centered. Within this environment, the HR professional, who is considered necessary by line managers, is a strategic partner, an employee sponsor or advocate, an administrative expert, a change mentor and so on.

Keywords: HR Professional, Organizational Change.

Introduction:

The study of organizational change is interdisciplinary in nature and draws from the fields of psychology, sociology, political science, economics, and management. Change is constant in today's business environment. It is a daily companion for owners, executives and

HR professionals (people with substantial specialized and technical knowledge of HR issues, laws, policies, and practices) that want to their companies to succeed by staying a step ahead of their business competitors. The rate of organizational change has not slowed in recent years, and may even be increasing. The rapid and continual innovation in technology is driving changes to organizational systems and processes. Witness the startling growth of the internet, which is enabling much faster and easier access to knowledge. Add to this the increased expectations of employees as they move more freely between organizations. And, of course, globalization has seen the tearing down of previous international market barriers. It is no wonder that relentless change has become a fact of organizational life.

Organizational change can cause a mix of emotions, including anxiety, fear, and resistance for employees. We also know that change is inevitable in an organization and in people. What is HR's role in driving organizational change? There is a lack of adequate literature on the emerging roles of HR Professionals in driving organizational change, still there a misunderstanding among the business executives about the actual roles of HR Professionals in organizational change.

Some Industry commentators call the Human Resources function the last bastion of bureaucracy. Traditionally, the role of the Human Resource professional in many organizations has been to serve as the systematizing, policing arm of executive management.

In this role, the HR professional served executive agendas well, but was frequently viewed as a road block by much of the rest of the organization. While some need for this role occasionally remains, much of the HR role is transforming itself. The roles of HR Professionals are critical to successful organizational change. Again their roles must parallel the needs of his or her changing organization.

Managing change in an organization

Management is the process of managing the organizational resources: Financial resources, information resources, physical resources, and human resources (Griffin, 2006). It is important to mention that the proper utilization of other resources depends on the human resources. The success or failure of an organization depends largely on the competence of its people. The main responsibility of the HR Professionals is to manage the human resources in an effective way.

But managing the human resources during organizational change is extremely complex and difficult. HR Professionals are supposed to play an active role in managing change in an organization. Their roles must match the organizational needs. With the increase in competition, locally or globally, organizations must become more adaptable, resilient, agile, and customer focused to succeed. Change is inevitable in today's organization.

The processes of changes are also becoming complex that, in turn, calls for new roles of HR Professionals. Any kind of organizational change has an impact on employees. Employees have the tendency to resist the change. Resistance to change has long been recognized as a barrier to organizational change attempts (Lawrence, 1954; Lewin, 1947). It encompasses a range of behaviors from passive resistance to active resistance or even aggressive resistance (Coetsee, 1999; Kirkpatrick, 1985; O'Connor, 1993). The changing situations also call for new roles of the employees. At the same time the expectations of the employees from the management are also changing. The changing expectations of both management and employees require new roles to be played by HR Professionals. Their roles are not confined to traditional framework now. HR Professionals should play the required roles to make the change effective. They must keep the employees of the organization on the right track during organizational change irrespective of the degree of change.

Only the high-spirited employees would be able to establish and maintain harmonious working relationship with workmates and contribute to keeping high morale (Chew et al, 2006). The roles of HR Professionals are not only important to manage the organizational change but also to create a culture of change in an organization.

Relevance of the study

Traditionally, HR departments often had limited involvement in the total organization's business affairs and goals (Poole, 1999; Procter and Currie, 1999). HR managers were often only concerned with making staffing plans, providing specific job training programs, or running annual performance appraisal programs (the results of which were sometimes put in the files, never to be used). They focused on the short-term--perhaps day-t-day needs of human resources. With the growing importance of human resources to the success of the business, HR managers and their departments have become more involved in the business. Again 'change' has become inevitable in today's organizations. The needs of the organizations are changing. HR Professionals must know the needs of the business and help address those needs (Ulrich, 1998). In considering these issues, this study is important for two important reasons. First, it will help the HR Professionals to identify the emerging roles that they have to play in managing changes. Second, it will enrich the existing literature of change management as well as HRM.

Objective of the study:

In this competitive business world, where change is inevitable, the roles of HR Professionals are changing constantly. HR Professionals are facing more or less new difficulty in managing organizational change. They are not confined to the so called traditional activities of personnel management. To remain competitive, they must play new roles which are closely linked to the success or failure of organizational change.

The main intent of this study is to find out the emerging roles of HR Professionals in driving organizational change.

The emerging roles of HR professionals in driving organizational change

There is no doubt that globalization has made the business world extremely competitive. Change has become inevitable in many business organizations because it is the question of survival of today's business organizations. These inevitable and constant changes have also made the roles of HR professional challenging. HR Professionals are supposed to play the roles that are parallel to the needs of changing situations. They have to come out from the traditional roles framework. Any kind of change, whether it is small or big, makes a distance between management and employees. The expectation of management from employees is changing. At the same time, the expectation of employees from management is also changing. HR Professionals must recognize that employees and management have the different concerns that create a gap between them. HR Professionals can play a significant role here as 'a gap reducer'. If they think of these differences as two sides of a coin it will be easier to understand - the management team and staff may have different views but they are connected as summarized in the following table:

HR Professionals need to show employees why the changes are necessary and point out how the changes will have a positive effect on them. At the same time they have to inform the management regarding how the employees can be affected due to change. The positive role of HR Professionals will ultimately bridge the gaps between the management and the employees. Whatever the degree of change, HR Professionals should consider the change in three areas: pre-changing activities, actual changing activities, and post changing activities that is best described by Lewin's three-step model.

Kurt Lewin (1951), the promulgator of this model, argued that change in organizations should follow three steps: *unfreezing* the status quo, *changing* to proposed by Kurt Lewin. The biggest role for human resources occurs during the preannouncement phase of any change. This is the phase that is most often overlooked. At this stage HR Professional must answer the following questions:

> ➢ What happens before the announcement?
> ➢ What does it mean?
> ➢ How much will it cost?
> ➢ Why are we doing it?
> ➢ Who will be affected?
> ➢ What are the current and future implications?

The answers to these questions will provide the context for the change. This information can then be used to develop a roadmap for the implementation and

communication phases of the project. HR Professionals should play the role as a 'transformational leader' in the planning stage. They should initiate bold strategic changes to position the organization for its future (Newstrom & Davis, 2002).They should articulate a vision and promote it vigorously which will help employees rise above their narrow focus on their individual jobs or departments to see a broader picture. They are supposed to create learning individuals and learning organizations that will be better prepared for the unknown challenges that lie ahead. It is extremely important because it is better to make the employees early prepared for any unknown change rather than to make the employees prepared at a desired end state, and *refreezing* the new change to make it permanent. HR Professionals should play active roles in every phase of the changing process as the time of changing. Creating a culture for change is the prerequisite for sustainable organizational change. HR Professionals should build 'change' as a part of organizational culture.

Again, it is important to build adequate time into the planning process. Organizations often make the mistake of not allowing for enough time to carry out the new initiative. The rule for timing is: double it. If you think you're going to need six months for the project, count on a year. One of the reasons the process takes twice as long as what most companies originally calculate is the people in charge of the initiative (i.e. the leadership) have usually spent a significant amount of time already discussing and dealing with the change. They've had time to let go of the old ways and digest the new.

Employees need that same adjustment period so they don't feel like they're being force-fed the program. When management pushes down change on employees it can kill morale and cause a negative chain reaction.

Let's use running for office as an example. Candidates don't just show up at the polls on Election Day shouting, "Vote for me!" There is a strategic plan behind the campaign. Candidates develop a platform informing voters about where they stand on issues, and what is important to them. They attend house parties and campaign meetings and participate in debates months in advance. And most importantly, they talk to voters to get feedback. HR managers should take a cue from campaign managers. They need to communicate their ideas, give time for them to sink in, and talk with employees about their concerns and opportunities. When HR managers have an appropriate amount of time in the pre-announcement phase to work with employees, they can try to identify concerns, recognize areas of resistance, and put components of support in place to address them head-on.

One way to do this is to create a diverse, representative change committee. Invite employees from different constituencies to be a part of the team. Not only can leadership gain valuable insight from this committee, but members can take news of

the change back to their colleagues and departments and start building internal support. While a smaller scale change may not warrant a dedicated committee, it still needs attention from human resources. Almost all new initiatives are complex and can provoke anxiety in employees. Even something seemingly simple like switching coffee brands can wreak havoc in the workplace. If not planned and communicated properly, these straightforward initiatives can be met with apathy or resistance. In fact, small changes are often harder to deal with because leadership doesn't recognize that there may be a problem. But most people have a natural aversion to change, no matter how minor it is.

If HR professionals are aware of this, they can plan a roadmap (either simple or complex depending on the situation) to guide employees through these tricky times. Just because the change isn't a merger or a lay-off doesn't mean it's insignificant.

Another important role of today's HR Professional is that they must maintain a good communication with the employees so that there will be no misunderstanding among the employees regarding the desired change. Communication can be helpful in 'selling' the need for change (Robbins & Judge,2009).Throughout the course of action, HR Professionals need to ensure that all communication channels contribute to information sharing and accurate absorption of relevant information by all employees (Hendricks, 1989). Again HR Professionals should not forget the importance of 'motivation' during change. They must come forward as 'a good motivator' during change. Motivated employees perform more efficiently in serving customers (Walkup, 1997).

One way to help employees accept new small or large-scale projects is to show what success will look like. This is a great way to rally the troops around the idea in advance, either through symbolism or something tangible. When it comes to change, leadership often spends a lot of time on the idea, but not on the process. HR's role in driving organizational change is to take hold of the process. For change to succeed, HR professionals need to provide a roadmap that works. With all of this in mind, in *Human Resource Champions*, Dave Ulrich (1997), one of the best thinkers and writers in the HR field today, and a professor at the University of Michigan, recommends three additional roles for the HR manager which is critical in managing emerging changes in today's organizations.

Strategic Partner

In today's organizations, to guarantee their viability and ability to contribute, HR managers need to think of themselves as strategic partners. In this role, the HR person contributes to the development of and the accomplishment of the organization-wide business plan and objectives.

The HR business objectives are established to support the attainment of the changing strategic business plan and objectives. The HR Professional should be deeply knowledgeable about the design of changed work systems in which people succeed and contribute. This strategic partnership impacts HR services such as the design of work positions; hiring; reward, recognition and strategic pay; performance development and appraisal systems; career and succession planning; and employee development.

Employee Advocate

As an employee sponsor or advocate, the HR manager plays an integral role in managing organizational change via his knowledge about and advocacy of people. This advocacy includes expertise in how to create a work environment in which people will choose to be motivated, contributing, and happy. Fostering effective methods of goal setting, communication and empowerment through responsibility, builds employee ownership of the organization. The HR professional helps establish the organizational culture and climate for change in which people have the competency, concern and commitment to serve customers well. In this role, the HR manager provides employee development opportunities, employee assistance programs, gain sharing and profit-sharing strategies, organization development interventions, due process approaches to problem solving and regularly scheduled communication opportunities.

Change Champion

The constant evaluation of the effectiveness of the organization results in the need for the HR professional to frequently champion change. Both knowledge about and the ability to execute successful change strategies make the HR professional exceptionally valued. Knowing how to link change to the strategic needs of the organization will minimize employee dissatisfaction and resistance to change. The HR professional contributes to the organization by constantly assessing the effectiveness of the HR function. He also sponsors change in other departments and in work practices. To promote the overall success of his organization, he champions the identification of the

organizational mission, vision, values, goals and action plans. Finally, he helps determine the measures that will tell his organization how well it is succeeding in all of this.

Conclusion

The role of the Human Resource Manager is evolving with the change in competitive market environment and the realization that Human Resource Management must play a more strategic role in the success of an organization. With the increase in competition, locally or globally, organizations must become more adaptable, resilient, agile, and customer-focused to succeed. And within this change in environment, the HR professional has to evolve to become a strategic partner, an employee sponsor or

advocate, and a change mentor within the organization. In order to succeed, HR must be a business driven function with a thorough understanding of the organization's big picture and be able to influence key decisions and policies. In general, the focus of today's HR Manager is on strategic personnel retention and talents development. HR professionals will be coaches, counselors, mentors, and succession planners to help motivate organization's members and their loyalty. In a nutshell, the roles of HR Professionals can be best presented with the help of the following figure.

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