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The Function of HR

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Aim of Presentation

To understand:

- The HR function evolution and objectives
- The HR contribution during change management
- Models of HR service delivery
- HR's partnership with line managers
- Ethical practice in HR
- Evaluation of HR contribution
- The link between HR practice and positive organisational outcomes

Key HR Objectives

The top 4 major HR objectives are to:

- Recruit and retain staff
- Develop employee competencies
- Improve people performance management
- Maximise employee involvement/ engagement

(CIPD, 2007)

The CIPD surveyed a range of UK HR professionals in 2007 and found that the top four major HR objectives were to:

Recruit and retain staff
Develop employee competencies
Improve people performance management
Maximise employee involvement/engagement

The survey found prominent differences compared to a similar survey completed in 2003; decreasing priority on reducing costs but an increasing priority focusing on business goals and customer needs; this could reflect the changing business climate (CIPD, 2007).

Influencing External Factors on HR Objectives

LABOUR MARKETS

- Low unemployment rates may prioritise recruitment and retention.
- High unemployment rates may shift the priority to other key areas such as performance management

GOVERNMENT IMPACT

- Long-term UK productivity issue addressed in a 2015 HM Treasury report
- Pressure from Government on organisations may see a focus on developing levels of productivity

(Wilkinson and Taylor, 2016; HM Treasury, 2015)

External factors can influence key HR objectives and priorities such as labour markets and government impact. Recruitment and retention is high on the agenda when unemployment is at a low and it is difficult to recruit talent, whereas in times of high unemployment HR objectives may shift from recruitment to performance management (Wilkinson and Taylor, 2016). Whilst the UK has been successful in growing employment, productivity has been a long-term issue which was addressed in a 2015 HM Treasury report (HM Treasury, 2015) which may result in increased pressure from the government to improve productivity rates therefore, becoming a major HR objective within organisations.

The Evolution of the HR Function



The HR function has evolved from personnel management to human resource management (HRM) and has further evolved to strategic human resource management (SHRM).

HRM evolved to SHRM due to advances in technology and free market competition; this moved the HR function into a strategic position where HR is responsible for aligning HR practice to organisational strategy (Wilkinson and Taylor, 2016).

Transactional vs. Transformational

TRANSACTIONAL

- Day-to-day administrative duties
- Encourage acceptable behaviour through reward and punishment
- Value of people not recognised
- Adopted during Personnel Management era

TRANSFORMATIONAL

- Development of motivation and commitment
- Empowerment, integrity and transparency
- Support change management
- People are a valuable asset
- Adopted for HRM and SHRM

(Wilkinson and Taylor, 2016; Marchington et al, 2016)

Personnel management dating back to the Industrial Revolution adopted a transactional model by delivering day-to-day administrative activities such as payroll administration (Wilkinson and Taylor, 2016) and encouraging appropriate behaviour through reward and punishment, whereas, the evolution to HRM and onto SHRM has seen a shift in the importance of people; no longer are they simply a cog in the organisation but a valuable asset giving organisations a competitive lead. As such, a transformational approach is being adopted to develop motivation and commitment to exceed performance expectations; transformational leaders are empowering, act with integrity and transparency and facilitate change sensitively (Marchington et al, 2016).

Change Management

- Change management triggers include technological developments and change of strategy.
- HR is crucial to support change management initiatives **as failure to implement change can lead to loss of key employees and reduction of employee engagement.**
- HR can contribute by supporting the **‘controllable’ and ‘uncontrollable’ factors**, and undertaking a range of HR activities.

(CIPD, 2018)

Change is triggered by a range of factors including technological developments, customer pressures and economic uncertainty. Most change initiatives fail to achieve the desired objective which may result in loss of key employees and reduction in employee engagement therefore, it is crucial that the HR function manages change effectively to support change management initiatives (CIPD, 2018).

Communication is vital during change as people will be less resistant if they are accurately informed. HR should consider the best method to communicate information and monitor the effectiveness of chosen methods. This can include top-down from a director/senior manager communicating directly to employees; two-way discussion between a line manager/HR and an individual to discuss the change and concerns and; bottom-up allowing employees to participate in the change and generate ideas through consultations and change workshops. Thoroughness is important therefore communication should include detailed information including the need for change, who is affected, and expected benefits and adverse changes. HR should inform senior management of the importance of effective communication and promote honesty, accuracy and consistency (Wilkinson and Taylor, 2016).

HRD interventions can support change management and gain employee buy-in. HR can coach or mentor employees who are struggling with change; address skills gaps to enhance employee's ability to adapt and; allow employees development opportunities to enhance their responsiveness to change (Wilkinson and Taylor,

2016).

Supporting the Controllable & Uncontrollable factors

CONTROLLABLE (BUSINESS PROCESSES)

- HR involvement at planning stage
- Advising project leads
- Consideration of training and new posts
- Appropriate communication
- Evaluating impact of change

UNCONTROLLABLE (PEOPLE)

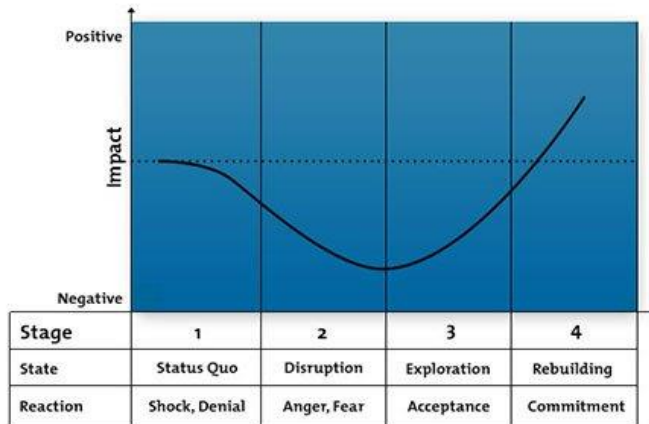
- Change will affect individuals differently
- Awareness of stakeholder potential reaction & cycle of emotions individuals will experience
- Awareness of change models i.e. Kubler-Ross Change Cycle

(Wilkinson and Taylor, 2016)

Effective change management should consider the 'controllable' concerning business processes that can be designed and implemented, and the 'uncontrollable' concerning people. HR can contribute to the controllable factors by having involvement at the initial planning stage, advising project leads about skills and skill gaps in the organisation, training needs and new posts, assessing the short-term goals with strategic needs, identifying potential stakeholder concerns to anticipate problems, consider an appropriate form of communication to stakeholders, and evaluating the impact of change on the HR (Wilkinson and Taylor, 2016).

Change initiatives will affect people differently and HR will experience different reactions across the organisation depending on the person's personality, experience of change and the impact the change may have on them. HR can contribute to the uncontrollable element by being aware of the expected reaction and activities that can be delivered to support people. Generally, change is viewed positively, however HR should be aware of the cycle of emotions people will experience when dealing with change (Wilkinson and Taylor, 2016).

Kubler-Ross Change Cycle



(Mind Tools, 2016)

The Kubler Ross Change Cycle depicts the cycle of emotions well. The Change Cycle model highlights four stages of emotions experienced when adjusting to change (see figure 1). HR can use this model to identify areas of negativity and disruption and plan accordingly to accelerate change and improve success. Stage one identifies shock or denial therefore communication is critical. Stage two sees negative and angry reactions and resistance to change; disruption must be managed before the situation escalates therefore, HR should consider the impact and objections in advance to be prepared. Stage three sees some optimism and acceptance of change as individuals begin to accept the change through exploration; HR should support individuals and plan enough time for learning. Stage four sees embracement of change and individuals adapting working processes; only at stage four will organisations experience the benefits of the change process (Mind Tools, no date).

HR Delivery in Organisations

Centralised &
Decentralised

Generalists &
Specialists

Shared
Services

Outsourcing

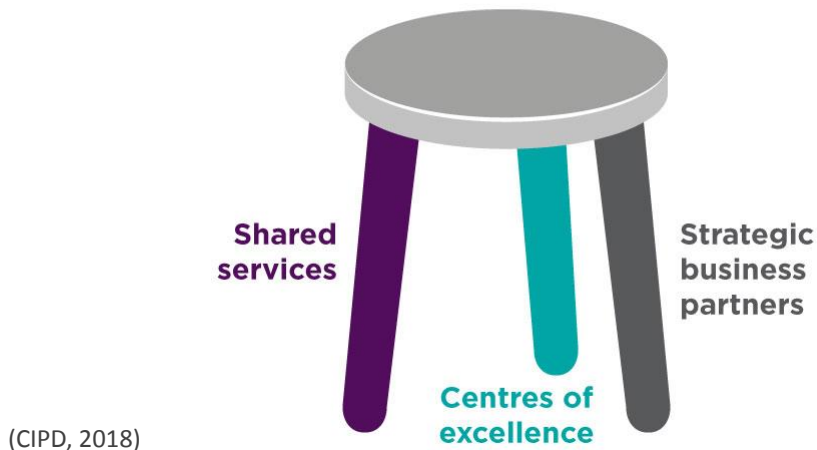
The HR function can be delivered differently across organisations. Teams can consist of HR generalists who have knowledge and involvement in all areas of HR, HR specialists who specialise in certain areas of HR or a mixture of both generalists and specialists.

Centralised HR delivery is a traditional approach where HR is delivered throughout the organisation from a central decision-making authority. Whereas, decentralised HR delivery will see HR distributed amongst different areas of the business and make independent decisions. Centralised HR has consistent standards unlike decentralised HR which can duplicate efforts, however, decentralised HR recognise local priorities due to independent decision making whereas centralised HR can struggle with regional needs such as language barriers (SHRM, 2016).

Larger organisations may opt for HR shared services whereby administrative HR activities are centralised and shared service across the organisation. Shared services can reduce costs, improve service quality, pool knowledge and have the potential to be profit-making by providing HR to a third-party. Shared services can be a pre-cursor to outsourcing (CIPD, 2018) which is the practice of buying services from an external provider. Organisations may outsource all their HR processes or specific processes. Like shared services, outsourcing can reduce costs and increase efficiencies but also access HR expertise unavailable within the organisation however, outsourcing is usually a long-term solution therefore organisations should understand their future

strategy to assess any risk before proceeding (CIPD, 2018).

David Ulrich – Three-legged Stool Model



David Ulrich penned the three-legged stool best-practice model which has three distinct working areas (Swift, 2016) namely; HR Business Partners who are HR professionals working with business leaders to develop strategy; Centres of Excellence (COEs) comprising of HR specialists to develop innovative solutions such as reward or L&D; and Shared Service Centre which deals with the transactional activities (Wilkinson and Taylor, 2016). Ulrich's model blends a centralised and decentralised approach to increase efficiencies and effectiveness. Research from forty organisations showed that 50% has invested in the Ulrich model; of these 77% believe the Ulrich model contributed to their success. However, over a third of these believed COEs has been neglected and is a missed opportunity. Research found that organisation's felt HR Business Partners were still transactional and struggled to rid the administrative work (Orion, no date). Similarly, Pitcher (2008), cited in Swift 2016, argues that the business partner model does not provide strategic thinking. The Ulrich model has clearly produced benefits however benefits has not filtered to all three areas therefore, HR professionals should be aware not to disproportionate attention across the three areas.

HR partnership with Line Managers

Working in partnership to develop HR solutions will see more alignment to the organisation's strategy.

Line managers are crucial to implementing HR policies and their actions can have a **positive or negative effect** on employees and implementation.

HR must **build line managers capabilities** and **develop a successful partnership** to deliver effective HR.

(CIPD, 2018; Sikora et al, 2015)

It is crucial that HR and line managers form a partnership to deliver people management effectively; employees are likely to approach their line manager in the first instance if they have any questions or concerns regarding their employment and role. As HR move onto strategic issues, line managers are taking on traditional HR activities such as implementing policies and procedures and supporting their team's L&D requirements. Working in partnership to develop HR solutions will see more alignment to the organisation's strategy (CIPD, 2018),

Research shows that the actions of line managers will have a positive or negative effect on employee behaviours, perceptions and attitudes; similarly, if line managers lack HR knowledge or have political agendas the likelihood of implementation is reduced (Sikora et al, 2015). Therefore, it is essential that HR invest in building line manager capabilities by providing regular training regarding policy implementation, provide updates, pay attention to people management behaviours and ensure strong organisational values are promoted to highlight the expected behaviours (CIPD, 2018).

HR will provide advice and support to line managers when they do not know what to do or if they are facing a complex issue; HR should stress the importance of line managers utilising support from HR wherever necessary, so they are well-informed to make responsible decisions (Wilkinson and Taylor, 2016).

Managing HR Ethically

Ethical vs. Unethical Practice

ETHICAL PRACTICE

- Develop positive employee relationships
- Invite a wider range of potential applicants
- Improve morale
- Enhance organisational reputation
- Financially outperform peers



(Wilkinson and Taylor, 2016; CIPD, 2018)

UNETHICAL PRACTICE

- Reputational damage
- Publicly shamed
- Fines
- High turnover of staff
- Smaller pool of potential applicants



Ethical practice is at the core of a HR professional and is encompassed within the CIPD's Code of Conduct. Championing ethical behaviour will foster positive employee relationships through trust and fairness, invite a wider range of applicants as ethical reputation is an increasing priority for potential applicants thus improving competitive edge (Wilkinson and Taylor, 2016), improve morale, enhance reputation and financially outperform peers (CIPD, 2018).

HR ethics is becoming a priority within the HR function; previously HR professionals may have deprioritised ethics, or they felt they could not apply ethical principles in practice. However, following the corporate Sports Direct and Volkswagen scandals, organisations are prioritising commitment to HR ethics (CIPD, 2017). The HR function is best placed to encourage organisational ethicality through successful recruitment and people management

During ethical decision-making, the CIPD describe using eight ethical lenses to aid ethical decision-making by providing different perspectives to help the person come to an ethical conclusion (CIPD, 2015) and therefore maintaining the organisation's ethical integrity.

Case Study – Sports Direct Scandal

As a result of unethical treatment, Sports Direct saw:

- **Huge reputational damage**
- **Shamed by Government**
- **Appeared before a Government Select Committee Hearing**
- **Ordered to pay back over £1m**
- **Shares plummeted by 60%**



(BBC, 2016; The Guardian, 2017; Hobbs, 2016)

Unethical treatment has damaging consequences for businesses. The Sports Direct scandal in 2015 found the company was practicing unethically and exploiting employees; an investigation found that staff were paid below the National Minimum Wage, enforcement of unfair disciplinary penalties including penalising staff for getting a drink therefore failing their duty of care, many unfair zero-hours contracts and that their business model treated employees as commodities instead of human beings (BBC, 2016). As a result, Sports Direct shares plummeted by 60% (The Guardian, 2017); they suffered huge reputational damage evidenced by UKRepTrak which tracks stakeholder and consumer expectation which saw Sports Direct fall into the 'weak' category of companies (Hobbs, 2016) and; shamed by the Government after appearing before a Government Select Committee Hearing which ordered the company to pay over £1m in back-pay (BBC, 2016). Institute of Business Ethics found that 21% of the British Public believes exploitative labour should be addressed (IBE, 2018); similarly, Wilkinson and Taylor (2016) explain individuals are less likely to work for a company with a reputation of unfair employee treatment.

Evaluating the HR Function

Ulrich and
Grochowski

Key
Performance
Indicators
(KPIs)

HR Statistics

Balanced
Scorecard

For HR to evidence that it adds value to the organisation it should have methods of evaluation in place to measure the effectiveness of its HR activities.

Ulrich and Grochowski (2017) identified nine criteria for an effective HR function to build upon; reputation, context/deliverables, strategy, design, organisation capability, analytics, practices, professionals and work style. To measure the effectiveness of HR, they suggest reviewing the nine criteria against four stages of value; foundational/administrative, functional, strategic and outside in; using a scale of one (low) to ten (high). This method of evaluation identifies areas for improvement and help to realign HR activity to business objectives.

Key performance indicators (KPIs) identify critical areas of HR performance for the achievement of business objectives. Targets are detailed for each area and the performance is assessed against the target. KPI targets should be SMART; specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound.

HR statistics including recruitment spend; absence figures; turnover levels L&D spend and distribution; and volume of applicants; are useful for benchmarking to demonstrate HR's performance. Benchmarking compares organisational data internally or externally; internally may compare performance with previous years or to different departments, whereas, externally will assess performance by comparing the organisation with others in the same industry or the local area (Wilkinson and

Taylor, 2016).

Balanced Scorecard is a document which are grouped into four perspectives: financial, customer, internal and learning and growth. The four perspectives provide a balanced view of performance as opposed to focussing on one area. Each perspective is given a set of strategic objectives and measures to determine the strategic performance (QuickScore, no date). Each department has its own scorecard tailored to their own strategic objectives therefore enables departmental comparisons (Wilkinson and Taylor, 2016).

Research Linking HR to Positive Organisational Outcomes

HRM and its effect on employee, organisational and financial outcomes in health care organisations (Vermeeran et al, 2014)

The study found that HR practices improve financial, organisation and employee outcomes.

- Research was well justified
- Utilised well published theory for employee outcome research; AMO (Ability, Motivation and Opportunity)
 - Only 'care' sector researched as opposed to 'cure'
 - Limited sample size

Vermeeren et al (2014) published a research study “HRM and its effect on employee, organisational and financial outcomes in health care organisations” to determine if HR practices influence multi-dimensional outcomes in the health care sector, the outcomes were: financial, organisational and employee. The study found that HR practices directly or indirectly improved all three outcomes however, the impact was vastly larger for organisational and employee outcomes.

The study was well justified as according to the researchers, few studies have addressed the multi-dimensional impacts as a result of HR practices and whilst there is substantial research on HRM and its link to performance, it is unclear how this affects the health care sector directly. Guest (1997) recommends the use of outcomes as opposed to performance therefore the research aim was developed from an informed background.

When researching the employee outcome, the questionnaire contained five indicators (L&D, performance related pay, teamwork, job design and autonomy) most frequently used in research. The AMO model (Ability, Motivation, Opportunity) is largely used in recent research; when using the five indicators, it covers the three elements of AMO therefore, this study is using a robust employee outcome measurement.

The data was based on the Dutch 'care' sector (i.e. nursing homes) and did not

include data from the 'cure' sector (i.e. hospital care) therefore the results do not represent the entire care sector thus not reflecting the research title. Data was obtained from a health care benchmarking database containing data covering the three outcomes; this is advantageous to the researchers as such data would be difficult to collect however the research design is unknown. The sample size limited the research; the dataset appeared large as 162 organisations participated however, the study required organisations to provide information on all three outcomes therefore, only data from 85 organisations was used.

Research Linking HR to Positive Organisational Outcomes

The impact of HR practices, HR effectiveness and a 'strong HR system' on organisational outcomes; a stakeholder perspective (Guest and Conway, 2011)

The study found that HR effectiveness is strongly associated to employee attitudes however, there was no association linking HR effectiveness to consensus.

- Justified and robust research
- Expands existing research
- Cross-sectional design used however, longitudinal may be best placed
- Response rate unknown

Guest and Conway (2011) published a research study “The impact of HR practices, HR effectiveness and a ‘strong HR system’ on organisational outcomes; a stakeholder perspective” to determine HR effectiveness on proximal (i.e. employee behaviour) and distal (i.e. financial performance) outcomes; and if the impact is greater when there is consensus between senior managers and HR managers. The study found that HR effectiveness is most strongly associated with ratings of employee attitudes (proximal); whereas, no significant association was found between HR effectiveness and consensus.

Researching the impact of senior manager and HR manager consensus on HR effectiveness is justified and expands existing research; recent research largely sought findings from employees regarding HR effectiveness however, the views of senior managers have been mostly neglected.

HR effectiveness is modelled in three key elements; presence of HR effectiveness, must be effective and effectively implemented. The study addressed the first two elements; implementation is difficult without presence and effectiveness so the research is most robust addressing these however, future research would benefit from addressing implementation in the same study.

A cross-sectional design was utilised however, longitudinal design may be beneficial to avoid perceptions being affected due to knowledge of likely performance. A

structured schedule of telephone interviews of companies was conducted by random selection however as a result, the response rate was unclear which limits the understanding of the dataset.

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