

3 Essential changes in HR in 2020s

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Corporate world is changing dramatically despite the headwinds and the onset of Covid 19, and technology is driving this change at a breakneck speed. Most of the HR professionals are catching up with this change, time has come for HR to be proactive and agile. Dave Ulrich’s HR model most of continue to bank upon, is now 25 years old and needs fresh thinking. Most of the HR professionals are not trained enough in technology, I certainly cannot understand or code and hence need to upgrade myself. Technology will drive a fundamental change in HR’s role in the near future. The second change happening in HR rapidly is moving from understanding and serving the collective (organization) to increasingly serving the individual talent and the third is how to continuously influence the stakeholder(s) to progress the people agenda. Put together these three will become essential for HR professionals to understand and master.

From	To
Understanding Business	Understanding Technology
Serving Organisation	Understanding & Serving Individual Talent
Advising Business	Understanding & Influencing Stakeholders

3 Essential Changes in HR in 2020s - Table 1

Let me dwell on each of the three changes in detail and build my case.

Understanding Technology

Every business is a platform business says my friend, Hari Abburi. It is the absolute truth and if HR does not understand the language of technology, engineering, digital and agile, they are going to be left behind. In the 90s and early 2000s if you did not understand the business you had very little to add to business discussions. Most of the HR folks wanted a seat at the table, but what would you do with that seat if you did not understand the business discussions happening. Cut to 2021, if you do not understand technology the seat at the table is not going to be there for long, you will not be missed if you cannot speak the language of technology. So, when I was challenged on this front two years ago, I turned to Hari who had been researching on the new role of HR in the technology world. I will not steal the thunder, you can read more about his work on his website www.thepreparationcompany.com.

Business understanding is table stakes, you should understand the business and also its vectors. You should be proficient in them, you should be able to answer business questions as well as any finance or strategy person can. Ram Charan has written extensively about this aspect and the next role of HR in his book, 'Talent Wins'.

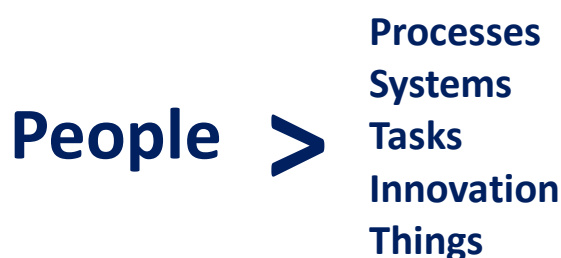
Technology understanding is still in its infancy, you can read the excellent book Hari referred to me "The Age of Agile", Stephen Dunning to start unpeeling this layer. How engineers are making every problem a data problem and how can that help all of us. The wise share their wisdom, engineers who are skeptics as ever prove those idioms so that there is no doubt left in anyone's mind. Google implemented project Oxygen and Aristotle to understand the role of Manager and how do high performing teams function (refer to the website – www.rework.withgoogle.com). Word of caution, not everything applicable there will be directly applicable to your context. Work with the principle(s) and not the practice(s).

Understanding and Serving Individual Talent

In an age of hyper individualisation, where I can have my own zoom background, my own Instagram/LinkedIn page, my own WeChat, my own Netflix liking and everything is unique. Each employee is unique and wants to be treated as one, if the marketers and engineers understand and respond to individualism why should HR be behind. HR should be looking at the collective and yet responding to the individual. Retention and engagement are an individual problem and not an organizational problem. The more we see it as organizational problem, the more we are challenged, as HR wants to solve it for the collective but the exiting employee is sharing the dissatisfaction she felt and that is sometimes the cause of a great employee engagement score but poor employee retention.

HR has to turn itself to serving the employee more than the organization and only then can it serve the organization. The tables have turned but HR still believes that the sun revolves around the earth. HR needs to smell the coffee often. HR solutions have to be for the individual and it has the tools available to make it happen. If it understands the technology it can not only find the tools, it can help build them. My argument is that if the organization talks to the employee one on one and caters to her needs/motives, she will remain with the organization for a long time.

All of us in the Human resources often forget that:



In the context of organisations, I refer to employees as people.

And individual employees make organisations not the other way around. Borrowing from Stephen Denning¹, the format of universe has changed, for organisations customer is the center and I say for organisations, employee is the center.

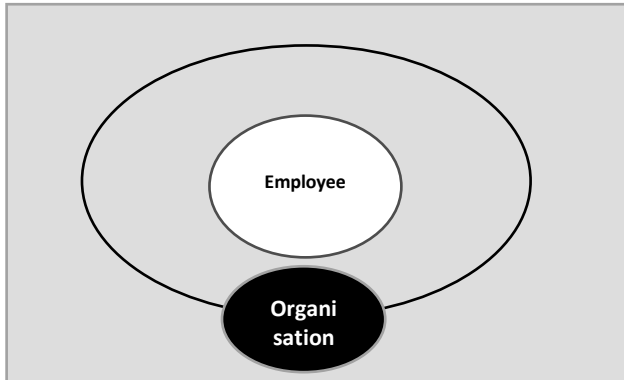


Figure 1

Understanding and Influencing Stakeholders

HR has many stakeholders, earlier it was only advising business and use to step back when it came to implementation (which was managers and leaders job). Most of the times handing over HR's work to the business, HR now will have to take it back and solve for the tricky issues – setting goals, giving feedback, understanding and arriving at motives before employee starts becoming disheartened. Paul Colgan, one of my bosses who used to run Agency Sales in Max New York Life had a saying, "Driving Sales, Pounding nails" before the employee has nails pounded in her heart, HR needs to discover and stop this from happening. For this not to happen, HR will have to influence CXOs, leaders and managers in the organization.

HR will have to understand the various needs of and influence shareholders, community, prospective employees, current employees, alumni, distributors, their employees...essentially the whole ecosystem surrounding the organization. Its role has broadened and parts of it will include selling which was not a core of its portfolio earlier.

The game has upped while most of us in HR are still working with the basics. Basics need to be handed over to Alexa and Siri. They can do a better job of HRMIS, Payroll, setting up employees etc. We

need to write new job descriptions for Alexa and Siri and handover the mundane to them. The core job of HR will be to keep on influencing the stakeholders on what is coming around the corner and what leaders cannot yet see. HR not only has to influence them but also build their capability to see around the corner.

There is a critical difference between advising and influencing, influencing has a stake in the ground and HR's success depends upon influencing the ecosystem and making sure it helps the organization succeed.

Get ready for the three essential changes for HR in 2020s – understanding technology, understanding and serving individual talent, understanding and influencing stakeholders.

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¹ Stephen Denning, The Age of Agile