

## **The necessary evil that is the human resources department**

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Human resources. The department that is seen by a lot of employees as the stand-alone ivory tower where its occupants only come down once in a while to mete out instant justice to the rest of the organization.

Many employees do not fully understand the function of the Human Resources department, their obligations, influence, and benefits that come out of them executing their mandate. This gap in knowledge can contribute to the general feelings of mistrust and suspicion associated with the Human resources function of most organisations.

The Harvard Business Review has it that the Human resources function in organisations, then known as Industrial and labour relations, started taking off in the early 1900s. The steel and oil industry boom of that era led to the formation and need for people management.

There are many misconceptions and myths surrounding Human Resources and its role in an organisation. Some of these are;

### **Human resources personnel exist to police everyone**

The phrase, “you better not let hear human resources say that’ is said more often than we would like to admit. Conversations automatically become muted once anyone from the department walks past a group of employees for fear of ending up under reprisal.

Due to the fact that at the mention of human resources the first thing that the average employee thinks is disciplinary hearings and terminations, it becomes very easy to see those in this department as existing solely to police all activities and ruin the workplace experience of everyone at every possible opportunity.

The reality on the ground, however, is that employees in the human resources department are not necessarily out to get everyone for every small infraction that happens.

### **Human resources is there to act as management mouthpiece**

Employees generally tend to see Human resources as the ever willing puppet that carries out the will and requests of senior management at the expense of everyone else.

Whilst one of the functions of human resources is indeed to disseminate information on decisions made at the senior level, they are in principle guided by labour laws and internal regulations on how to proceed with initiatives. The communication is not necessarily a one way street with lower-level

employees being left with no choice to object any directives that would have been passed down. A healthy workplace allows for deliberation and room to ask for clarification.

Given all these assumptions about the Human resources function, the question is then exactly is their role in the organisation and to what benefit?

## **Recruiting the right candidates for the organisation**

The success of recruiters and employment specialists generally is measured by the number of positions they fill and the time it takes to fill those positions. In reality, however, the lifeblood of an organisation comes down to the quality of its employees- do they have the right people in the right job as opposed to just adding another employee? One of the key responsibilities of HR is staffing- advertising job postings, sourcing candidates, screening the applicants and coordinating hiring efforts with the relevant managers to make the final selection of candidates.

## **Employer-Employee Relations**

Employee relations is the HR discipline concerned with strengthening the employer-employee relationship through measuring job satisfaction, employee engagement and resolving workplace conflict. Labor relations functions may include developing management response to union organizing campaigns, negotiating collective bargaining agreements and rendering interpretations of labor union contract issues.

## **Maintaining a Safe Environment**

Occupational safety and health have come a long way since the first industrial movement. There is a more concerted effort to recognise the wellbeing of employees as opposed to seeing them as just another replaceable cog in the wheel. An important function of HR is to support workplace safety training and maintain federally mandated logs for workplace injury and fatality reporting. In addition, HR safety and risk specialists often work closely with HR benefits specialists to manage the company's worker's compensation issues.

## **Training and Development**

Career development has consistently come out as a key deciding factor in employee retention. Employers must provide employees with the tools necessary for their success which, in many cases, means giving new employees extensive orientation training to help them transition into a new organizational culture. Many HR departments also provide leadership training and professional development. Leadership training may be required of newly hired and promoted supervisors and managers on topics such as performance management and how to handle employee relations matters at the department level.

Professional development opportunities are for employees looking for promotional opportunities or

employees who want to achieve personal goals such as finishing a college degree. Programs such as tuition assistance and tuition reimbursement programs often are within the purview of the HR training and development area.

Human resources may at face value seem like the black sheep that do the dirty work of management but ultimately, it is there to protect the rights of workers and also maintain a balance in keeping the integrity of the organisation.

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