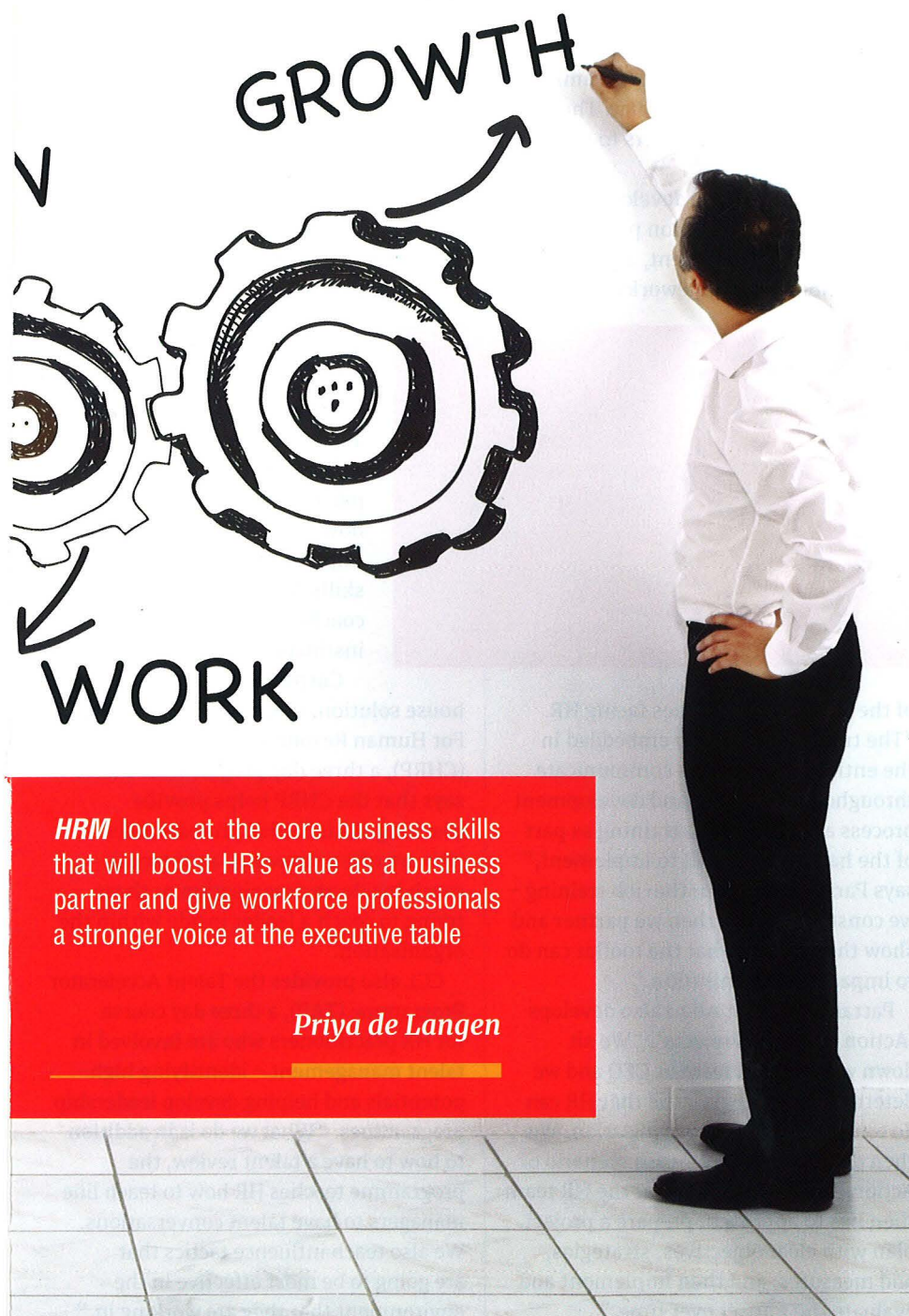


# Business skills for HR





**HRM** looks at the core business skills that will boost HR's value as a business partner and give workforce professionals a stronger voice at the executive table

*Priya de Langen*

**T**he nature of HR has changed over the decades. It has moved from a transactional function, handling things like payroll, to becoming a more business-oriented element of an organisation. Nowadays, it is not new for the chief HR officer to be part of the C-suite or for true HR business partners to be present in an organisation.

However, industry experts say that though HR has a presence at the executive table, the function is still perceived by many to be transactional. HR can change this mindset by improving skills and aligning goals with the business needs of the company. HR professionals also need to build relationships with leaders and departments in order for their views to be heard.

### **Building a business mindset**

Experts say that HR professionals need to look beyond just learning hard or soft skills, and align their ideas with the organisation's business goals.

"It is more about changing mindset and becoming transformational, rather than transactional in the way that HR sees itself and the ways employees see HR," explains Darryl Parrant, Managing Director, Align HR Group. "A lot of employees at all levels see HR as the 'gatekeepers'; as the people who enforce the rules, pay people, recruit and on-board, the people who make things difficult rather than easy."

Parrant says that it is essential that HR work on the skills that can help them gain a deeper understanding of the organisation. "We need to look at business strategy; business execution; business alignment; and business collaboration. Those four skills have the word 'business' in them and none of them have 'HR'. So, reskilling is about understanding the business and the depth of the business and how it operates and the commercialisation activities," he states.

Parrant adds that reskilling for HR is really about where the business is going and how HR can partner with the key



people and find opportunities to align, while managing the obstacles to ensure that the business is on the right path.

Chris Dewar, Faculty Director, Design & Development for Center for Creative Leadership (CCL) affirms that HR needs to build relationships and have a strategic perspective. "It is not just about learning and understanding the core businesses but the ability to have a strategic perspective from a couple of different viewpoints. If you talk with your business leaders that you are supporting from 'different lenses', you have the chance of having more influence at the (executive) table."

### Collaborating on data

Big Data is a major topic in the profession. With HR having access to a huge volume of information it needs to link that data to the business needs of the company, industry professionals say.

"HR needs the technology and reporting functionality to accumulate and manipulate the data, and then present the data in a dashboard or metric that allows good decisions that impact the business to be made. And if HR can lead and drive that, they will be better positioned to sit at the executive table. This will also shift the way people perceive HR," explains Parrant.

Dewar of CCL says that the volume of data available to HR leaders these days is almost overwhelming. "The challenge is how to pull the data that is useful and turn that it into information that helps you make the (business) decision."

Mei Yee Loo, General Manager of Executive Coach International, says: "If HR can link their data skills and business acumen, it will be a huge asset to the organisation." However, she says that for HR to work with data accurately there needs to be partnership among the departments in the organisation. "HR might have the data but the departments have the qualitative criteria that they are

looking for," she says. "How do the two groups work together translating all that data? Besides giving data to the HR, what else can the organisation provide? And if HR recommends something, does the department work with them or against them on it?"

### Reskilling HR

Recent studies show that HR needs reskilling in these areas, and service providers offer numerous programmes to help them achieve just that. These range from learning projects to skills-based courses.

Align HR Consulting develops toolkits, for example, on succession planning, performance management, and training and development frameworks: some

He explains that HR comes up with a tactical action plan which it has to implement over a year or longer. Also, Align uses its team of experienced coaches and management mentors so that the HR team is aligned and fulfilling the project.

Service providers also offer coaching courses to HR to improve their coaching skills and help them relate to stakeholders. Executive Coach International offers the Professional Coach Training Programme, accredited by the International Coaching Federation, which takes about six months to complete. Loo says that mainly HR recruiters and management attend. "The majority of HR and top management join this programme as HR finds it really important that they start to relate to a person a lot more," she explains.

Loo states that coaching is an add-on skill for HR that can help them to listen to the needs of employees and allow them to get the right information from the right parties. "They also learn how to resolve conflicts and improve their communication skills. When they pick up coaching skills, they trust their instincts a lot more," she adds.

Currently offered as an in-house solution, CCL runs the Coaching For Human Resource Professionals (CHRP), a three day programme. Dewar says that the CHRP helps provide coaching skills for HR professionals who are often viewed as an internal coach inside an organisation or those trying to coach a leader inside within the organisation.

CCL also provides the Talent Accelerator Programme (TAP), a three day course for HR practitioners who are involved in talent management – identifying high-potentials and helping develop leadership programmes. "What we do is in addition to how to have a talent review, the programme teaches HR how to teach line managers to have talent conversations. We also teach influence tactics that are going to be most effective in the environment that they are working in."

## Figures on HR:

- When asked about reskilling HR, 48% of business respondents reported that HR was "not ready", compared to 36% of HR respondents
- 57% of business respondents reported that their company was "not ready" when it came to talent and HR analytics, compared to 41 percent of HR respondents.

Source: Global Human Capital Trends 2014: Engaging the 21st-century workforce, Deloitte

of the critical talent issues facing HR. "The training is actually embedded in the entire process as we communicate throughout the design and development process and we provide training as part of the hand over for HR to implement," says Parrant. "It is on-the-job training – we consult first and then we partner and show the value of what the toolkit can do to impact the organisation."

Parrant says that Align also develops 'Action Learning Projects'. "We sit down with the HR team or CEO and we determine a strategic issue that HR can do to add value to the organisation. We then design a 'real live' case scenario or Action Learning Project that the HR team then has to approach; prepare a project plan with clear objectives, strategies, and measures; and then implement and evaluate the impact over time."