

Blurred Lines: Crossover Between Management and HR Functions

By: Ann Leary, MS, MBA

Program Chair (Management) – Western Governors University

“Train people well enough so they can leave. Treat them well enough so they don’t want to.” Sir Richard Branson is inarguably a great leader. Or is he a HR professional? Or maybe a manager? Maybe he’s all three.

How organizations train and treat their people is not just up to the HR team, nor is it just the responsibility of the manager. In order to have a strong and supportive culture, strategic relationships with managers should benefit not only the functional teams, but the organization as a whole. This is more than just important—it’s a best practice.

The best managers are those who develop employees. But, you might say, what about HR? Isn’t that their role, to provide, host, and evaluate professional development opportunities? And this is true, but it’s not really the whole story. Support and collaboration from a team of HR professionals is critical for success. However, with active collaboration from management, employees are provided what they need to succeed, grow, and engage at a level that unifies the organization.

Many organizations have transitioned and grown their HR teams to include talent specific teams, people teams, and teams that address specialized areas of focus. Some example of these areas of focus include providing mentors or mentoring opportunities and engaging in social emotional learning (SEL) activities. This type of transition fits beautifully into the evolving role of a manager. Sari Wilde, a managing vice president at Gartner, studied managers and leadership and identified a type of manager called a “connector manager.” This type of manager helps to guide development and provide encouragement through honesty, trust, and setting up the right environment for support. The connector manager also excels at targeted coaching, which focuses on helping to provide their people connections with others. This way, feedback not only comes from the manager, but also from others, in or out of the organization, where it might be most valuable. This obviously isn’t how we have thought of management before, which may include things like keeping schedules and deadlines, hiring and firing, and basically checking the necessary operational boxes. This new manager is leading, developing, and doing so very much alongside her HR comrades. If you are seeing a clear overlap between what HR works towards and this new distinction of manager, you are not wrong.

Staffing and development are two focal points of HR that blend easily into the newest version of the efficient manager. Recruiting, interviewing, onboarding, training, and ongoing professional development are all elements of staffing and development that could benefit from teamwork between HR and managers. For instance, millennials want more coaching than other generation currently in the workforce. This means they have a desire for more detailed and frequent feedback, and this can quickly result in managers feeling overwhelmed and under-resourced. This is a great opportunity to partner with HR to create a more substantial mentor network. The mentor network could assist in supporting the manager’s goal in meeting the needs of her team members, who desire the personalized, focused, and immediate feedback. HR can support this effort by working with the manager to establish criteria for the network and build a great bench of professionals who are interested in mentoring other professionals.

Another great overlap in manager and HR roles is the emphasis on being people-centric. There is a need for people to feel that they have the right skills mastered for their roles, are ready to advance, and have been provided relevant and individualized professional development. Knowing that managers often hold the key to employee satisfaction (we quit managers, not jobs, right?), those elements are often held with high regard by managers where they feel responsible for their people and their people's success. Managers know that providing the best environment possible to support the growth of their team is critical to fostering trust, as well as advancement. Having a supportive relationship with HR can be incredibly positive in the success and growth of a manager's team. Not only can HR support managers by providing resources, advice on best practices, and collaboration cross-functionally to grow a manager's team, but HR can also help support the manager's growth as well: BONUS!

Finally, knowing what the future of work looks like from an organizational perspective and from a role perspective are complementary skillsets that should be combined for optimal impact. HR professionals may understand staffing, training, and preparation for the future from an organizational standpoint, but managers have insight into what training and skills will be needed for the roles in industry. Putting together both repositories of knowledge and expertise result in what I'll call an organizational superpower.

Are you a manager looking to best support and develop your teams and need a trusted partner with resources and a desire to hire and retain the best of the best? Call your HR team! Are you a HR professional looking to strengthen your organizational culture and make the leap into aligning with the needs of functional teams? Call the managers! The results could be a partnership that benefits individuals, teams, and the organization in an amazing way.