



HR Professionals:

Your Strategic Partner

For medium to large-sized organizations, the Human Resources department is the traditional entry for new hires, exit point for employees leaving the firm, and a touch point for employees throughout their tenure. It's a role that can give HR professionals close, comprehensive knowledge of every job in the company, and a 360 view of the entire organization. But it's a resource that has remained largely untapped by senior management, until now. Today's CEOs are recognizing the value of HR as a strategic partner, and business-savvy HR executives are advancing the industry via the skills and knowledge acquired with their CHRP designation.

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Ensuring Excellence.



From Personnel Department to Strategic Partner

The 2008 recession saw many Canadian companies streamline their budgets. This meant laying off numerous employees when necessary and being more creative with their spending dollars—for example, contracting consultants for project-based work. This downturn created an ideal opportunity for HR professionals to step up their game and work strategically with their organization during challenging economic times.

The measure of their success is outlined in a study conducted in the fall of 2010.¹ This national initiative sought direct feedback from top business decision-makers; one-on-one interviews were conducted with CEOs from a range of sectors and differently-sized companies to investigate the role human resources plays in these various organizations.

“Our HR people are key resources I look to in appointments,” says David Anderson, Fellow Certified Human Resources Professional (FCHRP), president and CEO of WorkSafeBC. “I am looking for the HR leader’s advice, especially on internal hires where they will have good insight. For example, I can ask them, ‘is this the right person for the right job at this time?’”

Overall, CEOs feel that their HR staff is a valued contributor to their business. They reported that senior HR executives are increasingly seen as trusted advisors, and often hold the role of confidant to the

CEO and other executives. They also emphasized the value of the knowledge senior HR professionals can bring as members of the executive team.

Irving Oil provides a good private sector example of the new HR paradigm. Here HR has formed a partnership with senior management, becoming a critical enabler of the company’s business strategy.

“For the first time in our company’s history, the HR function holds a position on our Executive Team,” says Tanya Chapman, Certified Human Resources Professional (CHRP) and corporate human resources officer. “It’s the highest level of management and it has raised the bar for our HR function.”

Business Acumen: Thinking Moves Ahead

A common thread throughout the study was the value of business expertise among HR professionals. Those with a keen understanding of the business profit and loss (P&L) equation did better across the board.

“I believe that an HR leader is really a business leader,” explains Chapman. “They require business skills like financial accounting, business acumen, project management, and an understanding of economics—just like any other business leader. Speaking the language of business

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while practicing your craft is very powerful and it can be very fulfilling.”

Analyzing, assessing and translating new social and people trends into relevant policies and programs were also important, as was the ability to test them and gain buy-in for front-line implementation.

Understanding the challenges and business needs of supervisors and front-line managers on a first-hand basis also ranked highly. Not surprisingly, these are skills best learned in the trenches.

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But perhaps the biggest value of broader business knowledge is the attendant broadening of perspective. The most successful HR executives understand that there are trade-offs in business. They can apply their expertise to determine the impact of changing legislation and help manage the change rather than focusing on the punitive side of non-compliance. They can also better identify popular or recommended programs and policies that are impractical, or even irrelevant, to the top or bottom line of the particular business.

“I work with the entire executive team to build the business agenda,” says Chapman. “Alignment is critical to ensuring that the HR team is designing and developing initiatives that drive business performance and enable our people to achieve results.”

¹Human Resources Professional Association (HRPA) survey of Canadian CEOs regarding the future of HR conducted on behalf of HRPA by Knightsbridge Human Capital Solutions. Visit www.chrp.ca/HR_Professionals_Study/ to view the complete Knightsbridge study.

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Culture Building: Creating the Employment Brand

How employees feel about their company is often a reflection of how the senior HR executive feels and behaves toward them. Creating a positive culture and environment within the company is crucial. CEOs are adamant about the vital part HR assumes in connecting the company’s culture with its objectives, and in defining and communicating what makes their organization a great place to work.

“A good HR leader can really build support for an organization’s culture,” says David Anderson. “In our case, we needed to embrace more of a customer service focus and get away from the old ‘command and control’ mentality. It required a complete change in mindset to embrace this new way of serving customers.”

Talent Management

HR professionals have long been the first line of offense for identifying talent, but this role, too, is expanding. Today’s professionals can also identify the kind of behaviours and skills that will drive

their organization’s productivity. What’s more, they can take the lead in developing that talent with customized approaches to individual development. This includes individual coaching approaches as well as larger scale leadership development.

“Our HR team has achieved significant improvements in training and development, particularly in management,” notes Anderson. “We now have a comprehensive, end-to-end program to develop leadership talent. It’s relevant for all the various levels of our organization, and we’re getting good buy-in.”

Succession Planning & the Multi-Generation Workplace

During the economic downturn, a lot of companies put succession planning on the back burner. That was a mistake. And with recovery underway, companies need top-notch HR departments to confront the coming “Silver Tsunami”, the exodus of

skilled workers across the country through retirement. Highly skilled HR professionals are also required to address the challenges posed by multiple generations who don’t speak the same language in business or use the same tools to get their work done. This is especially true in terms of recruiting, building teams, dealing with change and motivating employees.

Trend Analysis & Forecasting

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“I support anything that ties the HR strategy more closely with the bottom line,” emphasizes Anderson. “Saving money and serving the customer better through their efforts is key.”

Employee Communications

Most CEOs expect HR to manage effective employee communications, and to ensure that middle managers in particular have the tools and information they need to communicate with and lead their employees. Social media is a big part of this for many organizations, and its uses are limitless, including: communicating with and recruiting employees, establishing best practices around employee use of social media, and leveraging social media platforms as an engagement and communications tool.

“Modelling the way with great communications skills is of vital importance,” explains Anderson. “HR is not like being an engineer or accountant. It’s more subtle. Their contributions are both tangible and intangible.”

CHRP: The Gold Standard

The Certified Human Resources Professional is the most recognized and respected HR designation in Canada. It demonstrates elite expertise and competency to both clients and prospective employees, and commitment to professional development that maintains a currency of knowledge crucial to any organization. In 2010 there were 3,180 HR professionals

across Canada who achieved their CHRP designation. A 2008 EKOS survey polled senior executives from more than 1,000 businesses across Canada about CHRPs:

- 76% of employers agreed that human resources professionals are very important to both the day-to-day functioning and overall success of their organizations

- 74% believe there is a strategic advantage to having a human resources professional on staff

- 74% report that the HR professionals on their staff are involved in helping to achieve the financial well-being of the organization



Change Management

Some companies embrace change, others resist. Regardless of the culture, CEOs want senior HR executives to have a toolbox of change management practices, and hands-on deployment skills. A consulting mind-set is also essential, as is a strong understanding of how compensation and performance management can be used to support change.

FCHRP: Recognizing Excellence

The Fellow CHRP title recognizes exceptional Canadian CHRPs who have made outstanding contributions to the human resources profession and to their communities.

Finding Your Seat at the Executive Table

The perception of HR's changing role differs from industry to industry. Communication-based sectors, such as knowledge management, financial service and consumer goods, understand it quite well. The resource and manufacturing sectors are slower to understand HR as a value-added business partner. Why? These industries often hold "old school" views; they think HR is still the "hirers and firers" responsible for recruiting and discipline.

Regardless of sector, the key for HR professionals is to make their voice heard. CEOs recognize they have a role to play in supporting and promoting the value of HR within the company, but are also looking for senior HR executives themselves to be more assertive in demonstrating their value and demanding that their issues be recognized.

"HR needs to stick their hand up and volunteer to take this work on," Anderson advises. "Ask for a secondment in upcoming operational jobs; whether it means serving on committees, working in IT, or helping open a new physical location. They need to get into roles that are critically important, and CEOs need to take more chances to allow their HR leaders to take on these roles."

The bottom line is that CEOs believe that senior HR executives can and should drive their agendas forward. First, by ensuring they are business-savvy and conversant in the issues that matter to the company. And second, by ensuring everybody else at the table knows it. The CHRP designation puts a lot of weight behind both of these assertions.

"To me, it signifies that we are passionate about what we do, and I encourage all of my HR people to get their CHRP," says Anderson. "I have my fellowship certificate on the wall in my office—it is a great point of pride for me—I think it has more prominence than my MBA!"

The CCHRA Commitment

The Canadian Council of Human Resources Associations is a collaborative effort of human resources associations from across Canada, which represents more than 41,000 professionals, 21,000 of whom hold the CHRP designation. The CCHRA is the national voice on the enhancement and promotion of the profession across Canada, through established and credible designations, collaborating on national issues related to the profession, leading federal government relations, and proactively positioning the national human resources agenda at the international level. Visit www.chrp.ca/contact for a complete list of provincial associations.

For more information on CCHRA, the CHRP designation and the HRPAC CEO study, visit www.chrp.ca/HR_Professionals_Study/

HR Strategic Partner Checklist

If you are an HR executive hoping to have greater influence and impact in your organization, start by asking yourself:

- How often do you put yourself on the front lines of your business?
- Is it time to take a line role to gain business experience?
- Do you know your way around the P&L of your business?
- Do your colleagues look to you for wise advice and counsel?
- Do you have the skills and resources you need to help your organization change, grow and prosper?
- How do you keep track of social trends and legislative change? How do you communicate these to your colleagues and CEO, and gain buy-in for programs to address them?
- Do you know what your CEO and your business require from you? How well are you meeting the real needs of your business?
- Have you networked with or joined your provincial member association?