



An Integrated Model for Strategic HR

The New Agenda

Some of the most pressing and current issues facing the human resource professional have been highlighted recently by the DTI's Accounting for People Taskforceⁱ, the management of the Employee Life Cycle and the ongoing War for Talentⁱⁱ. This document endorses the idea of HR needing to "take its place in the Boardroom"ⁱⁱⁱ and justify itself through greater links to performance and business value rather than being viewed simply as a cost centre.

The new HR agenda is to the benefit of all; management, employees, shareholders and of course, customers. The key question however, is to discover the most appropriate means by which this agenda can be delivered. How can existing practices and policies be linked and implemented such that an integrated approach is fostered? How can HR make the step up from its current position in the business world?

The above scenario is unlikely to come as a surprise and neither is the fact that, when faced with a plethora of choices, different companies opt for different approaches. No where is this more profound than within HR. David Bishop, a Senior Adviser at KPMG stated that "The examples of good practice show that there is no single right answer. Each organisation will work out what is material to its own circumstances, and will be stronger for doing so."^{iv}

Given the combined individuality of organisations and people, it is easy to see why David Bishop's observation is so apt. However, the balance between bespoke approaches and standardisation lies at the heart of this new agenda and as always in business, there is a desire for comparison, improvement and process efficiency. To this end, people are beginning to embrace this change and the theme encompassing this new thinking is integration.

- How can Human Capital Management strengthen relationships with and amongst employees so as to support the organisation's strategic goals?^v
- How can performance management be integrated into the business?^{vi}
- How can we integrate our management of the employment life cycle with time-driven employee events?^{vii}
- How can we integrate our approach to people such that we can mould strategy and exert influence over individuals, groups and entire organisations?

Standardisation and Fragmentation

As we have already seen, the new HR agenda faces a dichotomy between standardisation and the ability to benchmark and the fact that this is set against the needs of an organisation to make the most of its uniqueness, manifested through corporate culture. This situation not only represents a key challenge facing HR, but is representative of the multitude of approaches within HR. Such a fragmented landscape makes the goal of an integrated approach to HR difficult and the route to the summit is littered with dead-ends and blind alleys.



Such problems are only too easily witnessed. Taking the concept of 360 degree feedback, this has evolved such that diverse points of view about its use for development, appraisal, performance management^{viii} and even using 360 as a means of measuring returns on investments from training^{ix} can all be easily found. Likewise, the ability of the organisation to handle issues as varied as succession planning, conflict and performance has seen other extremes. For example, “one executive I worked with reorganized his 1,000-person division so he could make an underperformer someone else’s problem.”^x Also consider how a succession planning policy can promote organisational renewal and diversity but equally over-promote people or become a self-fulfilling predictor of success^{xi}.

When looking at psychometrics, the situation offers little difference. Steve Blinkhorn, Chairman of Psychometric Research and Development recently stated that “The time is ripe for a change. It’s time the UK psychometrics industry delivered something new to meet the needs of today’s working world.”^{xii} Additionally, Dr. Eugene McKenna, quoting Fletcher, observes that “the use of psychometric tests in organisations is facing the greatest challenge it has come up against in many years – perhaps ever. The main challenge comes from organisations themselves – downsizing, delayering and so on.”^{xiii} From these extracts, it is clear that there exists the start of a new approach to HR and in response to an integrated agenda; there is public recognition for new thinking and new ideas.

Towards A New Model for HR Strategists

“We would like to see simulations of human behaviour able to encompass multiple dynamic individual and collective identities acting simultaneously and representing all aspects of perception, decision making and action.”^{xiv} Given the context as outlined, Four Groups believes that there is an opportunity to present a new, integrated model for HR Strategists, namely 4G. The aims of 4G are to offer a single, linked, scalable view of an organisation, simultaneously encompassing individuals, groups and entire organisations.

In line with the notion of HR acting as a Business Partner, the goal of Four Groups is to offer foresight, interventions and processes that both serve an immediate business benefit in isolation and yet when combined, can be built up to offer an entirely integrated approach to HR strategy. 4G encompasses traditionally disparate areas of HR and provides new, interlinked solutions.

4G is designed to offer a shared view of an organisation via individuals, groups and the organisation itself such that there is a “better way of managing people throughout the employee life cycle, from recruitment to development to career and succession planning, to promotion and leadership roles, rather than doing this on an event-driven basis.”^{xv} This micro view is then expanded upon to take account of interventions that take place on a macro view and enable the implementation of a ‘True North’ organisation model^{xvi}, ensuring that people are aligned to business process and all of the people aspects within the organisation are systematically optimised, with 4G as an ongoing reference point.

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References

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- ^v *ibid*
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- ^{xiii} The future of psychometric assessment: Fostering positive candidate attitude. C. Fletcher, Selection and Development Review, August 1997, as quoted in Business Psychology and Organisational Behaviour, E. McKenna, Psychology Press, London, 2000
- ^{xiv} Cynefin; Sense-Making in a Complex & Complicated World, C. F. Kurtz and D. J. Snowden, IBM Systems Journal, Vol. 42, No. 3, 2003
- ^{xv} Private peer group correspondence from the E Network of Peer Assisted Learning Systems www.pals.co.uk
- ^{xvi} A True North model can be thought of as one that allows for the continual optimisation of all aspects of people management within an organisation. Analogous to TQM and Double Loop Learning, True North People Management enables changes to be made against an ideal form, in this case, 4G.