

Do you feel like Mr/Mrs **Excluded?**

What they don't teach you about HR.

By **Dr M Amr Sadik**

HR has become one of the major management functions and we can't deny its role in emerging business scenario. It has become a very sophisticated and specialised function like engineering or medicine. There was a time when HR handled every single staffing transaction from hiring to firing, but this role has changed significantly and now HR is playing new roles including the strategic ones.

Working in HR for a lengthy time with diverse organisations can, without a doubt, teach and enlighten us more than a good school can. In the real business world, one gets exposed to ethical and unethical situations in which one questions what one studied at school, and what one practises.

The fact is, we don't practise what we preach, so it is no wonder that our management systems and practices are far removed from the business reality and, of course, from theories. The best lessons we can learn from higher education are just good theories and few relevant and irrelevant examples from here and there. Thus, our students are either, and sorry to say, unlettered, ignorant or stuck with theories. They are not ready for the real business world. They are disconnected, and this needs to change. By saying so, I'm not trying to undermine the significance of theories. How to put them into practice in real life situations is of the highest importance.

However, a paradox exists among what we teach students at school and what we practise in real life, and no wonder some people hate HR. For example:

- Part of the role of HR is to establish policies and procedures in the workplace. Those are the constitution of the organisation, and made to establish business ethics, communicate values and expectations for how things are done at your organisation and also describe roles, rules

and consequences. But as a matter of fact that is in conflict. On one hand, we are asked to establish policies, procedures, systems and programmes for the staff to adhere to that should include everyone and, on the other hand, we have to enforce and execute them by establishing disciplinary charts and penalise the violators. HR plays the roles of judge, lawyer, and jury at the same time and also differentiates between who gets penalised and who does not. What kind of joke is that?

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Some CEOs complain about the performance and deliverables of their HR function and the level of their engagement and involvement. They aren't happy with the performance of their HR function, and will probably never be.

Undoubtedly, they are right but maybe they are wrong, as there are always two sides to every story. Let's consider this.

In the real corporate world when the economy is not promising, the financial situation doesn't look good or times are tough, employee training and development activities and budgets are among the first areas to be cut because it is unclear what value training brings to the organisation and what return on investment it generates. This situation has been reported several times in international reports.

We can understand that, but what we can't understand is why most of the time we are the second or third person in command to know that, because we are simply excluded from the discussion between the CEO and the CFO, we left in the dark.

2 The board of directors at your newly established company has decided to open and operate a new branch in another country and have just won the tender, and they are excited and in a hurry to expand, so you need to act accordingly and deploy some of your staff members, in particular, the Technical Director and a few of his team in order to lay out the infrastructure in the new operation.

But who is going to replace him and the other members in the main office? We don't have a second person yet – we are only two/three years old.

So the board is disappointed, as you seem to be negative and not supportive enough, and have asked you why you haven't told them in advance. But the fact is that HR was not in the picture when the board took such a critical and strategic decision. And why is that? Because we were excluded and unaware of what they were planning.

3 Your annual business plan is critical to the consistent, healthy growth of the organisation in which all senior members set and discuss strategies, goals, objectives and programmes for the years to come. It is an event that you prepare in advance, and HR plays an instrumental role in helping the organisation achieve its goals. You know who is who in the

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organisation and what they can and can't do, from performance point of view.

But time is passing and all of a sudden you are called to discuss your performance and the

achievement level of your departmental goals and objectives that were written earlier by someone else, namely the CEO, and you keep arguing on the applicability and achievability of those overwhelming ones. Why is that? Because you were simply excluded while your CEO was drawing those fancy and dreamy objectives to impress the board members and the boss.

These are just a few examples that we can see in many organisations. But wait, it gets worse.

At a recent discussion with a CEO who described HR's inability to contribute to the recruitment search, we find out that there is no budget for ads in the press, working with headhunters is costly, and the recruitment agencies are not up to expectations, but HR has to deliver. HR departments must understand how to source, screen, hire, cultivate and promote talent.

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Finally, if we want **Mr Excluded** to be included

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and generate success for the organisation and the function, then we need to be sensible and logical in our activities, demands and the way we look to HR. Top management must put itself in the shoes of HR and stop talking nonsense, being sarcastic and seriously invest in educating its HR professionals for the future. ■

Dr M Amr Sadik (DBA, CHRE, CHRA, MMC, CCMT) is Principal Consultant, Organisational Development and HR Business Advisor at Dimensions Consulting, Syria and Egypt. He is the winner of the 2010 Talent Challenge Best Practices in Talent Management Award, London, UK, the 2010 HR Leader Award from the Greentech Foundation, India, the 2008/2009 HR Leadership Award from the World HRD Congress, India, and the 2007 Best HR Executive, International Business Award from the Stevies, USA. He has held key human resources leadership roles for over 20 years in multiple industries within the Middle East and Gulf States.