

Internal Consulting Skills: The Key to Enhancing Effective Relationships Between Human Resources and Operations Management

Abstract

Three of the most valuable organizational assets are cash, technology and people. The effective utilization of these assets to deliver goods and services can potentially provide for a more productive supply chain. This paper focuses on ideas and research that support the more effective use of people in the supply chain. The predicate for this increased effectiveness begins with a strong relationship between the Human Resource (HR) function and operations management. What is the role of HR in developing such a relationship? Internal consulting with operations managers may prove an essential key.

Beyond merely holding a seat at the strategic table, demonstrating functional expertise and learning to measure the value of its services the HR function must also show impact in driving results toward organizational goals. Within this new focus HR professionals are more likely to earn a seat at the table when they directly translate organizational strategy and decisions into HR policies and practices (Lawler, 2005). Therefore, this puts the human resource professional in a new role. Rather than transactional administrators, they are now expected to be trend-watchers, problem-solvers, conflict resolvers, coaches and liaisons with lots of organizational savvy. This expectation represents a huge shift from what organizations have traditionally expected from HR (Green, 2002). Learning to utilize a consultative approach is the key to fulfilling this new role and ensuring operational impact.

Anyone doing staff work is consulting. Thinking beyond this simple definition, you are consulting any time you are trying to change or improve a situation but have no direct control over the implementation of such challenges, issues or problems (Block, 2000). The HR function stands in this unique position within organizations especially in positively affecting the output of the supply chain of organizations. The question at hand relates to HR's readiness to perform this required role. The task of changing the organization's perception of the HR function in this direction begins with HR professionals reorienting their perceptions of themselves and redefining their roles within the organization. As Peter Block outlines in his book *Flawless Consulting*, this requires the HR professional to move from a reactive employee responsible for completing assignments and implementing programs to a proactive consultant who works with clients internal to the organization to:

- Diagnose and solve problems
- Address an issue or challenge
- Implement a new initiative or program
- Build consensus and commitment
- Facilitate organizational learning
- Improve organizational effectiveness

The consulting process can begin when a manager or someone in the organization asks for your help to solve a problem, address an issue or challenge, or implement a new initiative or program. This person becomes the client. An established consulting process can provide a procedural frame of reference for internal consulting projects in driving value-added aspects within the supply chain.

This paper will present a compelling and comprehensive approach for HR professionals to become effective internal consultants. The first step in this process is for HR professionals to understand and develop a strategy for successfully targeting these efforts. Next, using newly developed competencies in consulting practice, the HR function can work more effectively in partnering with operations in creating greater efficiencies. Finally, by following a proven framework of consulting practices, continuous process improvement may be obtained in a systematic fashion.

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