



THE PRINCIPLES OF HR

Mr Richard Wilkinson is the Associate Vice Chancellor for organizational effectiveness and development at the University of Washington Tacoma. In his article, “My journey to the center of HR” (The Higher Education Workplace Winter 2014-2015), Richard documented some of his thoughts on the underlying principles and purposes of Human Resources Management during his journey when pursuing a higher education in the mid-nineties.

After attending an event where Dr. Margaret Wheatley, author of the book “Leadership and the new science” spoke, Richard Wilkinson began to ponder on the fundamental objective in which Human Resources was created. He shared that despite having an extensive experience as a HR Practitioner; he found it hard to find a convincing answer to that question. After much cogitation, he viewed these 4 principles as the core of HR Practices: HR as catalyst, HR as cultural architect, HR as relationship builder and HR as the heart of the organization.

HR as Catalyst

“We can be a catalyst for an organization’s success through our focused attention on people and people issues.”

Richard cited that Liz Wiseman’s *The Multiplier Effect* in 2013 and the Yorkshire Mines study in 1952 had a common finding—practices which empower employees often produce better outcomes than that of traditional, authoritative approaches. There have also been various recent studies which showed positive outcomes of employee empowerment such as increased job satisfaction, lower absenteeism, and higher productivity and so on.

Richard added that a myriad of practices and functions that HR personnel have to take on has also enabled us to be catalysts for organizational success. HR folks are the core for employees’ life cycle management, regardless of which unit they are in. Sourcing of talents, facilitating effective selection and on boarding, encouraging employee growth, keeping compensation competitive are just part of our daily operations. Yet, there is much impact to the organization from the energy and purpose that HR drives on a day-to-day basis.

HR As Cultural Architect

“We create an organization’s culture through the people we hire, the policies we adopt, the decisions we make and the practices we follow. Employees embody the culture.”

With the above quote, Richard has captured the essence of HR’s role as cultural stewards. He described organizations as “expressions of our collective imagination”. The decisions and choices we make on a daily basis are dependable on the type of organization climate we hope to shape. Though it may seem minor, the decisions matter and may have a significant ripple effect on the organization.

HR As Relationship Builder

“We build and nurture relationships.”

People and human capital are HR’s core subject matter in the work we do. The ability to build relationship with people is an important skill in HR which has countless benefits to reap. Richard supported his view by quoting Wheatley in her book, *Leadership and New Science*, “The participatory nature of reality has required scientists to focus their attention on relationships. No one can contemplate a system’s view of life without becoming engrossed in relational dynamics. Nothing exists independent of its relationships, whether looking at subatomic particles or human affairs.”

In the article, HR’s role in building relationship networks (Lengnick-Hall & Lengnick-Hall, 2003); the author reiterated that conventional HR practices between individual to individual is no longer sufficient. “Relationships, which integrate human capital with other intangible aspects of a firm, leverage the human talent that falls within traditional HR responsibilities to create more powerful competencies.”

HR As The Heart Of The Organization

“We embody courage, compassion and commitment.”

Finally, the crux of HR’s purpose is the encompassment of the 3Cs – courage, compassion and commitment in our work. The job of the HR personnel is like the balancing point on a weighing scale while organizational and individual related matters take up the 2 ends.

There may be instances when HR personnel has to bring across bad news, messages to individuals or workgroups that they may not wish to hear, or even advocate change when needed and so on. Courage empowers us to get our job done as well as enabling us to communicate bad news effectively.

On the other side of the balance scale is compassion. The work that HR does can bring so much impact to an individual. It can be very personal and compassion is a quality that enables us to be empathetic to another in order to make better informed decisions. Richard quoted this from Author and Consultant Peter Block which was very inspiring: “We have ‘human’ in our name. We should take that seriously. We have to provide an alternative voice to the one that argues for control and consistency. Our function is to stand for the restoration of humanity in the systems world”.

Commitment of the HR professionals – when simply put, should be able to address the question of whether employees can count on us to deliver promises with integrity and empathy while keeping organizational and individual interests at the same time.

Essentially, the 4 principles drive towards a common vision. In Richard’s opinion, are to create a positive and productive workplace. This includes both the workplace climate as well as employees’ individual development. A healthy workplace can be defined as a collaborative, empathetic and trusting work environment. With human as the greatest asset in the work of HR professionals, Richard highlighted that HR’s ultimate purpose is to create an organization that develops individuals to soar to their best and flourish in line with the organization’s missions.

Richard’s article has captured the soul of HR’s work in finding the balance between aligning practices with organizational decisions as well as the importance of empathy in our profession. I would like to quote Richard in which he recapped on the 4 principles and how it “create organizations where we would want our children to work, where energy is unleashed, and where ingenuity is at play each and every day.”