

HR urged to lead the way with innovation

HR practitioners are not doing enough to help instil a culture of innovation in their organisations, according to a report by the Corporate Research Forum. TOM NEWCOMBE asks how HR can spur and manage creativity

HR still has a “long way to go” to develop an organisational culture that supports creativity and innovation, a report from the Corporate Research Forum (CRF) has warned.

The study, ‘HR’s Contribution to Creativity and Innovation’, by HR Most Influential thinker William Pasmore and Rebecca Stilwell, says HR can play a key part in developing an innovation strategy. This can be through identifying business opportunities, leading the strategy development process or making sure there is a “clear line of sight” between the company’s plan and HR’s agenda and actions.

Pasmore and Stilwell claim HR needs to ensure it is “highly knowledgeable” about what is needed to drive innovation and support creativity. HR must start “setting an example”, they say, by experimenting with approaches and being “creative and innovative” in delivering HR services.

However, a third of respondents said innovation was either not a priority for their organisation or that HR has not made much progress in developing an innovative culture. Fewer than 20% of respondents could point to specific steps their company is taking to support creativity and innovation.



Bright sparks: Is HR doing enough to encourage and support innovation?

Catherine Rush, head of talent at DMG Media, said HR has a “fundamental role” to play in fostering an “innovative culture and mindset”, but added that “HR processes and procedures can stifle innovation”.

“People should be allowed to be expressive, creative and able to try new ideas,” she said. “By all means set basic parameters and light touch guidance, but then let people do their thing and showcase their ideas and talents.”

Neil Morrison, group HRD, Penguin Random House, told *HR*: “Innovation is about risk. It’s about experimentation and, sometimes, failure. Many HR practices are built

around control, risk limitation and reducing failure. It isn’t a surprise to see questions raised about the role of HR in driving innovation.”

Big Innovation Centre director Birgitte Andersen said getting the culture right has always been important for innovation but, as the economy is improving, it is now “critical”. “For innovation to work, all employees must be co-creators. If you have a strong vision at your company, then creating that innovative environment will be easier,” she said.

Andersen said HR helps to create “absorbed capability” within a company, so it is able to “recognise” the value of new information and ideas. HR must also create and develop leaders who will drive innovation, she added. To do this, HR must not be so “rigid and fixed in its policies because this will only hinder growth”.

The study suggested several contributions HR departments can make to bring more innovation into their businesses, such as

Figure it out

1/3

of respondents said innovation is not a priority for their organisation

78%

of staff think innovation in recruitment and talent management is key to delivering growth targets

1

Innovation is the number one challenge for CEOs

Sources: CRF, Korn Ferry, The Conference Board

Cultures of control and blame are the arch enemies of innovation. Innovation is all about risk.

encouraging leaders to “develop foresight” about future challenges.

It advised the ability to anticipate trends and external orientation should be included in the selection criteria for senior positions and leadership development activities.

The authors highlighted action points for HR around innovation. They said HR must have the right skills, attitudes and experience to support innovation, including strong commercial acumen, focus on customers, good understanding of strategy and openness to ideas.

The report said HR must be “fleet of foot” and “process-light”, adding: “Sometimes the best thing HR can do is get out of the way”.

Morrison said “cultures of control and blame” were the “arch enemies of innovation”. He said creative industries like his are “based on risk, innovation and individuality”. “It doesn’t mean that you can’t have good, effective HR management practices, it just means you need to think about them differently,” he added.