



HR business partner: 4 business critical things that you probably aren't doing

You've arrived – you're a Business Partner. Your delivery, focus and support to management have earned you a seat at the management table. But as Marshall Goldsmith says, **"what got you here, won't get you there?"** You may now be expected to work with the business in a different way.

Test yourself on these four business critical items to see if you're really making a difference to business success.

1 Strategic Workforce Planning (SWP)

Many people talk about it; few do it well. SWP is more than short-term operational planning; it also asks where the business is heading in its strategic planning timeframe and what changes and investments need to be made to deliver this?

Planning timeframes differ by business. In the defence or infrastructure industries, one can see trends 10-20 years out; in FMCG or Tech, things change more quickly. But whatever is right for your business, you need to be asking the business to think longer-term. You need to predict the market, political, economic, social, environmental and technological changes the business will face, and prompt action and investment. To do this well you need to integrate the process with the strategic planning process and make it subject to management review and follow-up. Data

and analytics are important here, but they're not the whole answer. Scenario planning will also help (Shell is the expert here), but in the end it's HR's challenge to the business on whether it is seriously investing in future workforce requirements in terms of retraining, hiring, M&A or other actions that will make a difference.

2 Risk Management

HR is increasingly being pulled into discussions about risk and reputational protection or enhancement. What if we have a data breach and employee records are lost/stolen? If 1,000 people phone HR in the first hour of the breach becoming known – will our service centre cope? Think about TalkTalk, HSBC, Thomas Cook – how well and quickly did they respond to data breaches and what did this do to their reputations and share prices?

How are we dealing with potential 'insider threats' such as whistle-blowers or disgruntled ex-employees? Have we considered the ethics in terms of monitoring employee activity? How ready are we as HR professionals to respond when (not if) these things occur, and what are we doing to avoid them in the first place? Do we have a point of view, a policy stance and a contingency plan? Even if your company doesn't run crisis management simulations, develop a risk analysis and run some scenarios with the HR and management team to test your readiness.

3 Technology Strategy

We understand that we need to embrace technology for the HR function, such as HRIS and analytics capability, but how do we support the organisation to develop its digital strategy? At our most proactive, we might challenge the business on its digital strategy and facilitate its development. At the very least we should be ready to contribute to understanding its implications – after all it is likely to involve some good old-fashioned organisational development.

Questions to consider include:

- what models (or new divisions) will be required to meet the digital challenge?
- what skills and capabilities are needed and how do we acquire them?
- what constitutes a digital culture for our organisation?

The challenge requires a multi-functional response and traditional organisational silos may impede innovation.

4 Productivity

Following the Great Recession, all the G7 economies have experienced slower productivity growth, with the UK, Germany, France and Italy failing to regain their pre-crash levels. Measuring productivity is challenging, and macro factors are at play. But what can we do to help at the local level? Do we understand the drivers of productivity in our business? Organisations have become complex systems and our responses need to reflect this. How do we measure productivity in a knowledge-based or service environment? Are we looking at working practices, engagement, management competence? Can we report the outcomes of our efforts in terms of measurable productivity improvement and thereby win support for our interventions and investment in people? This is ultimately our purpose as a function.

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