

We need inclusive CEOs

Number-crunching CEOs, eyeing only quarter-on-quarter results, cannot focus on long-term sustainable goals

The full potential of the HR profession is yet to be realised and we need to prepare for that. HR is in a better position to become a CEO because CEOs in these challenging times cannot be just number crunchers and controlled compliance types. We require CEOs who are inclusive, understand the issues of diversity, develop chemistry with their workforce, work in teams, energise people passionately and this is the core competency of HR. They need to work on intangibles like leadership, brand, governance, culture and technology. Bureaucratic CEOs with emphasis on rules, procedures and hierarchy cannot align their organisation to an environment that requires speedy leadership. Viewed in this context, those HR professionals who have demonstrated proven skills in people management and have contributed to successful transition of their organisations to operate in a competitive environment can aspire to the corner office. However, mere HR skills are not enough to reach the CEO position.

In order to move to the CEO position, HR professionals need to have a deeper understanding of the business. Based on my own transition from HR to business, I strongly feel that firms would do well in providing opportunities to HR professionals midway in the career, to undertake line assignments in a planned manner.

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— Dr Anil K. Khandelwal
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It is during these assignments that HR professionals should be able to demonstrate that they can achieve better business results through people. It will also test their learning aptitude, resilience and adaptive orientation. If they pass this test and demonstrate successful transition from HR to business, they would certainly be qualified to be the CEO.

HR – the current reality

In the last 10 years, due to the emergence of technology, the entire focus of HR in companies and

multi-nationals operating in India has changed to talent management, performance management and compensation management.

The HR courses in management institutes have also developed similar orientation. There is no holistic orientation to HR discipline that at one time involved understanding of social system, social work, study of trade-unionism and collective bargaining, conflict-management etc. In fact, a Head of HR in a large company recently lamented the fact that the new recruits in HR are reluctant to work at the plant level even for training purposes. Similarly, a professor in a management institute recently confided in me that courses in industrial relations are not popular in management schools. The HR discipline, which manifested itself with understanding of people, their aspirations and the role of employee collectives is now tilted more towards the issues of HR productivity and utilisation to suit the culture of high performance in the change context.

In my opinion, the role of HR is to have a holistic understanding of the organisation -- its history and culture and people at large. HR has to continuously work hard to create alignment between people and the organisation and ensure that this alignment helps the organisation to be resilient in these changing times. HR professionals have to be harbinger of this change and they would require thorough grinding in understanding the social system of the organisation and not merely have the expertise in implementing western HR techniques. ■

As told by Dr Anil K. Khandelwal, Ex-Chairman & MD, Bank of Baroda and Chairman, Anugyan Consulting