

people matters

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Is HR different in theory than in practice?

The actual execution of the HR strategy does not have a guide and varies on organizational need, external forces, culture and top management

"In theory there is no difference between theory and practice. In practice there is"
— Yogi Berra

In today's highly dynamic business environment, every manager has to deal with new and complex challenges, which do not have textbook solutions. Hence, the employability of many entrants into the business world, especially at the entry level, depends on the litmus test of transferring the theoretical knowledge into practice in the REAL world.

As you go higher in the hierarchy, the complexity of problems and challenges become manifold. Thus, while making the transition from Campus to Corporate or even as they move jobs across companies, it is imperative for new managers and entry level graduates to develop skills and attitude besides knowledge.

Even in HR, just like other disciplines, sound knowledge of theory is critical to building a solid foundation and understanding of the subject besides its applications in the real world. Theory helps students to understand the "what" and "why" aspects. But, the "how" is learnt at-the-job.

My maiden book "Reality Bytes-The Role of HR in Today's World" covers the "what" and "why" of all contemporary HR topics. Theory is dovetailed with practical cases to drive home the concepts.

It is very useful for:

- MBA students at cross-roads-Which specialization to opt for-HR? What does HR do? Is it only for women? (myth)
- Early Career HR Professionals-Ready Reckoner
- Line managers, People managers who need to be an HR manager for his/her team

In general, once the foundation is



laid, it is less jarring to see how theory comes into play on the ground. In my own experience, while aspects of theory may form a part of strategic framework or the HR strategy, the actual execution of the HR strategy does not have a guide or a rule book. It varies based on organizational need, external forces, culture and most of all the management or the top leadership.

New entrants and early career professionals often feel lost since they're not able to directly see the connection between what they studied and "this is how we do it here" as is the case in quite a few organizations. Some may even get disillusioned; hence the practical aspects of HR need to be integrated into the curriculum. My book serves this very purpose.

In order to help the new entrants assimilate the new culture and processes of the organization, most have a structured initial induction followed by a 30/60/90/180 day plan for smooth on boarding or even rotation across functions as part of the Management Trainee Program. In fact, it is a good HR practice to have this in place!

My submission is that one must put up one's hand for real roles/projects, which provides close interaction with business

New entrants feel lost since they're not able to directly see the connection between what they studied and what takes place in organizations

managers/teams and even customer interface, in order to accelerate learning and knowledge about the organization's business and environment. HR folks must refrain from fancying pure HR roles since it limits them to their functional area and deprives them of general management exposure early on.

This opportunity brings them into direct contact and exposure with the business and opens up opportunities to impact business in a much more meaningful way.

It's time to break away many of the stereotypes that define HR since in the past the function was driven by the business rather than driving business. Strong performance orientation and innovative HR practices can impact measurable business outcomes. Everyone in HR must also keep refreshing their knowledge and stay abreast with latest developments on tools and practices. 📖

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

APARNA SHARMA is the former Country HR Head at Lafarge India. She is a seasoned HR professional, thought leader and author of "Reality Bytes-The Role of HR in Today's World"