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Certified Corporate Director

Aparna is an Independent Director on several Boards, she also mentors Boards & advises corporates on strategic leadership, boardroom effectiveness & organisation culture. She is a TISS Mumbai alumna (PM&IR, 1996), has 29+ years of diverse HR leadership experience across industries like banking, pharma, biotech, petrochemicals & building materials. She has held key roles at NOCIL, Monsanto, Novartis, Deutsche Bank, Lafarge & Greaves Cotton.

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BOARDROOM & HR

Board Directors play a key role in organisations, yet their tasks are not always straightforward. Risk management, getting a grasp on competitive intelligence and helping define a company strategy are their top three challenges, according to a recent HT survey held among executives.

Given the wave of Corporate Governance reforms, board members face new challenges these days. New global business opportunities pose important questions to most boardrooms.

Key challenges are budget/resource constraints, conflicts of interest/related party transactions, and sometimes over-representation of controlling shareholders, to mention a few. While these get talked about & discussed, what also needs emphasis is the role Boards play in shaping corporate culture and the importance of a clearly defined succession plan for any Board.

In the centre of all this is the Human Resources function, which traditionally has been an insignificant minor player in the boardroom, even as critical matters that HR closely deals with—talent, culture, and executive succession—are assuming greater significance for the Board than ever before. Until recently, playing a second fiddle support act, HR heads have been “late to the party” across corporate boardrooms. But with the people function playing a crucial and central role in realising the company vision, more practitioners have their feet under the boardroom table.

This is soon becoming a reality!

In my view, the role of the Chief Human Resources Officer (CHRO) in the boardroom is just as important as the Chief Financial Officer (CFO), Chief Marketing Officer (CMO) and Chief Operations Officer (COO). If you look around at some of the best companies today, their HR head/function is a strategic partner to the business & Board.

Based on my experience, what works in the



boardroom is knowing the business, being able to speak to the business, and understanding how the HR interventions being evaluated can impact the organisation by an increased percentage in terms of revenue, engagement, talent growth, etc. Execution is key, and being able to drive these interventions effectively is crucial. Everything comes down to the bottom line. One has to quantify one's proposals & plans. Furthermore, influencing, negotiation and selling skills are key for HR folks with the Board to get them to bless what they want.

Practitioners need to be just as comfortable talking about costs, profit and strategic risk management as they are talking about reward or talent.

Human resource professionals bring a valuable perspective to the boardroom; you can't have a boardroom that understands all areas of the business without understanding its people. Many of the issues faced by Boards sit squarely in the HR remit. This includes succession planning, talent management, remuneration, and ethical leadership, to name a few. On a positive note, HR has emerged stronger by increasingly participating in organisational decision-making, with a greater focus on value-adding people strategies.

My submission is that there is much more to do. Such is the opportunity available to us!

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