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Why HR Can't Get No Respect

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The time has come for the human resource field to fully integrate its functions. In order to be viewed as the strategic business partners we yearn to be, we must unite and present the "powers that be" with a total-system, business model that allows for tracking, testing, measurement, and predictability.

In manufacturing, the interdependence of all the links in the chain is obvious, and quality tracking is a given. When trying to fill a huge client order by a certain deadline, just one link's failing anywhere, from receiving to shipping, leaves us with the same end result - late delivery. It's an all or nothing proposition.

Manufacturing engineers and operations managers do not have the luxury of viewing their links in a vacuum but, yet, as human resource professionals, we think if we're in recruiting we can simply think about recruiting, if we're in training, training is it, if we're in compensation, then that's our one trick pony. To add insult to injury, one huge component of organizational effectiveness, organizational design, is usually left to default.

When an architect sets out to build a bridge, his ultimate goal may be for it to be unique and aesthetically pleasing, but he knows he cannot build it merely with glass and gold. Architects, engineers, and scientists understand "first principles". These are the universally-accepted, non-negotiable, scientific realities of their business.

I believe there are similar laws surrounding human social organization and with these as our foundation, we can build a reliable, robust model. One law, for example, determines the number of layers your organizational hierarchy should have based on the complexity level of the work that must be done. Another component, time span of discretion, is a universal, apples-to-apples, measurement system for job complexity, which allows for job comparisons across organizations, industries and cultures. Finally, a corresponding measurement for any given person's ability to deal with complexity allows

employees to be matched to jobs at the complexity level for which they are naturally suited.

These three key concepts, how many layers should an organization have, which jobs should be located in each, and who will be best suited to work at each level, are fully explored by Dr. Elliott Jaques in his book, Requisite Organization. His scientific, total-systems approach to managerial organization and managerial leadership provides a comprehensive, internally-consistent approach to organizational design, selection, compensation, human capability, leadership, succession planning, training and development, and mentorship. This is the single best place I know of for HR to get a handle on the total system and to see how all the pieces of HR fit together, just as we can see how the manufacturing process fits together.

Jaques book, based on over 50 years' research, validates all you know in your gut and provides a unifying model to synthesize all the snippets that swirl in your head. It is simultaneously exciting and overwhelming as you realize that simply tinkering with one link in the chain will not bring your overall organization success. For example, your recruiting department can find and place the perfect candidate, but if her boss is not capable of providing her with the leadership she needs (which is measurable and can be predetermined), then your recruitment department's efforts are wasted.

To earn the credibility we desire, we must provide our organizations with an integrated contextual model along with corresponding tools and processes that will bring about predictable, consistent, verifiable ORGANIZATIONAL success, not simply a lucky-guess, quick win for one department.

United, we stand a chance. Divided, we get more of the same.

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