

Employee advocacy overview



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The role of the human resources (HR) management function has been developing over the years largely because of the changing importance placed by management on human capital. There is increased recognition of the value of employees due to such factors as the growth of the service industry, the globalization of business, the emergence of knowledge workers, and the increase in the number of laws regulating employer-employee relations. One impact of these developments on HR is the expansion of its responsibilities. HR departments are no longer confined to providing control, compliance and consistency, and are now expected to be flexible, creative and resourceful.

Human resource departments in effective firm in highly competitive environments today must play many roles in the organization. The more roles they play, the more likely they will be effective in improving the organization’s productivity, enhancing the quality of worklife in the organization, complying with all the necessary laws and regulations related to managing human resources effectively, gaining competitive advantage and enhancing workforce flexibility.

Traditionally, many human resource departments had a relatively limited involvement in the total organization's affairs and goals. Consequently the HR managers were concerned only with the short-term and day-to-day human resource needs.

The role of the HR manager must parallel the needs of his/her changing organization. Successful organizations are becoming more adaptive, resilient, quick to change direction and customer-centered. Within this environment, the HR professional, who is considered necessary by line managers, is a strategic partner, a change mentor, and an employee advocate.

Definition of employee advocacy

“ One of the enduring HR managers is to serve as an employee advocate- listening to employees' concerns and representing their needs to managers to make certain that the interests of employees and the interests of the organization are aligned with one another. Effective employee relations provide a support structure when disruptive changes interfere with workers ' normal daily activities”. (Bohlander & Snell, 2009)

This role focuses basically on supporting the rights and needs of employees and can be evidenced by innovative policies and programs in the areas of occupational health and safety, grievances, work-life balance, diversity, and employee assistance.

However, in some focus groups employees expressed a desire to be better understood by HR. Aspects limiting HR's capacity for a greater understanding of employees included a limited ability for regular face-to-face

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contact with staff. This may be due to insufficient numbers of HR staff, HR structures that centralize HR staff and limit the connection to the business units, a disconnect between the working hours of HR and other staff (e. g. where there are high numbers of shift workers), and the location of employees over a large geographical area.

The HR Employee Advocate's Main Tasks

Being the HR employee advocate is a long-term role and the hardest one ever because it needs a clear knowledge about the preferences and interests of the employees, expertise in how to create a work environment in which they will choose to be motivated, contributing, and happy, and at the same time; making evident alignment between their interests the business goals.

To be employee advocate, HR must know the employees well and spend time meeting with and listening to employees. HR must promote communication, which can include employee surveys, employee suggestion programs, all-employee meetings, on-going communication of business status, and any other program that can make employees feel part of the team and dedicated to customer service. This role also includes ensuring that employees who are having problems get a fair hearing.

HR manager as employee advocate is best placed to mediate between senior management and the workforce when relations break down.

It involves thoroughly understanding employee concerns and being prepared to communicate them, however uncomfortable this may be for CEOs and finance directors.

The tasks of developing the HR employee advocate role may include the following:

- Representing the interests of employees within the management team.
- Ensuring that there are equitable procedures governing the employment relationship.
- Being responsible for health and safety, risk management, equality and diversity at work.
- conducting regular opinion surveys among employees
- providing feedback from the organization to the top and line management
- providing the development opportunities for the employees to help them to keep their value for the organization
- assistance to employees to get used to the changes in the organization and to help the employees in the risk of the lay-off
- honest communication to the employees about the new business initiatives and the impact on employees
- support building and developing the corporate culture
- Communicating bad news to workers, such as impending closure or downsizing.

Employee Advocate

As an employee sponsor or advocate, the HR manager plays an integral role in organizational success via his knowledge about and advocacy of people.

This advocacy includes.

Fostering effective methods of goal setting, communication and empowerment through responsibility, builds employee ownership of the organization. The HR professional helps establish the organizational culture and climate in which people have the competency, concern and commitment to serve customers well.

In this role, the HR manager provides employee development opportunities, employee assistance programs, gainsharing and profit-sharing strategies, organization development interventions, due process approaches to problem solving and regularly scheduled communication opportunities.

Employee advocacy vs. business partnership

Effective human resources (HR) management balances the role of the HR professional as employee advocate and business partner. The function's original title, Personnel, was closely associated with the advocate role, but this has been replaced with the title 'Human Resources,' which is closely linked to the role of the business partner. In many organizations, the focus on being a business partner has intensified to the point that the advocate role is neglected. The descriptor 'Employee Resources' is more appropriate for these organizations than 'Human Resources.' The job of an employee resources business partner is to ensure a good match between employee resources and business needs, while the task of the employee advocate is to make sure that employees are treated fairly and provided equal opportunity.

The end result should be improved productivity, increased employees' commitment, customers' loyalty, shareholders' confidence and line managers' effectiveness.

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Recommendations

HR sees themselves as the employee advocates and chief social workers.

In an effort to be approachable and helpful, HR encourages employees to come to them with complaints and concerns. Unfortunately, they too often take the side of the employee before doing the fact-finding necessary for a balanced view of the issue.

In this scenario, the HR person puts on their hero's cape and charges off to the employee's boss to solve the problem, rather than teaching the employee how to take responsibility for solving it him or herself. The end result is a resentful group of managers who tend to view HR as meddlers, who should keep their noses out of their business.

In the case of an employee complaint about his boss, the HR professional should work on the sidelines to coach the employee, while discreetly and tactfully finding ways to coach the boss so that the relationship between them is strengthened, rather than jeopardized.

If a boss is a persistent problem, HR needs to work directly with that manager's boss and the manager himself (if needed), to hold that person accountable for changing problematic behavior.

So what is the appropriate role of HR?

Savvy HR professionals see their primary responsibility as meeting the business needs of the organization by managing the human assets. They

balance the needs of management, employees and other stakeholders to meet that higher objective.

For instance, they will respect confidentiality as long as an issue doesn't cross the line of legal, ethical or discriminatory behavior that could jeopardize the organization.

A sophisticated HR professional will push back assertively when management is out of line with an employee but will also be direct with an employee who needs to be set straight. The HR pro will also remove themselves from all relationships and become an objective investigator, in cases of alleged discrimination.

At times, HR will have to drag both managers and employees kicking and screaming toward necessary changes that are best for the business. It's a delicate balancing act but one that needs thoughtful discussion and conscious awareness in every Human Resources department because their reputation-and effectiveness-depend on it.

Human Resources Management is about people, the most valuable asset of any business, small or large. Employees are the forces that keep the wheels of business and industry rolling.

Human Resources Management is essentially about building relationships among employees. As an employee advocate, human resource managers work to bring positive change that benefits both employees and employers. They recognize the need for change and help bring about improvements in processes and in workplace environments.

Human resource managers need good communication skills and should be multi-task oriented.

They need to be people who can establish trust and effective working relationships with both employees and management.

Conflict resolution skills are also valuable. A successful human resource professional must be able to establish priorities and be genuinely concerned about the fair treatment of employees.

Instruction specific to Human Resources includes classes in employment laws and regulations, employee recruitment, compensation and benefits, diversity in management, job analysis and evaluation, and human resources management applications.

As a concentration in the business administration field, studies also include a variety of basic business classes including principles of management, people skills, accounting, computer technology, business law, and economics.

The instructional format, incorporating numerous professional guest speakers plus the use of team projects, helps to prepare students for productive careers in the human resources field.

Human Resources professionals are frequent guests in the classroom where they lead discussions on topics such as workplace violence, safety and security, interviewing methods, labor and management issues, diversity in the workforce, and cultural differences. Students learn through mock interviews and simulations of workplace situations.

Classes are available both in the day and evening at the Lee County Campus in Sanford. Distance education options are available for many of the general education classes as well as some selected Human Resources and business classes.

Companies, large and small, need management level employees with human resources skills. Entry-level positions in the field include specialists in staffing, recruiting, training, benefit administration, employee relations, and safety.