

Instituting Operational Excellence in today's Human Resources Operations



HR professionals are adapting to the new world of work as strategic workforce planning becomes a critical differentiator. While for many regular HR teams the immediate challenge is simply doing what they routinely do a little better, the dynamic teams who have recognized the crucial importance of understanding and meeting today's more exacting user expectations are radically rethinking how HR interacts with and supports the business. Instituting operational excellence in HR therefore is based on three key elements: creating better user experience, technology to support reliable data and lastly, securing the people the HR function needs to succeed.

Keeping pace with changing customer demands.

The reality today is that digital communication technologies have made human interactions easy and instant while e-commerce has transformed customer expectations by shaping interactions and product offering around customer's buying habits. The effect of this is that people now also expect (and are demanding) similar experiences in their other business interactions including HR.

This increasing need for excellent customer experience in HR is even more important given that HR is the first and indeed one of the main points of contact between the

organisation and its staff. From recruitment through to leaving the organisation, these interactions form an indelible impression of the relative professionalism of the organisation and how much employees feel they are valued. If they are dissatisfied, they may simply bypass HR operations when they want to get something done. Or worse, they might look for work at an organisation with a better level of employee experience.

A recent study carried out by PwC's global Human Capital consulting team sought to find out by sampling the views of 150 senior HR leaders around the world, what drives operational excellence and sets top performing HR teams apart. The survey found that organisations in the top quartile are focusing on using technology to strengthen interaction, with self-service capabilities providing the first point of contact. In addition, they are also exploring new ways of getting closer to customers.

Against this 'rising bar' of expectation, how user-friendly are HR operations currently in your organisation? Three points are important to note here; engagement, measuring performance through feedback and making improvement a habit.

Strengthening the quality and reliability of systems, data and reporting.

Closely related to creating a compelling user experience is the need for HR teams to apply value adding workforce intelligence to their operations while also strengthening the quality and reliability of data collation and reporting. The data collected by HR can provide invaluable information on performance, deployment and recruitment needs. It can also help to improve efficiency and relieve some of the pressure on HR operations itself.

Many HR teams are however currently operating with poorly integrated systems using solutions that are typically customised to meeting current needs rather than being adaptable to future requirements. The top performers in the market however are able to operate with much more flexible and future-proof platforms such as Workday, SuccessFactors, Taleo and Salesforce that can be easily adapted to changing needs. The standard processes and data structures can help to ensure more efficient service and fewer errors. The ease of deployment offered by these solutions also mean that they require less resource to implement.

Good practice we see in the market highlights the need for corporate data standards that underpin data integrity and improve the efficiency of the reporting process. With efficient procedures in place to ensure that data is reliable and fit for use, HR teams can devote more time to analyzing the data and providing insight.

Sustaining the talent pipeline

Organisations however must take care not to have systems rather than people as the main focus of investment within HR. Strengthening the HR talent pipeline and securing the people the HR function needs to succeed should be priority. This they can achieve by looking more closely at employee engagement and succession planning. In addition, they

should ensure a measure of variety of expertise in the team by hiring staff from varied background. More so, staff resources must also be deployed more flexibly to allow people to move quickly from one system or assignment to another.

Raising the bar

The most effective HR operations are developing the experience and services needed to meet changing customer demands and delivering the talent insights needed to take the business forward. They're using this record of excellence as the foundation for HR's increasingly important role within the strategic management of the organization.

Yet from our findings, even among the highest performers, the creation of a compelling customer experience is still work in progress. Few if any organisation in Nigeria today can offer the user experience that modern online retail websites deliver as routine. This is the yardstick by which HR as a whole will now be judged and is also key to being taken seriously as a valued business partner.

The organisations that will stand out from the crowd in the next few years will be those that coax every drop of value from their investment in human resources. That means accepting a new truth: thinking far more carefully about how HR teams engage with their customers. It means making full use of the growing arsenal of tools and information that's available to HR to cut through the fog of data in order to deliver real insights for their business and it means HR applying the same rigour to internal HR talent management as they do to talent management in the wider business.

Dr Bert I. Odiaka is a partner with PwC Nigeria's Advisory practice and a Human Resource specialist. He can be reached on bert.i.odiaka@ng.pwc.com

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