

The BIG Questions for HR

- **Administrative Expert**

Continuous improvement of administrative functions is essential to increase productivity of HR professionals and free up time to focus on strategic HR issues. This is one of the four cornerstones for how the HR function can build business value.

 - How well do we manage HR practices internally within the HR function?
 - Do we have adequate documentation to support HR processes without having to search for answers or reinvent solutions to problems? What is missing?
 - Have we done an adequate job preparing managers & supervisors to deal with the HR issues within their department? If not, what is missing? Supporting documentation for self-service of some issues? Expanded online support? Additional manager development programs (multiple formats are possible)?
 - Do employees have sufficient information and access to HR processes themselves to manage many HR issues themselves? What more might be done?
 - Does HR need a more formalized approach to continuous improvement? If so, which one? Six Sigma? Kaizen? Activity Based Management (ABM)? Business-Process Reengineering (BPR)?
 - Where do we have opportunities to improve client service?
 - How might we improve our client response times?
 - What information is difficult to access? What do we need to know that we don't know?

- **Employee Champion**

HR has traditionally served as the voice of the employee. This is one of the four cornerstones for how the HR function can build business value.

 - In retrospect, has HR anticipated employee concerns and needs? If not, what has been missed and is there an explanation for why HR missed the issue?
 - Do employees have the information and resources to commit themselves to meeting company objectives?

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- **Change Agent**

Establishing and nurturing a high performance workforce requires a supportive culture that is up to the task. This requires identifying areas for cultural improvement and spearheading change initiatives. While this is one of the four cornerstones for how the HR function can build business value, often HR has traditionally played a support function and has not actively led such initiatives.

 - Has HR effectively communicated HR trends that affect the business? Is HR aware of these trends within the company, the industry, and global business environment?
 - What are the leverage points for initiating organizational change?
 - In the past, some change initiatives have been proposed only to not gain sufficient traction for action to be initiated. Does another approach need to be tried?
 - How should HR best tie into the pulse of the organization to determine what change might be needed?
 - How much empowerment does HR have to initiate change effort without needing explicit authorization beyond being a critical part of the HR function?

- **Strategic Partner**

Many HR Departments talk about moving toward a strategic orientation for delivery of HR services. This implies understanding how the HR function adds value to the organization and how HR services are best delivered. This is one of the four cornerstones for how the HR function can build business value.

 - What has been accomplished so far in moving toward a strategic orientation?
 - Has this concept been pushed down into the organization? What is needed to help others throughout HR understand HR's mission and vision?
 - Often, HR talks around the subject of how they add value, but they don't explicitly document how HR generates corporate value. Does HR need to build a business case for itself? If so, what needs to be included?

The BIG Questions for HR

- Retention

This is one of the top five areas where CLC is asked for assistance.

 - Do we know what drives retention?
 - Do we know who is at risk for leaving? Do we know the difficulty of replacement?
 - Do we know what might be done to increase retention of critical employees?
 - Do we need a re-recruiting program?
 - Texas Instruments has an active retention program with a strong emphasis on re-recruitment. Their program also targets high potential employees and those in critical positions.
 - What are the critical components for such a program?

- Development of HR Professionals

Corporate HR departments often overlook their own development needs.

 - When we talk about developing HR professionals, what is included?
 - Do we need to clarify desired competencies for the various positions across HR?
 - Do we know how to best develop the necessary competencies?
 - To what extent does this discussion need to include decisions on career pathing and replacement planning for HR positions?
 - In general, how well do we keep up-to-date on issues within each of the HR disciplines?
 - Where do we need to expand our knowledge of emerging issues and best practices?

- Transition program

Promotions are a time of critical change both in responsibility and skills needed in the new position.

 - Are we adequately meeting the timely needs of 1st time supervisors?
 - What type of assistance is available for manager promotions, especially those promoted to General Manager positions?

- Career pathing

The perception often exists that current employees are best kept in their current position and opportunities go to new hires

 - Is this a valid perception?
 - Where do we need career pathing?
 - How should the paths be developed and communicated?
 - This is one of the top five areas where CLC is asked for assistance
 - How far down should career pathing go?

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- Employee Development Plan (EDP)
 - What is our “Employee Development Philosophy?”
 - Are we fulfilling the vision implied in this philosophy?
 - How do we transform the EDP into an ongoing cycle, rather than a once a year event?
 - How do we need to communicate the benefits to employees (& supervisors) for actively using Development Plans?
 - What changes are needed within the EDP system?

- Mentoring & Coaching
 - Do we need a formal mentoring program?
 - Coaching program?

- Benchmarking

APQC, CLC, and SAP are all involved in benchmarking HR activity. To do benchmarking effectively there is an investment in time to collect data and analyze the results. It is also critical to note that the payback on such activity only occurs when the analysis leads to action to improve beyond the competitive results of others. Many companies use benchmarking as a core component of their continuous improvement program.

 - Should additional benchmarking be done?
 - Are we committed to using the information to raise the bar for HR?
 - One comment has been made that “we already have a good idea of many of the things we need to get better at and do not have the resources to address them.” If true, should we spend the time and money adding to the list of projects that are not likely to be acted upon? (This also begs the question, “why aren’t we working to improve the areas already identified as opportunities?”)

- Career Advancement – Retention

Many companies have a long history of downsizing and operating with a flat organization. In such an organization there are few opportunities for advancement.

 - In general, what might we do to help high potential employees see a future for themselves with the company?
 - Do we need to establish a development path into other affiliated organizations?
 - If so, how might this be approached?

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- HR Communication
 - What are we doing well in communicating with employees?
 - Where should we be doing more communication?
 - Why isn't this communication taking place?
 - What should we be doing different to communicate better?

- HR Web presence
 - How do we want to leverage technology?
 - What should the top-side navigation be?
 - Private access for HR personnel
 - Open access for employees and managers/supervisors
 - What development teams need to be established? Who needs to lead each team? Who else needs to be involved?

- Client input
 - How can we get input from the client areas?
 - What do we really need to know about their transactional and strategic needs?
 - Can we get the same quality of input from a questionnaire with open ended questions? Or is some type of focus group still the best method of data collection?
 - Should we charter a “HR Steering Council?”
 - Is this the right name?

- Drivers for HR Success
 - How does HR define success?
 - What are the critical drivers for this concept of success?
 - What are the appropriate performance metrics for tracking progress toward excellence in HR delivery?

- Baby Boomers

The aging of the Baby Boom generation cannot be avoided, creating one of the top five difficult decisions facing HR per a HR.com survey.

 - What impact is this situation likely to have on the organization over the next decade?
 - How might we have to alter HR programs to soften the impact?

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- Contractor Policy
Increasing labor costs and growing burden rates are placing renewed interest in using contractors in lieu of employees. However, this creates both legal and strategic issues for the hiring manager
 - What are the guidelines for using employees vs. contractors?
 - Who needs to be involved in approving these guidelines?
 - How do these guidelines need to be communicated to hiring managers?
- Employer of choice
 - What does it mean to be an “employer of choice?”
 - What impact does this have on recruiting and retention practices, especially when tight labor markets occur?
 - What is the cost? Can the return be justified?
- Recruiting strategy
 - What should our recruiting strategy be? What is it now by default?
 - Should we recruit “the best of the best” and risk them later leaving due to lack of opportunities? Or should we recruit “average Joe” with the expectation that they will do a good job in that position and not have personal motivation for greater positions? Should there be a mixed recruiting strategy, varying for different positions and their critical importance to the company?
 - Some companies are starting to use online social networking (e.g., LinkedIn.com) to increase their quality of hire. Have we tested this venue for identifying candidates? If so, is the quality of hire improved as has been reported by other companies?
- Organizational culture is ever changing
It is inevitable that an infusion of new employees from other companies will have an impact on the company.
 - What changes are we observing in cultural differences between employees now being hired and those with long service?
 - Have we identified beneficial and detrimental aspects of the different cultures?
 - How are new hires adapting to existing business processes?
 - Are new hires taking advantage of their prior experience to make recommendations for business process improvement?
 - How are tenured employees reacting to recommendations for change?
 - Is teamwork being exercised to identify the best business processes among a larger universe of possibilities?
 - What role should HR take in easing this cultural transition?

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- Broadbanding
 - Going to true broadbanding would open up opportunities for cross-organization intra-band promotions that would benefit replacement planning and encourage high potential employees to gain further experience within the company.
 - However, this would also raise the issue of “what do we want to compensate?”
 - Do we want to reward long-term job expertise? Or do we want to reward someone who actively learns other jobs and accepts rotational assignments?
 - The same pool of money would have to be used for merit increases and promotional increases.

- Promotion strategy
 - A flat organization provides a challenge to a traditional promotion strategy. Fully implemented broadbanding provides still other opportunities for promotion variations.
 - What types of “promotions” do we have now? Should we have?
 - How should different types of promotions be rewarded?
 - How should promotions and merit increases be factored into the operating budget?
 - How should promotions be communicated? Pseudo-promotions?

- Family-life balance
 - This issue hits many areas from employee stress to recruiting
 - What are the competitive trends in the local labor market?
 - Is telecommuting an option?
 - What about flexible work schedules? 9/80?
 - What policies and procedures are needed to screen employees for such programs?
 - Do supervisors need new training for overseeing employees working alternate schedules?
 - Do employees also need some training to be effective in non-standard office environments?