Skilling the skill master

How corporations can upskill their HR teams to meet the new demands of people and organisations

FUSION OF SKILLS

Here are the disparate trends HR needs to reconcile

- **HR tech transformation** should be able to drive culture and behaviour

- **Though tech-savvy,** and using a range of apps for external services, employees are still not comfortable using employee experience apps within the system

- **Who drives talent** – CEO or HR – is a debate which remains unsettled and overwhelmingly skewed in favour of HR but the need is for better coordination: HR understanding business goals and vision and the top leadership understanding more than the nitty-gritty of HR functions

- **The turnaround time** for talent movement or hiring or sourcing of talent can be as long as six months at times which is also led to gig economy work culture taking over some functions

- **More investment** is needed in learning and development than what is being done currently

- **An instant need** is to address the fearfulness that comes with the fearfulness of job losses due to automation

- **Employees can't always count** on the organisation is going to invest in themselves, have to do it themselves by taking proper initiatives

SHUBHOMOY SIKDAR

In a scathing report following a survey sometime back, Deloitte said only 25 per cent of business leaders believe "their HR teams deliver excellent or good capabilities", compared to 75 per cent who said "HR is just getting by or underperforming". The report said, "Only 7 per cent of HR leaders surveyed feel their teams can consistently deliver innovative programmes that drive business impact."

So what is it that corporate leaders want from their HR teams? More importantly, are our HR teams ready to face up to the new challenges of the fast-changing workplace?

Before we proceed, here's why the new HR leader has her task cut out. She has to understand organisational strategies, product or service requirements and industry trends, and should be able to proactively plan her corporation's people requirements. Above all, she has to be able to offer CxOs actionable insights on these issues.

So what are the ways HR can help improve a company's bottom line? Ajay Shah, head (recruitment services), Teamlease, says, the first is in improving cost efficiencies. Second, making the hiring process more effective. The third is in managing the work force so it can be more productive.

Experts say one of the first things that needs to be done is to integrate HR goals with the larger goals of a corporation. So if one asks, "does HR have a seat at the table", the answer needs to be in the affirmative. To that end appraising HR about the business goals and the leadership's vision are imperative. And the change should start at the top — the CEO must appreciate the HR's needs and the kind of talent it must have at its disposal.

Technology has changed the game for HR professionals. It has made things both easy and difficult. Jayant Paleti, co-founder, Darwinbox, a company that provides cloud-based workforce management solutions and has Nivea, Dr. Reddy's, Swiggy and Myntra as some of its clients, says that HR needs to come to terms with the fact that large scale automation is not a distant reality, it's almost here. Citing a KPMG report, he said that 25 per cent of the BFSI jobs in India will get replaced by 2021. "It is not it so far away. It is not in some other country, it is here," believes Paleti.

Equally crucial is blending the two with data analytics. And this has its own advantages, as reflected in the performance of early adopters. "Three years ago, we formed a team which focused on HR analytics," said Sumit Neogi, the vice-president, human resources of Reliance Industries Ltd, during an HR summit held in Delhi recently. "Earlier, we used to get a report 24 hours after an incident had happened. Today, everything is on dashboard. All our reviews are on dashboards and they are live. I need to be absolutely sure today and that assurance is available."

Neogi added credibility is built if there is data and that data can be synthesised in the form of analytics. "For example, if I have an internal job posting today, whether a person applies or not, I have an algorithm which tells me who are the people who are eligible."

But for that to happen across the board, HR must become more tech savvy. Indeed, Shah says, technology has made two things simple — namely performance management systems (PMS) and application tracking system or ATS — empowering HR professionals along the way. Performance management systems have also helped in collating feedback, some aspects of which have been discussed in this section earlier.

It is ATS which is proving to be the game changer, according to Shah. "Now it is building employee connect, tracking CVs across platforms, building engagement and doing employer branding. Earlier, one could just track the applications in one's data base but now there is ATS which crawls into every possible digital platform to identify the right talent. That is where AI comes into the picture which, in a simple language, does matching. Earlier there was tangible parametric searches looking at only parameters like age, location and experience; with AI coming into the picture, it tracks historical successes," he says.

"For example, if I have 25 alumni from one batch of the same B-school in my organisation working for the past four years, AI will help me locate prospective candidates from the same batch. Now it is making decisions, as if telling you that you already have so many candidates from that B-school who have done well, stayed loyal, why don't you hire people with similar skillset."

Finally, who will skill the skill master? Experts believe that some movement has happened — ranging from artificial intelligence (AI)- based shortlisting to use of intelligent hiring analytics — in this direction, though we still have to cover a lot of ground .