TOP SKILLS FOR HR IN 2017
TOP 8 HR SKILLS FOR 2017

We are in the third month of 2017 and it is already promising to be an ‘interesting’ year. The corporate sector in India is in throes of change like never before with lay-offs, new technology, cut-throat competition and dearth of funding grabbing headlines.

What does this entail for the HR function? There are many opinions on new trends emerging in HR and a quick search on the internet will reveal a plethora of articles on this subject. What we have attempted here is to make sense of the skills and knowledge which HR people will need to tackle this change and add value to their organisations.

The HR landscape in India is very varied. This article is written in the context of SMEs, young organisations and manufacturing sector, though the other sectors can find the inputs just as relevant.

1. **Develop a Data-driven mindset, get Tech savvy**- HR people are often portrayed as not being ‘numbers people’, especially in the corporates in above mentioned categories. It is high time for this perception to change and for HR to become the ‘Central Pool’ of all employee data- not just personal and joining related data but sales, expenses, customer feedback, training etc.

   The first place to start is home, i.e. capturing of data within the HR department and consolidating it in a logical fashion. This may seem a very obvious thing to state but it is surprising how little attention is paid to this activity. This fact is highlighted in the Linked in post by DP Singh, Head of HR with IBM India and South Asia, referring to the findings of an IBM survey:

   “Less than 20% of the organizations today are able to apply predictive analytics to address important people issues. Over 40% of organizations are limited to basic HR reporting capabilities. More than 50% of companies report difficulty with integrating workforce data from HR and non-HR systems…”

   Data forms the core of any automation initiative, performance related decisions and strategic business decisions.

2. **Hone your Data handling and Presentation skills**- A large percentage of SME organisation do not have an HRIS in place. Digital is the buzzword and the noise around it is getting louder. The SME HR Landscape study conducted by People Matters shows that as many as 49% of respondents were not in a position to invest in a HR Technology platform, while 30% felt an Urgent need for technology in HR but were not able to decide on the best way to acquire it.

   Getting the organisation ready for the digital push is the responsibility of the HR department and the best way of doing it is to showcase the power of data before you have an HRIS installed. So work on those Excel and PowerPoint skills and if you don’t have them, acquire them. Whether your organisation goes in for an HRIS or not, these skills will prove to be invaluable in your career.

3. **Multiskilling**- Traditional HR roles are changing, job security is on the decline and productivity expectations are increasing. A typical HR Generalist who heads the function will need to augment skills and knowledge in HR areas most relevant to the organisation. Training and upgrading of skills will largely become the responsibility of the employee rather than the organisation. One needs to
be a Jack-of-all-Trades AND a Master-of–Some. It might be a good idea to add to your repertoire with specialised knowledge in areas like HR Analytics, Engagement practices and Performance Management.

4. **Evolve into a Strategic Business Partner** - The role of HR, especially in manufacturing and SME sector, has largely been that of a timekeeper and custodian of management policies. Look at the below figure which depicts how leadership portal Leaderonomics views evolution of HR in an organisation. In most organisations, HR is at the first or second stage. Very few HR people evolve to the higher two stages and that happens mostly in large multinationals where the HR Business Partner model is prevalent.

![Evolution of HR](image)

It is necessary for HR leaders to view themselves as entrepreneurs and dive deep into the intricacies of the organisations business, regardless of the size of organisation or the HR department. Even if you are a HR generalist running a one-man department, you can take on the role of a Business HR and win a place for HR at the table. Areas like succession planning, talent management and L&D require a thorough understanding of the Business to be successful and make a measurable positive impact on growth and productivity.

5. **Focus on Candidate experience** - Talent Acquisition is at the core of HR and interaction with every potential candidates is a moment of truth. Like the Marketing and Customer service teams create experiences for customers, the focus has to be on building a positive experience for the candidates. The hiring process should be responsive, both for the ‘Rejected’ candidates and the shortlisted ones, with clear communication on the status of the candidates application. The flip side of the social media is that negative comments can easily reach thousands of people at the click of a mouse. Employer Branding is something which HR leaders have to be conscious about now, more than ever before. Onboarding is another area requiring greater focus.
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6. **Engagement and Employee experience** - HR professionals know that high employee engagement leads to enhanced productivity and performance, but many companies struggle to create adequate workplace engagement. It is common knowledge that engagement levels are low in India with various studies over the years showing these as low as 30% to a high of 70%. An employee engagement survey may indicate a problem, but it won’t offer a solution. A look at the findings of the BT-People Strong Survey 2016 reveals the factors causing disengagement and those leading to motivation.

![Image](image_url)

The above is further reinforced by the SME HR Landscape study where managing attrition emerged as the top challenge for SMEs. Almost 73% of the organizations were struggling with high attrition and 45% felt that they were unable to cope with it. As an HR person it is very clear what skills one needs to develop to tap into these factors- career planning, rewards and recognition and job enrichment.

In 2017, HR teams will have to develop ways to strengthen the employee experience as a part of an arsenal of effective employee engagement tools

7. **Relook at Performance Management systems** - Annual Appraisals are dead, the Bell Curve has been junked and periodic feedback is the new mantra. But that may not be the best way for all organisations. Switching to a frequent feedback system rather than a six-month/annual appraisal makes sense only if a large percentage of employees are Gen Y or Millennials. The right PMS strategy has to be decided based on the age profile of the workforce, among other factors such as the nature of business, culture of the organisation etc. If you have a mixed workforce, you may even need to look at different PMS methods for different sets of employees. Getting this right will require HR leaders to get to up close with employees to understand their expectations and work ethics.

So if you have not had a look at this aspect last year, 2017 is the right time for assessing the need...
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8. **Use innovative Talent Acquisition practices** - Very few organisations can do without a constant stream of new talent to counter attrition or fuel expansion. Social Hiring is being used by most corporates today as a low cost means with a broad reach. However there is scope for increase, the SME study mentioned earlier shows that Social Networks are still the 3rd preferred talent source. It also used as a Employer Branding tool by showcasing the welfare initiatives and work culture of the organisation. The use of technology and the huge amount of data generated by the recruiting process can transform the talent experience for both the candidate and recruiters. CEOs will look to Talent Acquisition teams to deliver not only the right talent but to build a Brand which will help the organisation succeed.

These 8 areas will require the HR person to be both a ‘data & numbers person’ as well as a ‘people’s champion’, after all the basic percept of HR is to connect with people. It will be tough challenge for most of us to develop these seemingly opposing skills, but it will be imperative for the success of HR in 2017.

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to revamp prevalent PA practices. Again, technology can help tremendously here as it remains an area where HR Tech is least used. Only 9% respondents had a fully automated PA system while 33% were partially using some technology in the process. Almost 65% of organisations were using offline tools such as Excel for storing PMS data. (Source : SME HR Landscape study)

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