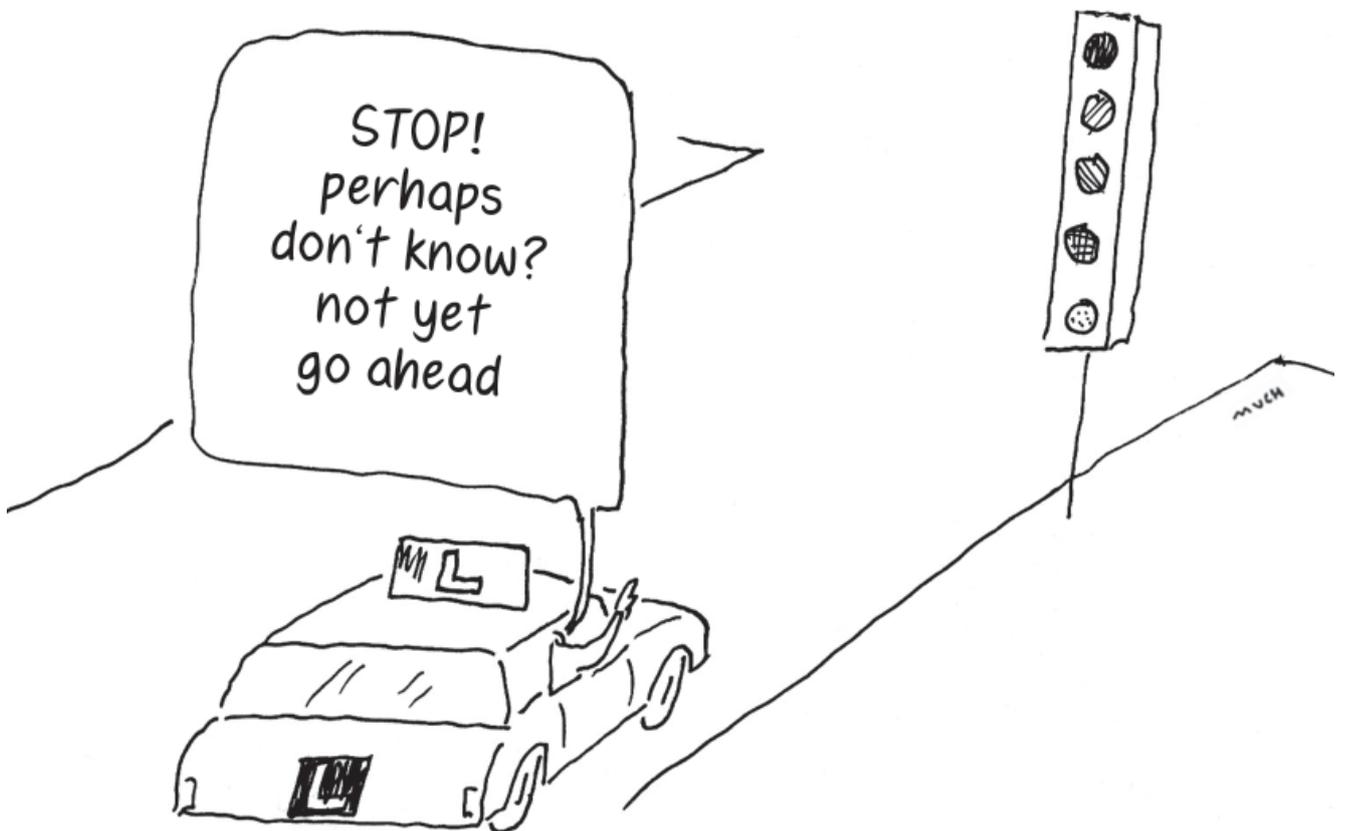


# Take the Driver's Seat

Human Resources must lend more effectiveness to its own role



They are regarded either as a service, maintenance or a rescue team, are usually underestimated and hardly seen as a strategic partner in the development of the enterprise. However, Human Resources should play a significant role in the operating practices and the sustainability of the organization. They should take a driver's seat.

by Iris Fischer and Birgitta Gregor



#### Recommended Reading

»Leading from the Emerging Future: From Ego-System to Eco-System Economies« (Otto Scharmer, Katrin Kaufer, Berrett-Koehler Verlag, 2013)

For decades, personnel managers and personnel experts have been striving to be recognized as business partners and to be included in planning and decision-making processes of companies. Equipped with enormous technical and social competence, they put forth their proposals and ideas in the hope of finally being heard. However, their input is often ignored and things stay exactly the same: Human Resources (HR) implements what management has already announced and does its best to iron out the mistakes and smooth out the bumps. It is high time that Human Resources took the »driver's seat«, giving its own role more effectiveness and actively shaping the development and long-term success of their organization.

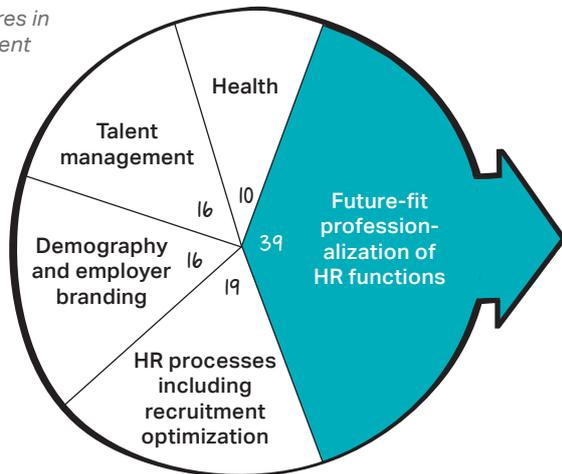
#### Effective role

During a workshop, a group of personnel managers from international organizations have identified topics that are relevant for Human Resources units and organizations, including, among other things, optimizing processes, developing an HR strategy, improving how to deal with rapid changes, determining demographic development and defining needs for action. With targeted initiatives in these areas, they can effectively shape their role and influence within the framework of the respective corporate strategy, for the benefit of the enterprise.

Yet, what prevents Human Resources from proactively taking the driver's seat? According to the personnel managers, »Human Resources is inaccurately positioned and, therefore, is often absent from the important meetings«; »HR is seen as the opponent and asking them for advice is a sign of weakness«; »Anyone can deal with personnel«; »They lack assertiveness or are seen as administrators«. Nevertheless, they can counterbalance these ascriptions with significant competencies and resources: expertise in the field of personnel and organization management, legal knowledge, work and organizational psychology, consulting skills and tried-and-tested implementation know-how. To get this power on the road, they should apply different behavior – instead of talking about problems, they could proactively create solutions. They have all they need, and they should be encouraged to use it. As a consequence, they themselves will set the function into a better position, address strategically relevant topics, create more impact and add value.

## Where do HR managers see the most relevant needs for action

Figures in  
percent



- 1 HR strategy development
- 2 Change competence improvement
- 3 Reflection and optimization of HR role

Results of a survey among 50 European HR managers in 2013.

### Actual issues

A survey of additional Human Resources managers from global players and small and medium enterprises (from Germany, Austria, Switzerland; some with responsibility for EMEA) generated the following results (see illustration). Room for improvement potentially lies in the further optimization of the HR processes, such as recruitment, knowledge management or succession planning. Talent management, including suitable leadership development programs, receives just as much focus as effective demographic management and employer branding. Given the changes in demographics in the future, employer attractiveness will have more impact on the success of the enterprise. The employer attractiveness not only plays a crucial role in the wooed Y generation, but also the key players »40 plus« selectively choose the more attractive environment. The resulting requirements for companies, including an increased consciousness of health-related topics and an improved work-life-balance, call for a more different approach from HR than previously required.

### Future mission

The most relevant results and learnings of the survey: If Human Resources wants to fulfill its role as a driver and a strategic player more consistently, the further

professionalization, competence development and improved assertiveness of the HR managers is required. In its own interest, and in assuming joint responsibility of operational activities and the long-term viability of the enterprise, HR should also be the operator of their own ideas and projects and, as such, become a co-driver of the enterprise. It is also about assuming a leading position – where HR actually belongs to – with an operative and strategic relevance. The paths leading towards professionalization are:

- Development of a Human Resources strategy to prioritize and implement topics relevant for the respective enterprise.
- Improved change management competence in order to be able to react faster and more professionally in times of change.
- Reflection on their own role in the current context and work on their professional standing.

Once this is done, Human Resources can take the driver's seat with strengthened competence and resistance to conflict. They can effectively support the executives as an internal coach and contribute to the value and, therefore, to the long-term future-fitness of the organization. Such professionalization goes hand in hand with an improved internal marketing. At the same time it also fulfills the often expressed desire for a higher profile and more recognition. ●