

A portrait of today's HR manager

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What do senior managers expect from their company's HR department today? To serve as a strategic partner and to convey the corporate philosophy, in addition to continuing to fulfill all of the standard duties.

For quite some time now, senior managers have expected their HR departments to go beyond mere administrative duties, and become fully integrated in the business, more involved in the organization's internal aspects and more devoted to employee development.

This expanded role is explored in a [book](#) that IESE professors [Javier Quintanilla](#) and [Carlos Sánchez-Runde](#) have cowritten with two HR practitioners, Gloria Poal and Susana Gutiérrez.

The authors interviewed CEOs, board chairs and general managers of leading firms in Spain. Since these are the ones who hire the individuals tasked with HR, their opinions matter, say the authors.

The interviews revealed three key roles that today's HR managers are expected to fulfill: to act as a strategic partner alongside senior management; to defend the company's culture, values and mission; and to serve as the resident expert in leading HR practices.

Only all rounders need apply

The HR department has become a core strategic pillar of the organization, playing a key role in defining and implementing the corporate strategy, and aligning it with employee goals and motivations.

To be an effective strategic partner, HR managers must have a strong foundation of general business knowledge.

At the very least, they should be able to interpret the company's profit-and-loss statement, and keep abreast of the day-to-day activities of each department.

They can enrich their general business knowledge by engaging in theoretical and practical training, such as a general management program, which offers a broad perspective of business administration.

The department's more specialized functions can be delegated to staff members. The necessary skills for this can be acquired through master's and other postgraduate programs, as well as specialized courses in interpersonal, communication, public speaking and negotiation skills.

Promoting the corporate philosophy

The HR department must also ensure that the company's mission, values and culture are aligned across the whole organization, and that these are shared by all employees, so that they feel a sense of belonging to the organization.

For this to happen, the company's values and culture, given their intangible nature, must be clearly defined.

Taking on a new role

The HR team must assume these new roles, while still performing the usual administrative functions.

For that, they must be led by someone with a broad range of professional, management and interpersonal skills. This person must be sufficiently creative and have a broad enough perspective to be able to conceive and implement HR policies across the organization in an integrated way.

Other qualities include proactivity, insight, intuition, and the ability to negotiate, analyze, prioritize and influence employees and fellow executives.

Skills based on knowledge and capabilities can be acquired through training, whereas interpersonal skills and emotional intelligence are developed through experience at both the

personal and professional levels.

Future challenges

Given the globalization process, market deregulation and the impact of the economic crisis, HR professionals must also know how to manage diversity and work in environments of uncertainty.

Furthermore, new technologies demand new communication skills, both internally and externally.

Finally, in helping other employees develop their skill sets, HR executives must not neglect their own professional and personal development.

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