

How Human Resources can Resource Humans

BY MICHAEL HENDERSON

Despite our best intentions so much of what we practice in Human Resources, including training and development, does little more than reinforce that the organisation views its people as resources first and humans a distant second. Humans are analysed, measured and evaluated as a resource, rather than as human beings with lives, personalities, wants, desires and feelings.

We regularly talk of our people as categories 'the sales people' or 'our middle managers' or we talk of them in terms of numbers and statistics, '45% of our people are engaged with their work,' 'we now have a staff moral average of 83%.' We measure and review our people as averages, on everything from the levels of engagement and morale, through analysis of learning needs, to tracking our staff turnover figures, as percentages of the whole.

These numbers and averages are, of course, useful in terms of identifying trends that are emerging or transpiring within our business. However, the danger is that by placing too much emphasis (and faith) in the averages and percentages we inadvertently begin to think of and treat our people as EVERYBODY rather than SOMEBODY! The down side of focusing too extensively on averages is that we can easily misinterpret the reality of the situation. People do not experience averages, they experience specifics and extremes and variances!

People experience specifics rather than averages because, of course, we are all unique with unique perspectives and experiences, even in a common environment. However, even though we all know and readily accept that we are all different, it seems repeatedly in Human Resources and training we do not necessarily act accordingly. We seem to regularly forget (or are forced by circumstances and time restrictions) that what we are really talking about are individuals with specific needs, desires and wants.

Even such current and popular frames of references as the emphasis on understanding the Generation Y phenomenon, tends to ensure companies begin to fall into the trap of generalising the individuality and uniqueness out of the way they view and relate to people.

When Human Resources get too caught up with the numbers and averages we live up to our name as viewing people as resources. By balancing our approach we can invert this phenomenon and begin to dedicate ourselves to Resourcing Humans. After fifteen years of working with people and organisations as corporate anthropologists we have found that organisations that engage and retain their people with the least amount of cost are more focused on resourcing their humans than treating them as human resources. So what's an alternative?

One approach that definitely works and has numerous merits is working with values. Using a comprehensive values approach, organisations can support themselves and their people to identify and work with the specific values of individuals in an effort to align them with people's work roles, the company values and even the company strategy and culture.

Research in Australia and New Zealand of over ten thousand personal values inventories (drawing from the globally validated pool of 128 human values) for people in organisations, demonstrates that no two people have ever had an identical set of values. We define a person's values as their preferences multiplied by the priority they place on each preference. When a person has clarified their preferences and the priority associated with each preference, they create for themselves a personal values hierarchy.

When companies understand that each and every one of us are driven by and motivated from our own unique personal values hierarchy then they are able to immediately create a language and process for supporting humans to become acknowledged as a SOMEBODY distinct and separate from others.

Organisations that support their people to clarify their own personal values and then work to align those values with their work role benefit enormously. The people feel that the organisation is acknowledging and celebrating their individuality and uniqueness.

Values alignment to a work role is also the key to supporting your people to establish, in very specific and personal terms, what is making work meaningful for them. It identifies what specifically is driving their motivation to work, perform and even excel, all of which is unlikely to emerge from averages...It will also make sure that learning and development can be focused on skills rather than trying to cover up issues of personal alignment and mismatched priorities.

Insight and understanding of people's personal values in alignment to their chosen work results in increased engagement and the unleashing of discretionary effort. Discretionary effort, in turn, has a direct impact on people work performance and their decision to stay in a role (retention).

For a simple, quick and effective way of enhancing your HR approach to resource humans, supporting your people to clarify their personal values and align them to their role will take you and them a long way down this path.



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