Top 6 new-age skills every HR professional must learn to stay relevant in the new normal

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The other day a senior leader in one of India's largest software organisations told me that 20 years ago, there was enough talent out in the market, they did not have enough compensation to attract the talent. Today the situation is quite the opposite – while they can exceed the compensation expectations, they struggle to find suitable talent. While I do not have data to claim this to be a general trend in the industry, I often hear laments from [HR professionals](#) about lack of employability among India's young workforce. This, they usually attribute to our failing education system. However, it makes me wonder whether this is because of a demand supply mismatch.

Forces of globalization and greater availability of information has dramatically increased career opportunities for talented individuals, shaping their aspirations, enhancing their confidence and demanding a lot more from their professions. One is not sure whether traditional organisations have been able to live up to such expectations, leading to frustrations among the HR fraternity for their inability to attract and retain suitable talent for their organisations. If this were true, HR professionals need to reflect and evaluate whether they should themselves change, develop new skills, to play a meaningful role of nurturing talent that would enable their organisations in achieving their objectives. The following are some of the necessary skills for the new age HR professionals.

Be catalysts for change: The pandemic has taught us the importance of adaptability, how human beings adjust to sudden, unpredictable changes. While one is unsure about the long-term implications of the pandemic, the need for responding to change in a volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous business environment predates this present crisis. All HR professionals need to be catalysts for change, implying that they need to understand, from their organisation's perspective, the rational for and the ideal velocity of change and match it with the capabilities of their employees in responding to such change. HR professionals need to be able to understand the pressure points for change, what makes people resist change and identify the change agents who can evangelize and lead change.

Be lead users of technology: Technology has become one of the most critical levers of change. Organisations intend to transform themselves digitally, so that they can get more insights from data and respond to the needs of business faster. Rapid pace of change in technology and a wide array of choices create significant confusion. HR professionals need to understand the implications of technology and how such technology can be leveraged to

get the best out of people. Basic human behaviour about understanding and adopting technology has not changed. HR professionals need to be lead users of technology so that they understand the advantages and challenges of digital transformations that employees need to go through.

Treat every employee as N = 1: Most modern organisations do not operate in a mechanistic mode and employees are valued for their thoughts and creativity. Therefore, it is necessary to understand individuals and customize HR policies, instead of adapting a standardized or one-size-fits-all approach. Lot of organisations are talking about N=1, when it comes to their customers, to treat every customer as unique and customize their offerings. Technology enables data analysis at granular level. HR professionals need to adopt this approach for their internal customers, the employees and act upon insights generated from such analysis to look at employees as N=1.

Differentiate signals from noise: HR professionals cannot be expected to become data analysts. They will be consumers of insights and analysis. However, understanding how such analysis is done is increasingly becoming difficult with the latest technology, such as AI, ML and associated data deluge. HR professionals need to differentiate between signal and noise, because just as analytics can be used to generate insight, it can also be used convincingly to spread falsehoods and create wrong impressions. To distinguish signals from noise, HR professionals need to develop the discipline of triangulation, checking credibility and above all, use native intelligence to cut through the hype.

Represent a larger purpose: Profitability for business and compensation for individuals will always remain important. However, neither individuals nor organisations can thrive because of the money they make. Talented individuals want to be part of a larger purpose that would give a greater meaning to their highly demanding professional efforts. Organisations need to honestly articulate how their business is good for the world and HR professionals need to translate its implication for the employees. This is not about planting trees or installing CFLs in office but working with leaders to establish governing principles related to sustainability and inclusivity. HR professionals, through their thoughts and actions, need to embody how their organisation is a force for good and not only a tool for profitability.

Develop meta-learning capability: Finally, HR professionals, like all professionals grappling with uncertainty, need to develop the meta-capability of learning to learn. Latest research shows that adults are capable of neuroplasticity, and despite some limitations, there is no upper-age limit to one's capability to learn. To develop such capability, HR professionals need to be willing to take some risks, experiment and learn from failures and pursue new learning objectives with focus and dedication.

There is no doubt that the above is a tough ask. Rapid advancement in information and technology along with growing concern about issues pertaining to sustainability and inclusivity had already made life difficult for HR professionals. The pandemic has only added to those challenges. Let us hope that HR professionals will be able to discover opportunities within such challenges and develop new skills to stay relevant and enable their organisations to make this world a better place.

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