



Business Perspectives

HR Perspective

I guess that I'm lucky that in our organisation HR is seen as a vital part of organisational strategy. I'm almost always involved in strategic discussions. This means that the HR implications of strategy are thought about from the outset. And this means that we would never adopt a strategy without being sure that we could ensure the human capabilities to deliver it.

I see part of my role as scanning the relevant parts of the environment – is there any legislation being debated that might impact upon us? How likely is it to be enacted? When? What do we need to do to prepare ourselves? For example when legislation against age discrimination was introduced we needed to review all our recruitment and selection policies to ensure that they weren't discriminatory – I hadn't realised how often we used terms like 'dynamic', which could be seen to suggest discrimination against older applicants. We also had to look at other likely aspects of its impact on our employment practices. It's really important to see things like this coming so that you have time to make all the necessary changes.

I see my role within recruitment very much as one of helping managers to resource their teams. Sometimes I think they see me as an impediment when I insist on following organisational procedures – I don't think they always realise the legal difficulties we may get into if we are not seen to be fair. Nor do I think they always realise how expensive it can be to take on someone who isn't really up to the job. I appreciate that sometimes they're under a lot of pressure to fill a vacancy, because it's difficult for their team when they are short staffed, but an unsuitable recruit can cost a great deal in terms of impact on both colleagues and customers.

Some of the frictions over issues like this – where I'm seen as imposing unnecessary restrictions on people - can sometimes mean that we don't get involved as early as we might in planning for recruitment exercises. Nor do managers realise the importance of involving us in performance management issues as soon as they arise. The procedures are quite complex, and need to be followed carefully. We can offer a lot of help to managers, but it's always best if they contact us earlier rather than later! Sometimes I wonder if they realise that we are actually there to help rather than hinder them!

The biggest difficulties, I guess inevitably, are when we have to make redundancies. Sadly in times of economic difficulty this is almost inevitable in our industry. In our organisation we operate a fairly clear 'Last in, first out' (LIFO) policy. You need a clear policy if people are not to claim unfair dismissal. But managers may resent this, if they feel that some of their longer serving staff are less innovative and less motivated than those more recently recruited. I suppose this is an endorsement of improvements in recruitment in recent years, but it creates a real problem if we then lose these excellent staff.

I guess you can't expect general managers to understand the wider implications of some of the decisions they want to take – after all they haven't been drilled in the importance of things like legal implications the way I was when I took my CIPD (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development) qualification. Nor do they necessarily understand the inter-relatedness of things like recruitment, development and performance management. When you do meet one who understands our role, and uses us as a resource, it's really great.