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Die Akte Personal

Warum sich die Personalwirtschaft jetzt neu erfinden sollte

Abstract

Human resources: an easy job

Honestly, what could be so difficult about it? You conduct job interviews, send out the monthly payslips, organize training and make sure that personnel files are kept up-to-date and accurate. Ok, if someone has to leave the company, you are also involved somehow – which is no fun, but even that you'll get right somehow. So where is the problem? Anybody can work in human resources, the good people are needed where the money is earned. They're the ones on the frontline with the wind blowing in their faces, while the HR lot in the background have a rather cushy number. But is it really true that anybody can be good at human resources? If only. In fact, we are very much mistaken if we think that getting the payslips right and booking that last training seminar with the delicious lunch is all it takes to fulfill the tasks of an HR department.

Admittedly, nearly everybody is capable of doing the latter; at least it can be quickly learned and then be pursued throughout working life. Unfortunately, that is exactly what is happening in many HR departments. Administrative processes are being perfected, and as this, over time, also creates knowledge that confers power without seriously disturbing the procedures within the company, from this alone the HR department draws its right to exist. Thus, one might easily conclude that HR is a job for everybody. A field for those who like to deal with such boring routine work instead of having to prove themselves in operational business. That is what HR managers often get to hear.

The reality, however, is very different.

It all starts with the HR manager being considered a specialist in his or her field, namely human resources, or to remain within the

general company jargon, HRM (human resources management). That makes this person a specialist in ... well, in what precisely? In human beings? A people specialist? What exactly might that be?

Upon closer examination you will soon realize how absurd that is. Obviously HR management encompasses a range of duties which require special competences, for example concerning employment law or psychological aspects. For your job as an HR manager, however, you should have particularly one quality: being a generalist. In other words, as the head of HR of a company puts it: "If we want to describe the function of HR departments and their staff, we should point out that these are perhaps the last remaining people in the company who are capable of thinking in contexts other than business economics."

Admittedly, that is provocative. It implies certain mental limitations and narrow-mindedness in other parts of the company, above all in the operational divisions. But if you ignore the provocative undertone, this statement might offer a clue for starting to think about how HR management could find a way out of its self-inflicted irrelevance.

For many years we have supported HR practitioners and their clients in companies – with projects, concepts and discussions, with forums and the exchange of experience. Complaints about the diminishing significance of HR in corporate policy are a common theme in the countless discussions we have had. No matter whether you talk to the chief human resources officer of a DAX-listed corporation or to a highly dedicated HR officer of a medium-sized enterprise – the gist is always the same. They are suffering from increasing strategic irrelevance while being confronted with rising expectations and demands from all sides.

"We always get involved far too late when the strategy has already been defined. But then it is left to us to implement it. Nobody bothers to ask anymore whether the strategy is in any way feasible from a human resources point of view", (...).

At the same time, it should be clear to all of us that the importance and relevance of human resources in companies should actually be growing. If you consider the general context of our knowledge society, the reasons for this require no further explanation. Suffice to say that if you google "increasing importance of human resources", you'll get 58,000 hits. With this book we seek to shed light on this fundamental contradiction. We want to better understand the strange situation in

which human relations seems to find itself. The book documents our learning process as to the role of human relations, its self-understanding and its self-deceptions.

We open the file on human relations.