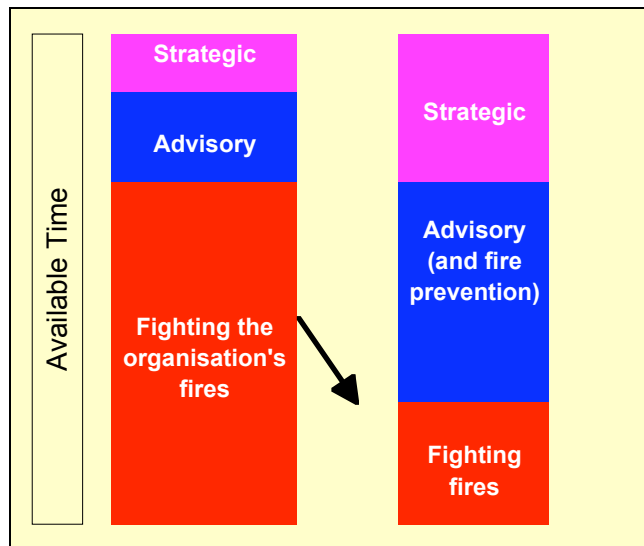


## Does your HR function get time to take its fire fighting gear off?

By David Parmenter

Much valuable Human Resource time is invested fighting the “the organisation fires” rather than dealing with advisory and strategic issues.



Do you have an HR function that never gets time to take its fire fighting gear off? Data from *waymark solutions limited* studies suggest HR functions are finding ways to spend more of their time on strategic and advisory issues.

### Steps you can take

- take hold of the strategic “high ground”
- involve HR in an all embracing induction cycle
- get involved in cross functional projects
- price your time
- join a better practices study
- provide informative HR reporting
- measure “user” satisfaction of the HR team
- train the HR staff in BPR techniques
- reward good interfaces with HR

### Get involved in cross-functional projects

Participants\* are having success in cross-functional projects. One HR manager for example is responsible for all the satisfaction surveys undertaken on the processes and workgroups within their organisation. Another HR function took a lead role in the process re-engineering project. Another HR manager sees their role as a business partner rather than the HR function and the manager meets weekly with the CEO and is involved in decisions outside of the HR brief.

Besides providing stimulating work it gives HR an opportunity to subtly educate their peers about HR issues whilst demonstrating the skills and depths of

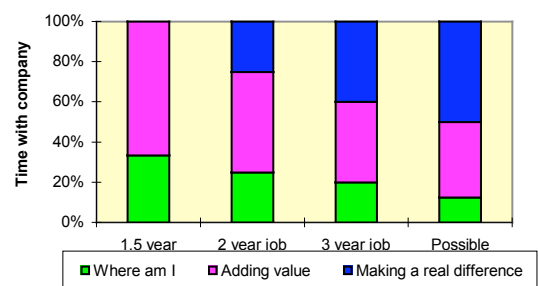
knowledge that HR professionals have but frequently “hide under the bushels”.

### Involve HR in an all embracing induction cycle for new staff.

Forget the one or two day induction programme that makes the organisation and the new employee feel good for the first few weeks.

We are talking about a longer term cycle that helps the new staff member become more productive. In IT the problem is exacerbated. It is critical that these staff are brought on stream quickly as they do not stay for so long. The issue is to get the staff person on to phase 3 quickly which often means ensuring new IS recruits get access to senior management during a well thought out induction programme.

Shifting more time to “making a real difference”



### Take hold of the strategic “high ground”.

Do not be like King Harold and give up the high ground to pursue a fight at Hastings. There are many strategic issues that need time now. For one, make sure you are knowledgeable in the CEO’s interest areas. Wangle more time to spend with the CEO. They want to be more involved in HR, so help them to be involved. Do not just rely on email and reports, take the CEO out for a coffee NOW.

Some of the strategic issues that have been raised by participants are:

- senior executive management training programmes;
- establishing 360 degree feedback for senior management and key teams;
- involvement in manpower and succession planning;
- involvement in disaster recovery planning;
- involvement in, and in one case ownership of, the strategic plan; and
- staff opinion and culture surveys.

### Price your time

Has the HR function worked out what your charge-out rates would be if you want to breakeven as a cost centre?

The other day I bumped into one senior team having their weekly management meeting. I found out to my

horror that these lasted for over 5 hours. This could be an interesting debating chamber, but 10% of the working week had just evaporated for these hard working executives.

I wonder if they would have carried on so long if there had been a message on the whiteboard **“This meeting is costing us \$1000 per hour”**.

Sometimes it just might be better to concentrate on other issues and let the fires burn themselves out.

### **Join a better practices study**

Get real, do not think your networks can bail you out. Half the time they will be deep in the thicket, making a fire break. That promised copy of their 360 degree questionnaire will never arrive. Better practice studies can help you more efficiently access and adopt tried and tested practices.

### **Provide informative HR reporting**

HR functions have a way of catching up with their accounting colleagues. Little use is made of trend graphs when they are surely the key to understanding the HR issues. Are you monitoring your trends? If not then maybe you should acquire some better practice reporting templates. **Imagine trying to fight the vast fires of central USA without accurate weather forecasts.**

### **Measure user satisfaction of the HR team**

Yes I know, it's something that you will do next quarter. Come on, you have said that since you started here. Sound familiar? As Nike would say “Just do it”, it won't hurt as much as you think. The staff know you put your life on the line to put out the fires. They wouldn't swap jobs. You will be surprised with the positive feedback you will get with a properly worded questionnaire.

### **Train the HR staff in business process re-engineering techniques**

HR should be involved in stimulating the use of continuous improvement, total quality management etc., within the organisation. It is very interesting work, it makes a major impact on the bottom line, it makes jobs more interesting and cuts out inefficiencies.

### **Reward good interfaces with HR**

We all appreciate recognition, especially when we don't have to wait for it. Some participants\* have found some clever methods that work, such as handing out film tickets, meals, etc to staff who have gone the extra mile. One function gives a bottle of wine each month to the first complete monthly return they receive. This simple thank you has provided the appropriate environment for timely submissions from

management. For example you could use this technique to improve the promptness of performance returns or on HR statistics which are gathered through monthly returns.

### **Last words**

- **Make time to market HR to the senior team**
- **increase HR's influence over strategic planning**
- **Join a better practice study to get access to better practice templates and contacts**
- **implement at least one improvement to the work environment every three months**
- **run a user satisfaction survey on HR**
- **set up coffee with the CEO now**
- **increase the linkage between management and new information systems recruits**

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