

From Support to Strategy: HR's Rise as a Business Influencer

The HRCI Team | December 4, 2024

The world has drastically changed since the COVID-19 pandemic, and so has the role of HR. According to a recent survey conducted by HRCI and MindEdge Learning, HR seeks to broaden its scope in the new post-pandemic "normal," aspiring for a more significant role in business operations.

The Transition from Traditional to Strategic HR

Findings from the survey, which included feedback from 1,044 HRCI-certified human resources professionals, reveal that an overwhelming 88% of respondents believe HR should take on a more active role in business operations. Only a small minority (8%) feel HR should continue focusing solely on traditional employee-related tasks.

This desire for an expanded role possibly stems from a perception gap with organizational leaders, as more than 40% of respondents feel that leaders view HR as fulfilling a crucial but limited function. This perspective could contribute to the challenges HR departments face, such as budget constraints and understaffing concerns.

"Our findings highlight a dynamic shift toward continuous learning rather than HR certification alone," said David Meginley, aPHR, GPHR, Chief Revenue & Learning Officer at HRCI.

"Professionals are taking a more expansive approach to education and skill enhancement, which is key to ensuring that HR has a place in strategic organizational development."

Sector-Specific Differences in HR Perception and Support

The survey highlighted variances between sectors. HR professionals in the Technology sector report feeling underfunded and understaffed, while those in Financial Services generally perceive adequate support and believe HR is seen as integral to organizational success. These sectoral differences reflect diverse experiences and expectations for HR professionals post-COVID.

Confidence in Economic Recovery and Organizational Resilience

Despite these challenges, there's growing optimism among HR professionals regarding the U.S. economy's resilience and their organizations' financial health. Over half of survey participants express confidence in the national economy, and a more significant proportion (60%) are optimistic about their organizations meeting revenue goals. This optimism is particularly pronounced in the Financial Services sector, with a notable 75% expressing confidence in revenue growth.

Top Concerns: Employee Retention, Talent Acquisition, and Burnout

HR professionals face the dual challenge of retaining talent and attracting new employees. These concerns are especially pressing in sectors like Healthcare, Retail, and Manufacturing. Alongside these recruitment challenges, employee burnout continues to be a prominent issue, particularly in the Technology and Education sectors.

A significant 74% of HR professionals acknowledge an increase in employee burnout in their organizations, underscoring the need for effective strategies to maintain workforce well-being in the face of heightened workloads and changing work dynamics.

Adaptation to the New Workplace Normal

Amid these challenges, HR has successfully navigated the shift to new workplace norms. More than half of the respondents report a return to in-person work, while others have embraced remote or hybrid models. Interestingly, 86% of those supporting remote or hybrid work believe these arrangements will remain permanent, highlighting the enduring impact of the pandemic on workplace arrangements.

"Four years after the onset of the pandemic, American businesses have settled on a new mix of work arrangements—mostly in-person in some sectors of the economy, mostly remote or hybrid in others," said Hugo Lallo, chief of technology and staff for MindEdge Learning. "HR professionals have risen to the challenge and adapted to this New Normal with relative ease."

Remote work has introduced its own set of challenges, but managing these has not emerged as a primary concern, indicating a successful adaptation by HR professionals to new work formats.

Empowering HR Through Continued Education and Skill Enhancement

Considering the evolving challenges and strategic demands placed on HR practitioners, a promising trend has emerged from the survey: a strong interest in continuous learning and the acquisition of specialized HR certifications. Over four-fifths of respondents express interest in earning certificates in areas such as HR Leadership, highlighting a shift toward enhancing skills beyond traditional HR roles.

Survey respondents have identified pressing concerns, including employee retention, talent acquisition, and managing burnout. Addressing these complex issues requires a sophisticated set of skills and a commitment to ongoing education. As HR professionals navigate these challenges, targeted learning opportunities become essential.

The HRCI Learning Center offers a wealth of courses designed to meet both immediate and long-term needs, providing HR teams with the tools to manage their evolving roles adeptly. By fostering a culture of continuous learning, HR professionals can equip themselves to contribute more strategically to their organizations, driving sustainable growth and adaptation in the post-COVID landscape.

HR: A Strategic Pillar in Organizational Success

Four years on from the pandemic's start, HR professionals have demonstrated resilience and adaptability, striving for greater recognition and responsibility within their organizations. As HR practitioners continue to expand their role, continuous learning and strategic involvement in business operations will be crucial for HR to solidify its place as an indispensable part of organizational growth and adaptation in the post-COVID world.