

Editorial: Still expecting the HRBP miracle?

Javier Bajer

Remember when the big dream for HR was a seat at the top table? That was supposed to be the moment HR would finally be taken seriously. No more just a “support function”, no more eye-rolls from the business. HR was going to prove its worth, speak the language of strategy, and drive real organisational value.

Eventually, Personnel Directors became CHROs. But, it appears, the problem had little to do with sitting plans. Titles changed, but the conversation didn't.

People continued to question HR's business relevance, often accusing it of being distant or, even worse, of getting in the way.

Then came the big idea, a new role: The HR Business Partner (or HRBP, for those fluent in HR-speak). HR generalists embedded in the business, positioned as a trusted advisor. This was going to prove that HR is part of the business, finally.

So, did it work?

Results? Patchy, at best. In most cases, HRBPs spend their time interpreting new policies, nudging managers to complete performance reviews, or helping employees navigate the maze of an ever-growing HR function. They're the only ones with a direct line to the technical specialists – and that becomes their value.

They are more like observers than influencers. Sitting in on leadership meetings but rarely shaping the agenda. Trusted for their helpfulness, not their challenge. It's not their fault. The model gave them proximity, not power. We wanted strategic partners. We got intermediary problem solvers for an additional layer of complexity.

While marketing talks brand and finance talks growth, HR is still too often stuck talking policy launches, eNPS scores, and the number of clicks on an internal newsletter.

Maybe the next big idea isn't embedding HR in the business, but embedding business thinking in HR.

I hope you enjoy this latest issue of SHR.

Warmly,

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