

# The Global HR Mindset - Do You Have What It Takes?

**As an HR practitioner, how do you find yourself in Global HR? In today's increasingly global business environment it may in fact be as easy as simply accepting your first HR job. Gone are the days when you first had to do a number of years in local HR before aspiring to a global HR role. Whether your first HR job will be in a small start-up or a larger organisation, chances are that you will begin your Global HR journey as soon as you walk through the front door.**

## The Importance Of Cultural Awareness

All too often, HR practitioners are expected to handle situations for which they might not be prepared for unless they have already developed some or all of the aspects of a global mindset. More and more of what is deemed as "normal" HR activities in fact involves the interaction with a very multicultural workforce and/or the movement of people across national boundaries through business travel or assignments. An appreciation of cultural differences and when these differences are important is then essential. As an HR function we also need to constantly reflect on our own cultural norms and attitudes. What cultural norms might bias our outlook, opinions, or even actions? How can we ensure that our HR practices are culturally sensitive, while minimising potential cultural bias?

The organisations in which HR practitioners work are becoming increasingly multicultural in nature, therefore cultural awareness has become a core skill even in HR roles that only years ago might have been considered local HR jobs. Talent scarcity further drives the need for HR practitioners to be culturally aware as they recruit, onboard, and support an increasingly culturally diverse workforce. Not only are the leaders and employees more culturally diverse today, but also the HR function itself. No Global HR function can become effective unless it can manage to deliver business value as a cohesive whole even if the HR function itself is culturally diverse and globally dispersed.

## Global & Cultural Effectiveness Competency

If an HR function gets stuck in a purely operational mode and/or has to constantly do

firefighting due to lack of clear strategy or well-developed processes, then it will continue to struggle to be seen as strategic and significant within the organisation. When an HR function ends up painted into a corner like that, then the opportunity for real business impact is lost. In too many organisations, the HR function is still seen as a cost centre, rather than a strategic function that can attract, develop and retain very scarce talent as well as support future business development.

What HR functions often lack in order to deliver greater business value is improved global and cultural effectiveness competency. The Global HR function must be the brain, the muscles and the heart of the organisation in that it simultaneously must anticipate the future needs of the business, while delivering on what is needed in the present, while at the same time ensuring leaders and employees alike feel a sense of community and belonging within the organisation.

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What is needed is then a confident and courageous Head of HR that from within the Executive Team can champion an HR function which at least partially is allowed to focus on creating an agile and proactive HR function. The main focus of an agile HR function is the creation and successful implementation of HR policies and processes that properly supports the global and cultural effectiveness of all launched HR activities and initiatives.

## Coaching Across Cultures For Business Success

Today as well as in the future, Global HR functions in multinational organisations of all sizes need to be change agents, and champions for the development of a global mindset among leaders and employees. The HR function, and especially L&D practitioners will be instrumental in supporting the further development of organisationwide cross-cultural knowledge, enabling their organisations to do well in international markets. Leaders need coaching from HR practitioners in order to develop the skills to nurture productive and efficient multicultural and geographically dispersed teams.

Coaches should help their coachees leverage cultural differences (professional, national, etc.) to become an asset in creating business value and new opportunities. In order for Global HR practitioners to deliver as coaches to leaders in multinational organisations, they need to themselves have access to valuable tools relating to unleashing the power of the multicultural workforce and know how to effectively adapt to culturally diverse business contexts.

All HR practitioners should in my opinion strive to incorporate a coaching approach to their interactions with global business leaders, as that generally is more effective than a pure transactional exchange of do's and don'ts based on policy documentation and employee handbooks.

## Global HR Effectiveness Requires Teamwork & Collaboration

In today's globalised world, most professional roles are becoming increasingly global. Today, I would claim an HR study programme that does not prepare future HR practitioners for increasingly globalised and complex roles would not be delivering value for its students, or for their prospective employers. In order to be effective in any HR role, there are certain core skills that you as an HR practitioner should aim to develop, which includes how to work in a distributed and diverse HR team. There will be no Global HR Effectiveness if there is no teamwork, and there will be no teamwork unless a culture of trust has been created and the lines of communication are open.

But, the relationship and network building skills required for any effective Global HR practitioner goes well beyond the HR function. In order to deliver Global HR

Effectiveness, HR practitioners need to actively collaborate with a wide variety of internal as well as external stakeholders. An equally important skill of HR practitioners in order to deliver effectively is knowing when to reach out to other internal or external specialists. A Global HR practitioner needs to know a lot in order to be a good collaborator or buyer of services. It is in situations where the HR practitioner does not know what he/she needs that there might be a mismatch in what is asked for and the knowledge that in fact was needed. Striving to ask the right questions is a skill that HR practitioners should never cease to improve.

**HR's Key Role In Creating An Agile Organisation**

The HR function has a key role to play in creating an Agile Organisation. Not only does traditional HR processes offer part of the necessary stability required as a counterpart to agility. Being a function that has needed to continuously do more with less while needing to quickly shift focus and deliver appropriate HR services based on ever-changing business needs, has over time required HR functions to become increasingly agile.

Agility can be defined as the ability of an organisation to renew itself, adapt, change quickly, and succeed in a rapidly changing,

ambiguous, turbulent environment. It is important to note that agility is not incompatible with stability-quite the contrary. Agility requires stability for most companies. Agility needs two things. One is a dynamic capability, the ability to move fast-speed, nimbleness, responsiveness. And agility requires stability, a stable foundation of things that don't change.

An Agile Organisation is even more in need of just-in-time delivery of HR services that can quickly be adapted in response to new or altered business needs. Further, an agile organisation which needs to change quickly needs a Global HR function that can help support leaders and employees navigate through the stormy waters of continuous change. So HR agility occurs when the HR function can thrive on change and get stronger by it so that the ability to change in fact becomes a source of real competitive advantage.

In summary, an HR practitioner with a Global Mindset is an asset in any organisation. Make the commitment today to strengthening your own Global HR Mindset over the summer! Start with assessing where your strong and weak points are regarding cultural awareness, global & cultural effectiveness, coaching across cultures, global teamwork & collaboration and HR agility.



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