

Human Resources Management – An Integral Vision

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If one studies Human Resources, one will notice that the field seems to be missing architects – people who are able to connect the dots and integrate the variety of HR sub-disciplines and instruments which are available. In many organizations the way HR is operating today still resembles what people were doing around 1990, when the word “Human Resources Management” started to replace the term “Personnel Management”¹. For instance, HR is the only part of business which has “escaped” the business process re-engineering movement of the 1990s. Even in the Internet Age, one notices that after the e-learning and e-recruiting hype, many companies are mainly still operating in the same ways as before the Internet, and only using the Net as a way to deliver the same messages as they delivered before.

Things can be different. For example, IBM centralized its global recruiting, and manages most of it from one location in the U.K. (and fired most of the local staff in HR). The result was that one recruiter can now hire 90 persons a year versus a sector average of 36 in 2000. Another company, BP, decided to outsource most of its HR systems. In some companies, the demand for Return on Investment (ROI) and productivity (less HR staff doing more work) are now getting louder and louder.

This paper explains why and how to build an integral and more efficient HR practice, starting from an Integral Worldview in combination with state-of-the-art technology.

The Integral Four Quadrant Approach

One of the major contributions of Ken Wilber, an contemporary American philosopher, is his approach to think at a level of abstraction at which various conflicting approaches actually agree with one another. Then Wilber poses the question: “What coherent system would in fact incorporate the greatest number of these truths?”² In this paper, we have attempted something similar for several approaches to HRM and psychology, grouping them in the four quadrants Wilber typically used for organizing seemingly conflicting theories.

Indeed Wilber (1997) introduces the Integral Vision by pointing out that some views of reality start with objective, and often quantifiable observables. This is called the *external* view (pictured as the quadrants at the right side of figure 1). At the other side we have approaches that start from introspection and interpretation, looking at consciousness and at the direct experience that each of us has. These are called the *internal* approaches (or the left side quadrants). Both sides of the spectrum are then divided in *individual* approaches, where one is looking at the parts (the Upper half of the drawing) and *collective* approaches, where one is looking at the whole (the lower half of the figure).³

In the sections that follow, we will discuss the contribution of these four quadrants to an integral vision for HRM.

¹ For instance, the main HR organization in the UK is called “Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development” (CIPD). In the US, the “Society for Human Resource Management” (SHRM) was founded in 1948 and was formerly called the “American Society for Personnel Administration” (ASPA).

² Foreword “What’s the Meaning of Integral” by Jack Crittenden in Ken Wilber (1997), “The Eye of Spirit”.

³ See for instance the introduction Ken Wilber (1997), “The Eye of Spirit” (pages 4-29)



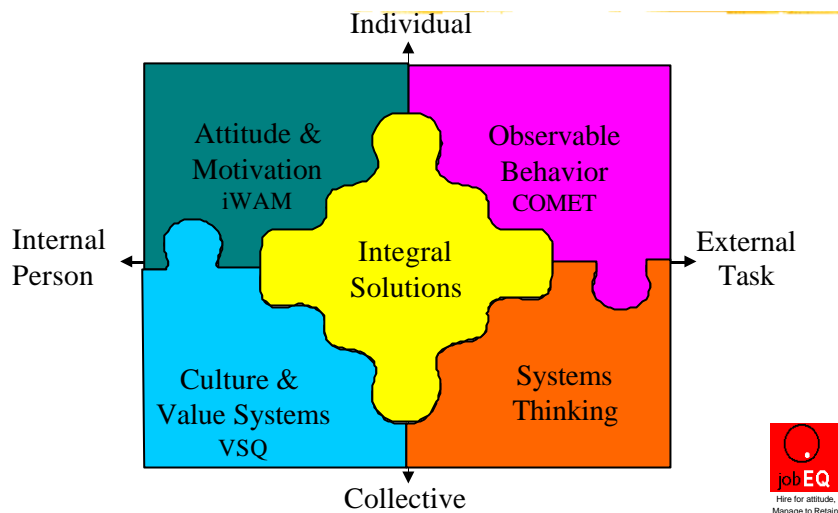


Figure 1: An Integral Approach to Human Resources

Lower Right: Systems Thinking

Until the beginning of the 1990s, one could safely say that the lower right quadrant was often overlooked when implementing new programs in organizations. But even more than 10 years after the hype of business process reengineering and the learning organization, there is still something to learn for HRM. Symptoms of a lack of a systemic view are for instance that different HR programs do not take each other into account, leading to incredible situations where the training and development department in charge of training for the organization’s High-Potentials organizes training without even being aware what the company’s competence model for high-potentials is.

Connecting all the dots will greatly enhance the effectiveness of an HRM effort. For instance, if an organization decides to set up a mentoring or coaching program, it’s recommended to brief mentors or coaches on the competence models the company is using for the target audience of these programs. Similarly, mentors and coaches should be helping the person they are working with to integrate this mentoring and coaching into their personal development plans, and hopefully the organization is planning to let the persons put their new competencies into practice, and this will be reflected at the next appraisal or when the employees get promoted. The chart below, using jobEQ’s formula for success, illustrates how all the dots need to be connected:

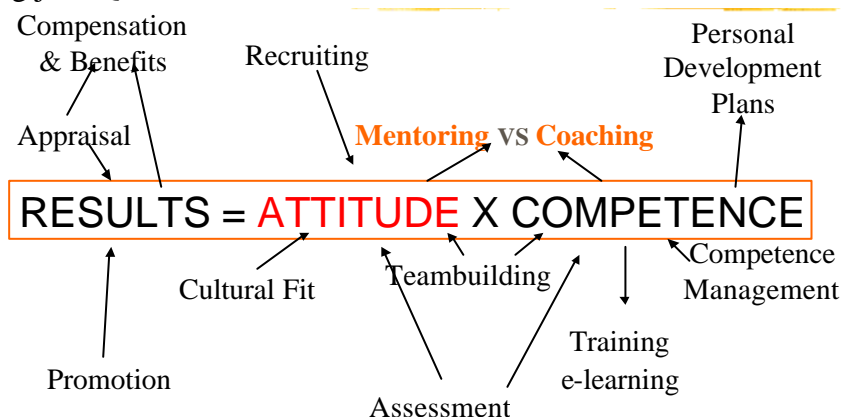


Figure 2: Bringing order to the HRM Chaos



Upper Right: The Scientific View

Much of business is looked at from the external side, including people. From this perspective, one is only interested in the observable behavior of people. Much of what is called “competencies” in HRM is based on this looking at what is observable. It is clear that competence management is an important building block of an integrated HR approach. This can happen in two ways: First, as Hamel & Prahalad (1994) argue, an organization should determine which are its core competencies related to its strategic position, thus building competitive advantage. Secondly, an organization should determine which are the important competencies for each position in the organization, of course taking into account the core competencies. The resulting competence models become the standard to be used for many HR practices, such as assessment, recruitment, promotion, training, coaching, and evaluating people. In other words, when competence management is consistently applied throughout the organization, it offers a way to connect the dots.

The mistake that is sometimes made by people designing competence models is reducing other elements such as the person’s motivational characteristics to these competencies. In such a reductionistic model, being “proactive,” “goal-oriented,” or “having attention for detail” will be seen as competencies.

The limitations of this approach become clearly visible when one sets loose statistical factoring techniques on most competency-based questionnaires. In fact, using these techniques, most of these questionnaires will show very high correlations and tend to be reduced to one factor only. This is clearly the result of a modeling error, since motivational characteristics measured by a well-designed work attitude and motivation questionnaire prove to have pretty low correlations between the different attitude elements. In other words, using an upper right method to predict upper left attitude characteristics is bound to fail.

Upper Left: Individual Consideration

While the implementation of a coaching or mentoring program in an organization includes a systemic component, doing a particular coaching and mentoring intervention starts from individual consideration. Instead of generalizing behavior, our starting point is that each person may react differently when confronted with the same event in the same context. Suppose for instance that you get a compliment from a customer about your work. Some people will feel happy about it. Others may doubt whether this comment is really meant, and get mixed feelings, given that they feel the compliment overstates what they have delivered. Others might even react that the comment is not needed and might be wondering: “What does this person want from me?”

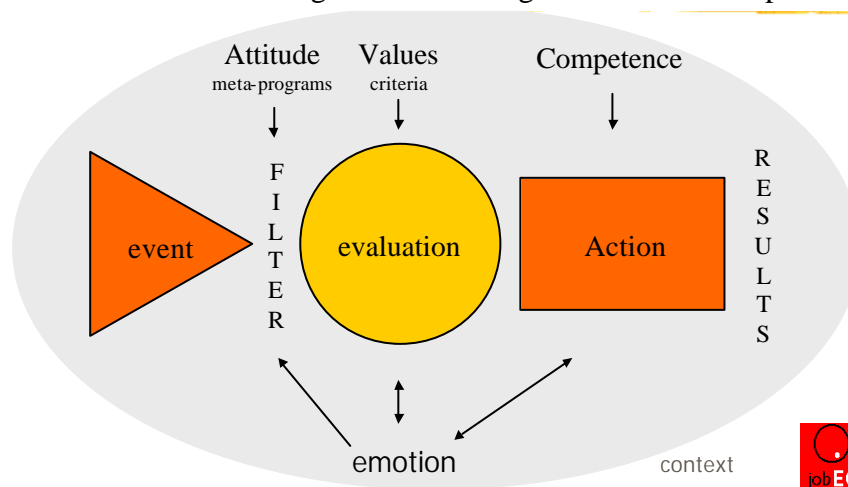


Figure 3: How do people get emotional?

The kind of response, both emotionally and in terms of external behavior, will depend on how this person filters reality. Is this the kind of person having a strong external reference? In that case, the likelihood of accepting the compliment and feeling good because of it is greater. Does a person have a strong internal reference? In that case, the person is more likely to evaluate the compliments by their own criteria and how they feel will depend more on their own evaluation.

How the person will respond will also depend on their criteria, feelings and competences, in this case for instance the question the person might be solving is “What kind of response should be given according to what they consider appropriate and polite during these circumstances?” In general, the last question can be generalized to: “In order to reach the outcome I have in mind, what works best in this context?” And if it doesn’t work, the main recommendation we have for the individual is to try something else. This way of looking at the upper left quadrant has been the focus of the book “*7 Steps to Emotional Intelligence*” (2001).

Also when doing coaching, these are exactly the kind of questions we will help the person being coached to deal with. Here is a generic framework based on the elements of figure 3:

Generic Individual Consideration Coaching format

Part 1: Take an issue you have been facing of which you don’t like your emotional response or the action you are taking.

Part 2: Exploring the issue and the response

- a) Context: What, when, where did this happen?
- b) Filters: What are you paying attention to in this situation?
- c) Criteria: What kind of evaluation (judgment) are you making about this situation? What are the criteria that underlie this evaluation?
- d) What kind of emotion does this bring along?
- e) What kind of action have you taken or do you plan to take because of this?

Part 3: Options for Change - choose any of these:

- a) Changing the filters:
Which elements did you forget to bring into the picture? (People, Things, Time, Money, Place, Activities, Information, etc.) Who is responsible? What would be another way to look at this?
- b) Changing the emotion:
 - 1) What is the message the emotion has for you?
What would be a more appropriate way to respond to that emotion?
Where is this emotion coming from (historically)? Is it relevant (Is this message linked to an emotional issue that needs to be addressed now)?
 - 2) What would be another emotion to have that would serve you better? How will that emotion influence what you are attending, what you are thinking and how you will be responding?
- c) Changing the criteria / beliefs:
What would be another way to evaluate this?
What stops you from seeing/taking this in another way?
What else is important in this context?
- d) Changing the behavior:
How else could you respond? What else could you do?
- e) Changing the context information:
How would you respond in a different context (or with another person)?
What would you attend there? What criteria would you use? What would you do differently?

Validation question: How would that make you feel?

Note: Many of the change techniques covered in parts 4 and 5 of the book “*Mastering Mentoring and Coaching with Emotional Intelligence* (2004), and most NLP change methods fit in this generic format. (e.g. reframing fits into changing the filters and/or beliefs, much of the work with states fits under “changing emotion”)

Lower Left: Culture

Apart from figuring out the competence model and taking into account individual characteristics such as work attitude and motivation, one also needs to consider the organizational culture. Approaches which will work in one organization may fail in another one. For instance, a study for the Dutch police force in 2003 showed the unwanted side effects of replacing the internal management training program by sending officers to the Dutch business schools where they enrolled in the standard MBA programs. Many of the officers complained that the managerial techniques learned in business school were difficult to apply in the police force. The main problem was that the cultural model underlying the business training is not compatible with the culture of the police force. In other words, when examining the HR systems and tools of an organization, one needs to have a way to map out the organizational culture. Similar to what Ken Wilber did in his book “*A Theory of Everything*,” we use the Value Systems model which was developed by Clare Graves⁴.

Based on extensive research, Graves proposed eight major levels or waves of human existence, of which two different ones dominate the culture of the Dutch Police force and a typical MBA program, respectively. In a business school, the main level is “StriveDrive” (E-R) where people focus rationally on their individual gains, analyzing and strategizing to prosper. This type of culture is highly achievement-oriented and tends to converge into materialistic gains. In the Dutch police force, the main level is “HumanBond” (F-S), where people put aside their personal gains for the good of the community and feelings and caring supersede cold rationality. At this level typical motivational systems from E-R, such as individual bonuses stop working. Also, there is less respect for hierarchy and officers are respected when they operate as team players.

Integral Thinking

In a nutshell, an integral HR Management aligns all HR tools with the culture and the strategy of the organization, taking into account the individual’s motivational characteristics. The advantage is that HRM will become more efficient and effective, contributing to the whole of the organization. This can be achieved through examining which competencies, attitudes and value systems are needed for various functions within the organization, and adapting the HR systems and tools to these requirements.

References

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⁴ An introduction of the Graves Value Systems model, can be found in Wilber, K. (2000), *A Theory of Everything*. A detailed explanation of the model can be found in: Clare W. Graves (2002), *Levels of Human Existence*

