



Human Resource Strategy

making the most of people

“Please send me an HR Strategy.”

HR Strategies are not like software packages; they are not off the shelf products that can simply be tweaked to fit the situation. You cannot expect to buy the answer before you have agreed what the question is.

Peter Drucker famously described how he once received a letter from a CEO asking if he would be so kind as to send him a personnel policy at his earliest convenience together with a statement of his fee. Drucker thought this was a good if unintended joke, but then reflected the joke may have been on him. The CEO had simply said what he (and many other CEOs) thought. He was like the small boy innocently declaring that the Emperor had no clothes.

Like any other aspect of corporate strategy, HR Strategy is a distillation of the agreed way forward. Unlike some other aspects, however, the personal behaviour of the top team must demonstrate the values and principles on which it is built. People say senior managers must ‘Walk the talk’ to show their commitment. These values, principles and behaviours permeate all aspects of the way the organisation works. Everything has to derive from the same source: the way investment priorities are set, new products are developed, employee communication is organised, targets are set, pay and bonuses are calculated and performance feedback is managed.

Inconsistency and insincerity stand out a mile and undermine the whole structure. Support for the HR Strategy must start with the top management team and extend through a broad range of stakeholders. Their support has to go beyond simple intellectual comprehension or emotional understanding to strongly held personal conviction.

This cannot be done at one remove, as Drucker rightly implied; it cannot successfully be done for an organisation by an external expert. The CEO and his senior team have to lead the process and engage in it. Nor will it be done over one weekend. There is a surprisingly wide variety of assumptions that we each hold about what drives other people’s behaviour, let alone our own. This is reflected in our individual beliefs about the best way to get things done, how to communicate, how to manage and even how to make decisions. These differences surface when we explore where the organisation is going and how it intends to get there. The conflicting assumptions that lead to these differences need to be talked through. Some will remain and become part of the values that underpin the new organisation, but some will need to be tailored to the new situation.

The process of working these things through produces some extra-ordinary benefits. It improves dialogue within the senior team; it gets greater clarity about the strategic direction of the organisation, its business and operations strategies; it clarifies what the group believes are important principles and values; it builds the team - and it starts the process of developing and living an agreed HR Strategy.

Human Resource Strategy Ltd
35 Piccadilly
London
W1J 0DW

Phone: +44 (0) 20 7734 7287

Fax: +44 (0) 20 7734 4561

Email: enquiries@HRStrategy.co.uk