

# HR Heads Wear More Hats in the Business

HR is now being seen as a strategic function as organisations struggle with talent-related issues

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COMPANIES are asking their people managers to morph into number-crunching business heads and handle both portfolios simultaneously. As a result, when it comes to a vacancy in a business leader's role, an HR head's chances are as good as that of the finance or marketing lead.

"In today's environment, people strategies have to be integrated with business imperatives," says Harsh Goenka, chairman RPG Enterprises. HR heads need to directly impact the business outcome innovatively, he adds.

Nearly three months ago, mid-tier ITES firm Mphasis named its chief people officer R Elango as strategic business head for emerging markets where he is responsible for application services, business process outsourcing and infrastructure service in emerging geographies like India, Indonesia, Hong Kong and the Middle East.

For Elango, this means a career spurt and the chance to be part of the CEO succession plan. "I get to eat my own medicine. This step makes me a fuller HR professional," says Elango, who was HR head for six years before taking over the new role.

A change in the mindset of companies in India could be why Indian firms look at HR today as a strategic function.

"Indian organisations have been great at a concern for tasks but have realised that in the current context, they have to ensure concern for people, which enables them to super-achieve on tasks," says Krishna Mohan, Emami, CEO, sales, supply chain and human capital.

There was a time when most CEOs or business heads would be from sales and marketing, but around five years ago, the focus shifted to finance people. "Now HR has taken centrestage at a time when most companies are grappling with peo-

## KRISHNA MOHAN

Emami

- HR HEAD
- CEO, SALES, SUPPLY CHAIN



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## SACHIN RAOLE

RPG Lifesciences

- HR HEAD
- CFO



Both finance & HR deal with resource management. For any investments in workforce, it is finance that gives the final nod

## R ELANGO

Mphasis

- HR HEAD, STRATEGIC BUSINESS UNIT HEAD



It is like handling a company within a company. It makes me a fuller HR professional as I get a multi-dimensional perspective

ple issues including attraction and retention of talent," says Executive Access MD Ronesh Puri. Adds Goenka: "In the next decade, HR will play a pivotal role in organisation-building."

Emami's Mohan has been playing a triple role for the past two years and believes this strategy integrates some of the important components of each function. His sales background meant he had to handle people on a regular basis and push them to perform, a role that matches an HR head's profile as well.

Simultaneous handling of multiple verticals by the same leader not only broadens the vision of each vertical but also helps the team grow, says Marico group CFO Milind Sarwate. This is because the sheer diversity of responsibilities forces the leader to delegate more.

"Every function has the potential to add value to the other. Also, in every vertical, there is a need to collaborate across functions and businesses. Such collaboration is facilitated by the empathy built by the cross-functional experience," says Sarwate, who was CFO, HR and finance head for almost two-and-a-half years till April 2012.

There is also an organisational gambit in giving a sales, marketing or finance head a people-centric role. After heading the finance vertical for two years in RPG

Lifesciences, Sachin Raole was asked to look into the HR role. A smart ploy on the part of the firm, since his customers remained the same. Raole, however, says he may not have been able to marry marketing and finance, which have two distinct sets of customers. Finance and HR, he says, can be merged more easily. "Both departments deal with resource management. For any investments in workforce, including compensation, finance gives the final nod and the process becomes smoother since they are under one umbrella," says Raole. He did not have any formal training in HR processes but has managed to bring in more town halls and alter performance management since he sits on the other side of the fence as well.

"Sometimes, the board will have a transformational agenda which could include restructuring or takeover. In these cases where people issues are core, there's no one better than an HR guy," says R Suresh, MD, Stanton Chase India.

At times, though, the perspective widens considerably.

Adil Shah, HR head of Essar Group, says heading the marketing and HR team for Marks & Spencer in the Middle East in the 1990s helped him improve his performance, as he was closer to his clients. It also helped him develop the next rung of leaders.