

Competitive Thinking

Helping HR deliver the true business partnership

Winning Strategies - the 'Inside' and 'Outside' Jobs



In our previous article, we argued that to create a clear business partnership role in the new economy, HR clearly needs to re-position itself – in terms of its awareness and behaviour - as a 'steward of Competitive Thinking'.

Properly developed and positioned, highly effective Competitive Thinking is an enduring source of competitive advantage.

For the company's HR function, the issues are threefold:

- 1 First, to ensure that all of the HR function's activities, priorities, processes and resources are all fully aligned with Competitive Thinking
- 2 Second, for HR to rise to the challenge of guiding and sustaining organisation-wide Competitive Thinking as an extension of HR's traditional stewardship role in areas concerning leadership and employee development, and corporate culture
- 3 Third, for senior HR people and teams to take a critical view of their own interests. The acid test question should be: 'Do I see a

clear value-adding role for myself in this new world, or would I rather be doing something else?'

In order to become the company's steward for 'Competitive Thinking', HR must overcome two hurdles.

- 1 First, there's the 'Inside Job' of transforming the HR function into the exemplar of how Competitive Thinking should be developed and managed in internal support departments.
- 2 Next comes the 'Outside Job' of extending that knowledge and insight to the rest of the organisation, guided by a Competitive Thinking strategy and structured approach.

HR Leadership by example - The 'Inside Job'

It's unlikely that the Human Resources department will ever be entrusted with stewardship of its company's Competitive Thinking development unless its own house is in order first.

- 1 The HR team that spawns a dozen high profile development programmes

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without first verifying their true value sets itself up to be branded as value-destroying

- 2 The HR team that doesn't understand how its own activities fit with the company's Key Value Drivers (KVDs) is unlikely to help, guide or inspire Competitive Thinking
- 3 The HR team with little knowledge of accelerators and bottlenecks within its own function is unlikely to be asked to participate in such investigations elsewhere in the business

Others across the organisation want to assure themselves that HR's Competitive Thinking initiatives are tangible, and can be readily applied in other parts of the organisation. Merely communicating in abstract, or facilitating directionless brainstorming can and do more harm than good. If, on the other hand, the rest of the organisation comes to perceive a highly-focused, fully commercially driven HR team with priorities, activities, goals and incentives aligned with the company's Key Value Drivers (KVD's), HR emerges as first choice for owning the company's Competitive Thinking strategy.

HR as Organisational Driver/Influencer - The 'Outside Job':

Having established the relevance and rewards of Competitive Thinking within its own function, HR is now well-positioned to perform a continuing organisational role and extend the benefits of Competitive Thinking to the broader organisation. This includes:

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Next in this Series:

What's in it for Me/My Organisation, and how do I develop my Competitive Knowledge - coming in **November 2006**

1 Cultural and Behavioural Values

Non-Competitive Thinking doesn't simply happen, but results from deeply embedded personal beliefs and values about 'How we do things in this organisation'. Until and unless the values underlying non-Competitive Thinking are fully understood and addressed, there is no enduring improvement. HR's knowledge of the history and root sources of cultural beliefs within the organisation is of paramount importance to any joint internal-external teams addressing Competitive Thinking across the business.

2 Ensuring Adoption

We have all endured the new initiative that is at first enthusiastically embraced in a well-orchestrated launch, only to fade just a few months later after the fanfare. Competitive Thinking is too important to endure such a fate. The organisation should look to rely on HR's special insights and expertise to help ensure that measures and incentives ensuring compliance (while preventing backsliding) are all in place.

3 The Internal 'Case Example'

Whilst external 'success stories' may be somewhat useful in demonstrating the importance and benefits from changes in commercial thinking and behaviour, such references are invariably subjected to 'Not Invented Here' scepticism. By emerging as the first internal group to successfully embrace Competitive Thinking, HR serves as a continuing reference point for 'How It's Done Here'.

In the next issue we look at the personal developmental implications of Competitive Thinking stewardship for the HR profession.

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