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I recently received this article from a former associate of mine who used to work for me. He is now Executive Director of Leadership Development at world-renowned Banff Centre, located in Banff National Park, British Columbia, Canada.

I thought it provided some excellent "food for thought" on how we should think about HR and how it should go hand in hand with a proactive continuous process improvement mentality.

Reinventing HR as Human Resourcefulness
By Nick Nissley

The theme of a recent HR conference – "Explore the Possibilities" - got me thinking.

My personal experience as an HR leader and my experience engaging with and listening to other HR leaders leads me to suggest we're experiencing a *crisis of the imagination* in HR. The following are some of my perspectives:

First, many leaders pay lip service to the value of HR within their organization, speaking with an actor's conviction the lines from the script: "human resources are our most valuable asset." Typically, these words are rushed into print, and included in their vision statements which are wallpapered around the office, before the print from the retreat has even dried. While the leaders are typically well-intentioned, their followers are more skeptical of their leaders' words. In fact, many simply roll their eyes and would say that their HR leaders' actions speak otherwise.

Second, even when HR is viewed positively by the organization and truly valued as a business partner, too often HR is structurally excluded from asserting its contribution and made impotent. HR may not be afforded a seat at the table, where they could truly partner with and influence the CEO and make a real impact on the organization's culture and performance.

Third, this is often the case because HR leaders believe their role is to be the organization's police officers – enforcing policies. This ineffective HR culture of being rules-bound at the expense of being values-driven is another reason why the organization's leaders may not want to partner with HR, nor see the potential value of HR in solving their problems. Too often HR's response to an organizational client's problem is to recite verse from the policy manual – essentially stating why something can't be done. Instead, the more progressive HR leaders understand that they are solution brokers, that the client doesn't need a yes or no answer – he or she needs a partner to help find a solution. One past company president that I worked for, reminded me when I worked in an HR executive role: "if it's not against our mission and values ... if it's not unethical or illegal ... then your job is to help the client find a solution – don't simply recite verse from the HR policy manual."

Fourth, the daily grind from the sort of issues that HR leaders often have to deal with may breed a cynicism or glass-half-empty mindset in those leaders. Too often, these leaders become trapped in a deficit-based view of their workplace, rather than a strengths-based perspective, where the organization and the people are seen through a glass-half-full lens.

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For example, consider the most pressing issue facing HR professionals at this time: workforce recruitment and retention. Nearly every publication and every HR practitioner is framing this as a problem to be solved – seeking to fix the *turnover problem.* However, some HR leaders are beginning to examine the problem from another vantage point. They're focusing on retention versus turnover. Consider if an organization has 25 out of 100 employees who leave the company (turnover); it also has 75 out of 100 employees who are staying (retention). While turnover views the organization's pipeline as half empty, retention views the pipeline as half full. Why do HR leaders focus so much energy on the problems – the 25 employees who left at the expense of the 75 employees who stayed? What if managers began asking the 75 retained employees what makes this a great place to work, versus asking the 25 who chose to leave why this place is so bad?

Reinventing HR as Human Resourcefulness

So, what if HR leaders weren't perceived as speaking hollow platitudes about "human resources are our most valuable asset" and instead served as valued business partners who were seen as solution-focused (and values-driven versus rule-bound), while exhibiting strengths-based leadership? My personal experience when I meet the most effective HR leaders? They are truly resourceful. They're focused on the process of generating possibilities, thinking of new things and seeing existing things in different ways.

Resourcefulness is the human capability of being able to cope with challenging situations and, as we know, our success in our work lives – especially as leaders – is defined by our ability to work through challenges (whether these are seen as problems or opportunities). Further, resourcefulness is defined by our ability to access our imagination and think and act creatively. This creative capacity provides the basis for innovation, which is needed to keep our businesses and organizations competitive in this global economy.

So, in the spirit of exploring the possibilities… what if we stopped being consumed with trying to manage human resources of the workplace, and instead focused our professional talents on developing our organizations' human resourcefulness? I hope this question provokes HR professionals and organization leaders to enter this conversation, and ***explore what is possible.***