

# Human Resource Roles in India

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*The purpose of the study is to find out the human resource (HR) roles in India replicating the model for multiple roles proposed by Conner and Ulrich (1996). Based on the data collected from 293 managers - both HR and non-HR, the study concludes that HR is playing predominantly administrative expert and employee champion roles now. But in future its predominant roles will be as a strategic partner and a change agent. The study finds that the overall quality of delivery of HR services is going to be increased. Further, no significant difference is established about the HR roles between manufacturing, service and software organisations.*

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## Human Resource Roles

Human resource (HR) function faces a diverse set of issues and challenges from both internal and external environment. Global competition, technological advancement, changing profile of employees, skill shortages, retention, downsizing, and outsourcing are some of the most common HR issues and challenges. To address the issues and to meet the challenges, HR has to play different roles. A review of literature reveals different roles proposed by different scholars. This paper makes an attempt to identify the HR roles in India replicating the model for multiple roles proposed by Conner and Ulrich (1996). A brief review of different HR roles proposed by different scholars over a period of time is presented in the first part of the paper. This is followed by a summary of evolution of HRM in India. The latter part presents the research carried out in India to find out the HR roles.

Pigors and Myers (1973) indicate that personnel administration is a line responsibility, but staff function. As it is a staff function, Flippo (1984) mentions that personnel department's roles

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are extending advices and services to line managers. Personnel/HR professionals extend their services using their expertise in HRM to the top management to evolve HR policies and procedures and help all line managers to solve employee related issues in their respective shop floors. On the other hand, Senge (1990) suggests that in order to become learning organisations, HR professionals must play the roles of coaches and mentors. Wiley (1992) classifies the HR roles under three headings - the strategic process, the legal aspects, and the operational aspects. The strategic process role is defined as consultant, assessor, diagnostician, innovator/change agent, catalyst, business partner, and cost manager. The legal aspects of the role include as auditor/controller, consultant, provider, and conciliator. Lastly, she defines the role in operational aspects as: fire-fighter, innovator/change agent, employee advocate, facilitator, policy formulator and consultant.

Ulrich (1993) proposes a conceptual framework about HR roles that adds value in an increasingly complex environment based on two main dimensions such as operational focus and strategic focus. From the juxta-position of these two dimensions, four types of HR roles emerge. They are as strategic partner, administrative expert, employee champion and change agent. Conner

and Ulrich (1996) measure this model by developing a questionnaire and administering it on executives and find that the scores are higher for employee champion and administrative expert roles and lower for strategic partner and change agent roles. Schoonover (1998) identifies three roles for HR professionals: HR product and service specialists, HR generalists, and HR strategists. Hunter (1999) assumes that HR professionals will become leaders in affecting organisational performance and will be accountable for obtaining a competitive advantage through people.

Adopting from Ulrich (1993), Kossek and Block (2000) classify HR roles into transaction, translation, transition and transformation. The transaction role refers to the routine yet essential sub-functions of HRM that assures that day-to-day tasks are carried out. The translation role refers to the communication responsibilities associated with listening and responding to employees' and customers' concerns, as well as explaining to and implementing policies established by management. The transition role refers to execution of HR activities, policies, and practices to make necessary ongoing changes to support or improve operational and strategic objectives. Under the transformation role, HR serves a leadership change agent role. Jackson and Schuler (2003) identify five key HR roles such as strategic management role, enabler and consultant role, monitoring and maintaining role, innovator role, change and knowledge facilitator role. Kahnweiler and Kahnweiler (2005) propose a role

framework based on HR professionals' emphasis on relationship and their emphasis on results. They identify nine roles such as helper, feedback provider, process observer, guide, trainer, expert advisor, collaborator, model, and director. On the other hand, Reddington, Williamson and Withers (2005) find two roles of HR. The first one is a highly skilled generalist role—of the HR business partner, who is the primary client interface and who provides leadership and support on the full range of HR issues. The second is an HR specialist role—typically in areas such as learning and development, compensation etc.

In the light of new rules for organisational success in a radically different world, Roberts and Hirsch (2005) propose the revolutionary new role of the 'chief organisation effectiveness officer' which goes well beyond today's top HR job. Borrowing the lessons and principles from product branding, Sartain (2005) suggests that HR steps into the new role of 'brand builder' within the organisation. He advocates that branding internally is not just to attract and retain employees. It is a way to bring employees together under a shared sense of mission and values. After filtering and synthesizing previous work of HR roles, Ulirch and Brockbank (2005) propose another framework for HR professionals consisting of metaphors such as employee advocate, who makes sure that the employer-employee relationship is one of reciprocal value; human capital developer, who builds future workforce; functional expert, who designs and delivers HR practices; strategic partner, who helps line

managers at all levels reach their goals; and HR leader, who is credible both within their HR function and to those outside.

### **Personnel Management / HRM in India**

In India personnel management has been of comparatively late growth, and has only developed on a wide scale since independence. Government legislation has played a vital role in the evolution of personnel management/HRM in India. The other reasons would be business acumen, economic conditions, social set up that have also contributed in shaping personnel practices (Balasubramanian 1995).

The cotton textile industry in Bombay and the jute industry in Bengal have started to employ labour welfare officers before, and during the Second World War. The interaction of Government policy and the initiative of the leading employers' associations in the textile industries brought about the rapid development of personnel management in India just before and during the War. It was the problems and the discontent which arose with the old system of recruitment through jobbers that led the Royal Commission on Labour to advocate the appointment of labour officers. Their functions as industrial relations officers were handling grievances and preventing disputes (IIPM 1962). The provision for appointment of welfare officers in factories under the Factories Act of 1948 has contributed to the growth of the institution of welfare officers in India, to look after health, welfare and safety of workers. With further develop-

ment of industrialization, the personnel officer emerged around 1960s (Kudchedkar 1979).

Venkata Ratnam and Srivastava (1991) trace the evolution of personnel management in India in five phases. The beginning phase is 1920s to 1930s. During this period the status of the department was predominantly clerical and the activities were confined to statutory welfare, and paternalistic welfare programmes. During the second stage (1940s to 1960s), the personnel profession struggled for recognition, emphasizing on introducing techniques. In the third stage from 1970s to 1980s the profession has made attempts to impress with sophistication, emphasizing on regularity conformance, and imposing standards on other functions. The period of 1990s was the promising phase of personnel profession in India with a philosophical outlook, emphasizing on human values, and productivity through people. Budhwar (2009) adds that 2000 onward is a period of rationalisation in which the outlook is strategic with emphasis on organisational performance. Over a period of time the role of personnel/ HR has been elevated from clerical to administrative, administrative to managerial, managerial to executive, and executive to strategic partner (Venkata Ratnam & Srivastava 1991, Budhwar 2009).

**Over a period of time the role of personnel/ HR has been elevated from clerical to administrative, administrative to managerial, managerial to executive, and executive to strategic partner.**

## **The Present Study**

Different typologies of HR roles in general and with specific reference to India, indicate that transition of HR roles is taking place. It may be from operational to strategic, policing to partnering, functionally oriented to business oriented, internally focused to externally focused and activity-focused to solution-focused. But there is no comprehensive empirical study in India that defines the role of HR that would help to find out what HR department does in organisations. Therefore, this study is undertaken to identify the current and future HR roles in India, replicating the model of Conner and Ulrich (1996). The respondents of the study are HR and non-HR managers working in manufacturing, service and software organisations. It also makes an attempt to identify difference in HR roles based on nature of business the organisations undertake. Further, the study attempts to assess current and future quality of HR function in India.

HR role assessment survey questionnaire developed by Conner and Ulrich is used for data collection. This contains 40 items. There are ten items which are related to strategy. They are used to measure the role of strategic partner. Another ten items focus on transformation and change. They are used to measure the change agent role. There are still ten items more in the questionnaire that are related to administrative issues of HR. They are used to measure the administrative expert role. The remaining ten items

focus on management of employee welfare. They are used to measure the employee champion role. The respondents are expected to rate each item using a five-point scale. The total score of each role may vary from 10 to 50. Thus the total score for all four roles may range from 50 to 200. This constitutes a general assessment of the overall quality of HR services within a business. Total score above 160 may be considered high, indicating a perception of high quality in delivery of HR services. Total score below 90 indicate HR services perceived as being low quality overall (Ulrich 1997).

The questionnaire was administered on HR managers and non-HR

ing (31.06%), software (27.65%), and service (41.30%) sectors in India.

Data collected from the respondents are subjected to means and standard deviations. One-way ANOVA tests are used to find out differences in the perceptions of respondents in the roles based on the nature of business. Tukey's HSD tests are used for multiple comparisons. Pearson correlation coefficients are calculated to find out the relationship between the roles.

### Present HR Roles

Results indicate that HR department is playing four multiple roles in India (Figure 1). However, the predominant role is as

**Table 1: Distribution of the Sampled Managers**

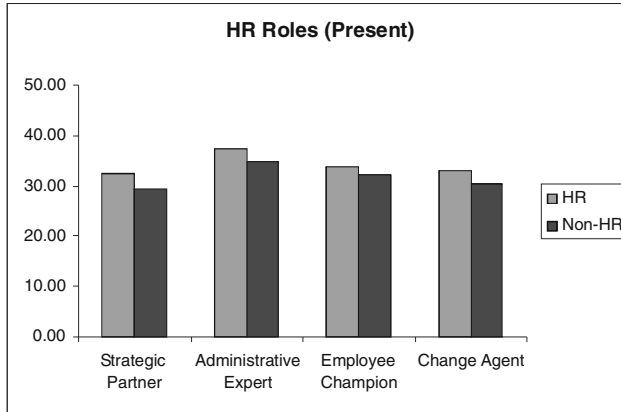
SL. No.	Category	Manufacturing sector	Software sector	Service sector	Total
1	HR managers	36 (39.56%)	34 (41.98%)	31 (25.62%)	101 (34.47%)
2	Non-HR managers	55 (60.44%)	47 (58.02%)	90 (74.38%)	192 (65.53%)
	Total	91 (31.06)	81 (27.65%)	121 (41.30%)	293 (100%)

managers in India working across the country during May-June 2007. They are requested to rate the current and future (after a decade) quality of each of the HR activities (40 items in the questionnaire) using a five-point scale (1 is low; 5 is high). A total of 293 usable filled in questionnaires are collected. 65.53% of the sampled respondents represent non-HR managers and the remaining are HR professionals. They are distributed among manufactur-

administrative expert, followed by employee champion and change agent roles. Strategic partner role has secured the lowest score. It seems that HR Managers' views

are slightly more favourable than the non-HR managers, but not at a significant level. As presented in figure 1, the present pattern of HR roles in India is: administrative expert, employee champion, change agent and finally strategic partner. The role of administrative expert has occupied first place because of its active participation in designing and delivering HR processes, and its role in monitoring administrative processes. The ef-

**Fig 1: Present HR Roles as Perceived by HR and Non-Managers**



**The present pattern of HR roles in India is: administrative expert, employee champion, change agent and finally strategic partner.**

fective-ness of HR department is measured by its ability to efficiently deliver HR processes. The second role in the order is employee champion. This might be because of active participation of HR department in listening and responding to employees and spending time on this activity. The change agent role follows the employee champion role because the role of HR department in the organisation change is at moderate level. HR does not make sure that its processes and programmes increase the organisation's ability to change to a great extent. Its participation in organisational renewal, change, or transformation is also moderate.

The strategic partner role has occupied fourth position at present. One

reason for this situation would be the relatively less participation of HR in the process of defining business strategies. The second would be that the HR is not much considered as a business partner. Whatever might be the factors associated with the findings, it can be stated that findings are consistent with the traditional HR roles and the role pattern identified by Conner and Ulrich. As the scores are below 40 on 50, it

can be stated that though HR is playing multiple roles now, the quality of the roles performed requires improvement.

The results of one-way ANOVA test and Tukey's HSD test for multiple comparisons (Table 2), indicate that there is no significant differences in the roles of HR, based on the nature of the business the organisations carry out; manufacturing, software and service organisations. As presented in Table 3, the results of the Pearson correlation co-efficients for the present four roles indicate low to moderate relationship between most of the roles. But there seems to be a significant association between the strategic partner and change agent roles as the Pearson correlation coefficient between these two variables is .80.

**HR department is going to make sure that HR strategies are aligned with business strategies.**

**Table 2: One-way ANOVA Test Result for Present HR Roles by Sector**

Present Roles	Mean Score (SD)			F-Statistic
	Manufacturing (N=91)	Software (N=121)	Service (N=81)	
Strategic partner	30.8(9.96)	29.9(8.21)	31.02(9.43)	0.445
Administrative expert	36.00(6.13)	34.64(6.25)	36.93(6.06)	3.486*
Employee champion	32.68(7.43)	32.52(7.18)	32.88(7.34)	0.058
Change agent	32.16(8.32)	30.73(7.63)	31.43(9.14)	0.786

\*significant at the .05 level.

\*Tukey's HSD test is significant for Administrative Expert visa-a-vis other group in present value

**Table 3: Present HR Roles: Pearson Correlations of Coefficient**

HR Roles	Strategic partner	Administrative expert	Employee champion	Change agent
Strategic partner		0.491**	0.458**	0.800**
Administrative expert			0.605**	0.545**
Employee champion				0.601**
Change agent				

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

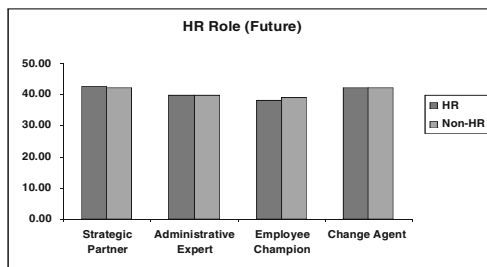
\*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**Future HR Roles**

It can be noticed that all four roles of HR department will be stronger in future (fig.2). However, it seems that the HR department is moving from its predominant role of administrative expert

to strategic partner role. HR department is going to make sure that HR strategies are aligned with business strategies. It will be helping the organisations to accomplish business goals. It will get credibility for this effort. It does not mean that HR department is not going to perform the administrative role. As perceived by the respondent HR managers and non-HR managers, administrative role of HR is also going to be stronger in future. Its role in designing and delivering HR processes will be more effective in future. It will gain more credibility by increasing productivity. The employee champion role will be stronger in future because HR department will actively participate in improving employee commitment, and it will ensure

**Fig. 2: Future HR Roles as Perceived by HR and Non-Managers**



that HR policies and programmes respond to the personal needs of employees. Coming to change agent role, it will also become stronger in future than it is at present. HR department will effectively help the organisation adapt to change. It will ensure that HR policies and programmes increase organisation's ability to change and it will actively participate in organisation renewal, change or transformation. It is important to note that there is no significant difference between HR and non-HR manager respondents with respect to future roles of HR.

The results of one-way ANOVA test and Tukey's HSD test for multiple comparisons (Table 4) reveal that there is no significant difference in the future HR role pattern in manufacturing, service and software organisations. A slight difference may be identified based on the mean scores. Strategic partner role, which is the least role at present has occupied first place for future between the four roles. This is followed by change agent, administrative expert and employee champion roles.

As presented in Table 5, the results of the Pearson correlation coefficients for the future four roles indicate low to moderate relationship between most of the roles. But there seems to be a significant association between the strategic partner and change agent as the Pearson correlation coefficient between these two variables is .74.

### Overall Quality of HR Services

Table 6 reflects overall mean scores of all 40 items put-together. The data indicate that the present quality of HR services perceived by the respondents of the study is 'moderate' as the average mean score is 131 on 200. The positive factors that have contributed for this situation would be: active participation of HR in designing and delivering HR process, its ability to efficient delivery, its work to monitor administrative process, and the time spent by HR on operational issues. The impediments for lack of high quality of HR services would be: little participation of HR in the process of defining business

**Table 4: One-way ANOVA Test Result for the Future Roles by Sector Type**

Future Roles	Mean Score (SD)			F- Statistic
	Manufacturing (N=91)	Software (N=121)	Service (N=81)	
Strategic partner	43.57(5.22)	41.45(7.80)	42.33(6.01)	2.668
Administrative expert	39.77(6.13)	38.97(5.82)	40.53(5.97)	1.698
Employee champion	38.10(7.14)	38.76(6.55)	39.46(6.69)	0.860
Change agent	42.73(5.63)	42.00(6.34)	41.91(5.60)	0.521

\*significant at the .05 level.

**Table 5: Future HR Roles: Pearson Correlations of coefficient**

HR Roles	Strategic partner	Administrative expert	Employee Champion	Change agent
Strategic partner		0.359**	0.264**	0.746**
Administrative expert			0.651**	0.433**
Employee champion				0.474**
Change agent				

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

strategies, little time spent by HR on strategic issues, its inability to help to make strategy happen; and it is not seen as a business partner. Finally, it is not very active in business planning. Interestingly, it could be seen from the data that the overall quality of HR services is going to be 'high' (163 on 200) after a decade as perceived by the respondents. The reasons for this situation would be: measuring HR effectiveness based on its ability to help employees meet personal needs, participation of HR in improving employee commitment, and in the process of defining business strategies, and its help for the organisation to accomplish its goals. As indicated in table 6, the mean scores show slightly more positive perception of HR managers as compared to non-HR managers. The mean scores further indicate slight edge of manufacturing sector in the present quality of HR service and the same can be seen in service sector with respect to future quality of HR services.

### Conclusions & Implications

The study leads to the conclusion that HR professionals play multiple roles. The present HR role pattern is as admini-

strative expert, employee champion, change agent and strategic partner. HR is playing predominately administrative expert and employee champion roles now. But in future its predominant roles will be as strategic partner and change agent. There is a significant association between the change agent and strategic partner roles. Interestingly, there are no significant differences in the perception of HR managers and non-HR managers. This disproves the common belief that the HR professionals have a tendency to rate HR activities more favourably than the non-HR managers. Further, no significant difference is established about the HR roles between manufacturing, service and software organisations. HR roles are going to become stronger in future. All four roles will be best carried out in organisations in future. The study implies that the expectations from HR are increasing. By combining strong multiple roles, HR is going to become central in

**No significant difference is established about the HR roles between manufacturing, service and software organisations.**

Table 6: Overall Mean Score for HR Services

Item No.	Present				Future			
	HR	Non-HR	Average	SD	HR	Non-HR	Average	SD
1	3.55	3.10	3.33	0.22	4.35	4.30	4.33	0.02
2	3.26	3.11	3.19	0.07	3.97	4.01	3.99	0.02
3	3.33	3.30	3.32	0.02	3.75	3.90	3.83	0.07
4	3.40	3.26	3.33	0.07	4.22	4.27	4.25	0.02
5	2.91	2.66	2.79	0.13	4.06	4.07	4.07	0.01
6	4.22	3.77	4.00	0.23	4.24	4.19	4.22	0.02
7	3.44	3.24	3.34	0.10	4.05	4.07	4.06	0.01
8	3.27	3.01	3.14	0.13	4.20	4.18	4.19	0.01
9	3.71	3.28	3.50	0.21	4.43	4.43	4.43	0.00
10	3.56	3.34	3.45	0.11	4.00	4.06	4.03	0.03
11	3.27	3.20	3.24	0.03	3.75	3.94	3.85	0.09
12	3.40	3.22	3.31	0.09	4.22	4.31	4.27	0.04
13	3.00	2.88	2.94	0.06	4.12	4.06	4.09	0.03
14	3.89	3.65	3.77	0.12	4.09	4.22	4.16	0.07
15	3.21	3.00	3.11	0.11	3.71	3.77	3.74	0.03
16	3.33	3.02	3.18	0.16	4.24	4.15	4.20	0.04
17	3.05	2.72	2.89	0.17	4.16	4.11	4.14	0.02
18	3.68	3.53	3.61	0.08	3.67	3.67	3.67	0.00
19	3.38	3.24	3.31	0.07	3.93	4.06	4.00	0.07
20	3.24	2.93	3.09	0.16	4.29	4.19	4.24	0.05
21	2.99	2.74	2.87	0.12	4.25	4.22	4.24	0.02
22	3.72	3.52	3.62	0.10	3.73	3.64	3.69	0.04
23	3.67	3.50	3.59	0.09	4.00	4.07	4.04	0.04
24	3.24	3.05	3.15	0.09	4.13	4.22	4.18	0.04
25	3.07	2.78	2.93	0.15	4.18	4.14	4.16	0.02
26	4.18	3.77	3.98	0.21	4.39	4.35	4.37	0.02
27	3.60	3.51	3.56	0.05	3.99	4.18	4.09	0.10
28	3.35	3.08	3.22	0.14	4.26	4.26	4.26	0.00
29	3.49	3.09	3.29	0.20	4.35	4.33	4.34	0.01
30	3.79	3.56	3.68	0.12	3.74	3.58	3.66	0.08
31	3.30	3.03	3.17	0.13	3.56	3.66	3.61	0.05
32	3.19	2.93	3.06	0.13	4.29	4.19	4.24	0.05
33	3.39	3.07	3.23	0.16	4.34	4.28	4.31	0.03
34	3.61	3.46	3.54	0.07	3.88	3.75	3.82	0.07
35	3.17	3.10	3.14	0.03	3.67	3.80	3.74	0.06
36	3.20	3.01	3.11	0.10	4.15	4.24	4.20	0.04
37	3.40	3.10	3.25	0.15	4.31	4.37	4.34	0.03
38	3.45	3.16	3.31	0.14	4.04	4.17	4.11	0.06
39	3.32	3.08	3.20	0.12	3.62	3.73	3.68	0.05
40	3.38	3.07	3.23	0.16	4.25	4.21	4.23	0.02
Total	136.61	127.07	131.84		162.58	163.35	162.97	
Overall	3.42	3.18	3.30		4.06	4.08	4.07	

**Table 7: Overall Quality of HR Services**

Sector	Present			Future		
	HR (N=101)	Non-HR (N=192)	Average	HR	Non-HR	Average
MANUFACTURING	139.17	126.62	132.90	161.28	166.05	163.67
SOFTWARE	134.19	125.55	129.87	162.32	160.71	161.52
SERVICE	135.88	129.64	132.76	164.12	164.32	164.22
Overall	136.41	127.27	131.84	162.57	163.69	163.13

gaining competitive advantage through people. It is going to be integrated with the top management to ensure results. HR has to perform multiple roles consistent with the expectations of its stakeholders. HR professionals should continue to acquire knowledge, skills and abilities that are required to meet the expectations. HR professionals may master the competencies such as business knowledge, HR delivery skills, HR technology, strategic contribution and personal credibility as suggested by Ulrich and Brockbank (2005) to perform the multiple roles.

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