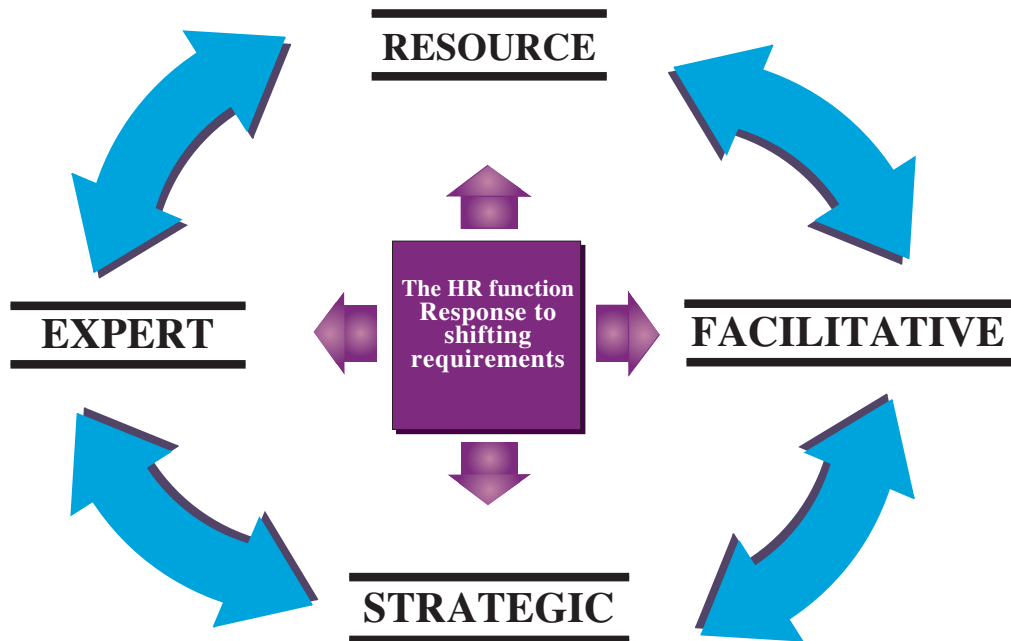


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# The Shifting Role of HR

## WorkStyle Patterns® Report

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## THE SHIFTING ROLE OF THE HUMAN RESOURCE FUNCTION

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### ■ HOW SHOULD THE ROLE BE REDEFINED?

Should there be a specific role for Human Resources? Or are HR activities shifting from administrative and based within a functional arena to activities that are blended within the operating areas? Or, even more ambiguous, are HR activities being integrated throughout the organization in a strategic manner?



Since 1983, The McFletcher Corporation has tracked the evolution of work requirements in different industries and professions. The **WorkStyle Patterns**<sup>®</sup> (**WSP**<sup>™</sup>) *Normative Database* indicates that the work performed by HR functions has changed nominally during this time and, in fact, has shifted to a much lesser degree than that of other professions such as engineering and customer service.

However, customer expectations regarding how HR functions should respond to operating requirements have shifted considerably as evidenced by WSP<sup>™</sup> data. Those performing HR activities are aware of the need to be more adaptive and strategic in response to their customers. At the same time, first- and second-level HR managers expect more specialized expertise and technical services from these same HR employees.

How then do HR professionals meet both expectations – their customers' needs for strategic adaptivity and their managers' requirements for specialization? Even more importantly, how *should* HR functions be structured? The same dichotomy that employees experience on a daily basis is seen on a more global level within both organizations and the larger HR community.

McFletcher consultants have found that organizations that address this dichotomy between strategic adaptivity and specialization carry out more effective HR activities and ultimately contribute to increased productivity. Conversely, organizations that assume a traditional personnel approach and fail to address this dichotomy are likely to become restricted to performing a narrow range of administrative services. Alternatively, these organizations may find their HR functions serving multiple masters by being responsible for all administrative activities while also assuming a strategic position. As a consequence, the HR function may suffer from a lack of clarity or vision.

## ■ RESOURCES AND THEIR CONSISTENT THEMES

Various resources were utilized to determine what demands are placed upon HR functions, the nature of the resulting dichotomies and how these dichotomies influence the role of HR functions. The resources utilized include:

- Individuals in high-level HR positions, such as executive vice presidents and senior organizational development specialists.
- External consultants who work with HR functions.
- Research publications addressing HR activities.
- **WorkStyle Patterns® (WSP™)** Normative Database results regarding HR professionals and positions.

### **Four consistent themes emerged:**

1. In the long term, customers prefer a more strategic partnership with HR functions and see this as necessary for organizational survival. Yet, on a daily basis, they tend to request immediate *administrative services*, thus presenting ambiguous expectations.
2. There is confusion on everyone's part – executives, customers, and HR and line employees – about how to make the shift to include a more *strategic approach*.
3. HR activities must be broader, more fluid and more flexible in order to meet the economic and technical requirements of organizations in the future. Yet those in HR functions report a lower preference to be flexible and responsive than the general workforce, and a higher preference to have influence over organizational goals and results.
4. There exists a shared perception of the need for a role shift, yet there is a lack of resource allocation and commitment among HR functions to make the shift, particularly in relation to the purpose, role, scope and activities of HR. This could be described as "more talk than action." WorkStyle Patterns® (WSP™) data reveal that the role shift to a more strategic approach actually decreased between 1995 and 2000.

For the full ***Shifting Role of HR WorkStyle Patterns®*** report, contact us at [mcfletcher@mcfletcher.com](mailto:mcfletcher@mcfletcher.com), (480) 991-9497 (US phone number) or Toll Free: 1-866-WKALIGN (1-866-952-5446).

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