

## Analysis of An Evolving HR Shared Services Model in a Software Product-based Company

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### Abstract

*The HR shared services model is one of the most implemented models in the present-day organisations. The central idea is to divide the functions based on nature and expertise and have a HR shared services centre as the support unit for all the functions. However, based on the organisational structure, resource allocation, and other constraints, many companies have developed a derived form of HRSS model in the organisations. This study tries to analyse the evolving HRSS model in a product-based company and the factors contributing to the evolution and implementation of the model. The main focal point would be analysing the benefits of having the HRSS team and the challenges faced by the team on the long term. **Design/methodology/approach:** It is a case study-based research based on observations, interview, and focus group discussions conducted among the employees. **Findings:** There are benefits of having a HRSS team as well as there are challenges faced by the HRSS team. A new model is under review which could help in improving the effectiveness of the HRSS model as well as enhancing the employee experience. The new model is promising as it offers to segregate the tasks and track the work allocated and seems like a perfect mix to the HR automations in process in the company research. **Limitations/implications:** The study revolves around the observations in one company and may not be applicable to other companies with varying employee size, organisational structure, cost and time factors, and culture. **Practical implications:** This study can help organisations reframe the HRSS model based on the needs and environment of the organisation to maximise efficiency, effectiveness, and employee experience and thereby leverage the HR function in the company. **Originality/value:** Case study-based researches have been scanty in this area especially in the current VUCA world. This study provides insights into redeveloping the HRSS model based on the organisational needs and the considerations to be looked upon while implementing a HRSS model in the organisation.*

**Keywords:** Cost optimization, efficiency, employee experience, HR operations, HRSS, HR shared services, organisational effectiveness

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### INTRODUCTION

The HR department has evolved over the years from the administrative partner to a complete business partner. Over the last 30 years, HR organizations have gone through several transformations, moving from the personnel department to an operational role or HR as a service centre to one focused on driving talent outcomes and finally becoming a partner in strategy. Most companies are heavily focused on building integrated programmes to attract, retain top people, operate a compelling employment brand, improve and align the performance process, and better manage and transform the organization.

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With the introduction of HR information systems, most tasks are system-driven, with fewer resources spent on operational activities. This has led to more and more implementation of the HR Shared Services model, which aims at lesser cost and maximum efficiency of the HR function in the organization. This study aims to understand the functioning of a new HRSS model in a product-based Information Technology MNC and analyse its benefits that do away with the significant problems of any HRSS model.

In the last few years, the delivery of the human resource function has undergone considerable changes, especially within large multi-national corporations. Traditionally, the typical HR structure in a large IT MNC starts with a small team at the corporate level responsible for strategic issues. Most of the operational HR tasks are carried out at the national level. This function is often delegated to the branch-office level, supported by a small on-site HR department. However, the new trend in recent years has been establishing HR shared services centers that deliver these functions more centrally, and often more remotely, from the firm's subsidiaries. In terms of user orientation, there are two broad types of HR shared services. The first is shared services set up by large organizations to provide HR services to their own organization and external client organizations as an outsourcing business. The second type of HR shared services refers to those setups where multi-national or multi-site organizations aim to restructure their HR service provision through decentralization and create an internal market system. (Cooke, 2006) [1].

### **ULRICH'S THREE-LEGGED STOOL CONCEPT**

The HR Shared Services model loosely derives its terminology from Ulrich's three-legged stool model of HR. Ulrich (1995) [2] suggested that the complete HR function separates into three fragments in large organizations. Shared service activities should be focused on a call-center kind of function with a supporting intranet facility to provide administrative and essential support functions to the remaining business. The Business partners refer to the individuals or small teams who work closely with the managers or leads of the business units or different project teams on key initiatives and specific change management. Finally, centers of expertise act as sources of critical technical knowledge on resourcing, reward, employment relations, etc., and develop core policies while providing crucial support to business units and shared services. At the top of the three-legged model, according to Ulrich, should be a small, corporate HR team that will be responsible for all the functions as a whole and provides strategic direction to the organizational decisions.

The shared services model addresses the following five management concerns: productivity, reengineering, globalization, service, and technology. The productivity demands have mandated that manager do more with fewer resources through improved efficiency and reduced costs. The costs were reduced significantly from the efficient use of human resources. Shared service organizations improve productivity by being both shared and services simultaneously. First, by sharing services, managers may eliminate redundancies, duplications, and other overlapping work, improving productivity as fewer employees do similar or more work outputs. Second, by making the "user the chooser" of the services provided, unnecessary services are discontinued (Ulrich, 1995).

### **THE EVOLUTION OF SHARED SERVICES MODEL**

Many companies began their shared services model journey in a decentralized model, gradually moving into a centralized and standardized model and then finally adapting a complex and global-facing model across the globe.

As per literature presented by Collier et al., (2017), the different models identified; firstly, the decentralized model refers to companies that do not have an exact shared services area. COEs and HRBPs are responsible for delivering HR services to employees. Secondly, the centralized and standardized model is the next level of evolution in most cases. In this stage, the companies have designed an HRSS centre and provide transactional HR services in many areas such as payroll,

benefits, and job leaves. The services are provided to the employees in a standardized manner. Thirdly, the final and current evolution is the complex and global model. At this stage, the companies have included different HR functions and activities into their HRSS centres, such as compensation, recruiting, and performance management. The HRSS in this model stage has developed a global process and has also incorporated and modified as many repeatable transactions from COEs/HRBPs as possible, thereby standardizing them.

Petković et al., (2014) say that HRSS should be considered part of the HR function design evolution that best integrates the advantages of modern technology and standardization. The idea that the needs of the employees and management should be satisfied in the best way. With the increasing demand for cost optimization, increased efficiency in the processes, and the need for customer-specific solutions, HRSS provides the best structure and smooth implementation [3].

### **HRSS ADAPTATIONS IN VARIOUS ORGANIZATIONS**

Boglund et al., (2011) studied the journey of 7 Swedish organizations from theory to practice of HR transformation as they adopt and adapt the model. All seven of the organizations adopted the HR transformation as a standard design. Management consultants played an essential role in this process. HR shared service centres were set up, the local HR staff was reduced drastically, and the remaining function of the HR business partners became less critical. Also, during the adaptation process, various solutions came about, some of which were innovative [4].

In another study, it was found that the freshness of the implementation can lead to confusion among the employees and lead to a decrease in overall value creation (Meijerink et al., 2013). It took a considerable amount of time for the adaptation to be in place and gain employee acceptance and help in its promised transactional offerings [5, 6].

### **BEING FUTURISTIC**

The findings of the study conducted by Cooke (2006) suggest that the initiative's implementation displayed several operational problems typical in change management [1]. These problems have reduced the quantity and the quality of services for both employees and line managers, and they have led to rising levels of dissatisfaction. Also, Transactional HR services are also observed as a hygiene factor in a classic work environment. They do not intensify end-user/employee satisfaction once their quality exceeds a specific limit. Still, they may lower satisfaction if delivered inadequately (Boselie and Paauwe, 2005) [7]. Another argument is that many organizations have ignored the talent management agenda and have missed a significant opportunity to contribute to commercial value in the organization (Boroughs, 2018) [8].

While a focus on the Ulrich model for HR has produced noticeable benefits in the quality and efficiency of HR operations, the benefits have not rolled into the other parts of the model. There still lies gaps in these studies and have not been tested in the current work environment under an observational methodology. Further, a holistic approach has not been taken in a single study wherein all the contributors of the HR department have been consulted to understand the value addition and the challenges of adopting an HRSS model. This study helps understand the evolution of the model in a software product-based company and understand the changes made to the model and evaluate how a new model is implemented in the company.

### **WEIGHING THE PROS AND CONS**

The HR Operations team, the HRSS team, becomes the common support to the other HR functions in most companies. They are the custodian for the employee data, policyholders, and change implementers at the organization level. However, due to the multitude of responsibilities assigned to them, prioritizing and tracking the work becomes cumbersome for the team. Some significant challenges the HR Operations team faces include a) Lack of resources in terms of time and people, b) Lack of career growth and diverse opportunities, and c) Lesser recognition given to work done.

The main focus point is the workload that is not structured well and tracked correctly. Unless this happens, the team cannot concentrate on all the tasks and cannot be effective. Also, in the long run, employee experience might be compromised. Compromising employee experience will be a failure in the HRSS model, which aims to optimize work. Hence there is a need for new interventions and changes that can support the HRSS functions in companies.

### ABOUT THE COMPANY

The company is a leading cloud product and service provider headquartered in the US. It has over 6000 employees worldwide. Over the last 11 years since its inception, it has tried to unify IT operations and bring frictionless application mobility across different cloud environments. It integrates private, public, and distributed clouds and empowers IT to deliver applications and data that power their businesses.

With offices worldwide, the operations are divided into four regions: Asia, Europe, India, and the US. Each centre has its process and procedures with a hybrid organizational structure of reporting. This allows more flexibility in terms of responsibilities.

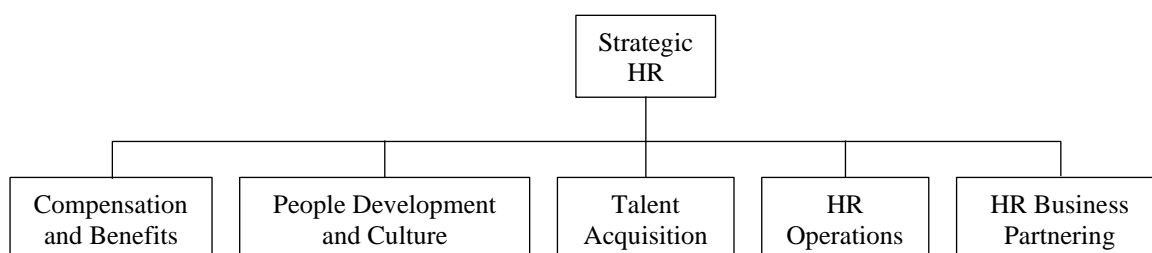
### HR MODEL IN THE COMPANY

As shown in Figure 1, the compensation and benefits, people development and culture, talent acquisition, HR Operations, and HR Business Partnering are the sub-functions of HR in the organization. At the global level, each role is led by a director, supported by managers at the regional level. The organization moved to a global shared services model last year, with implementation in progress. The structure is given in the Figure 1.

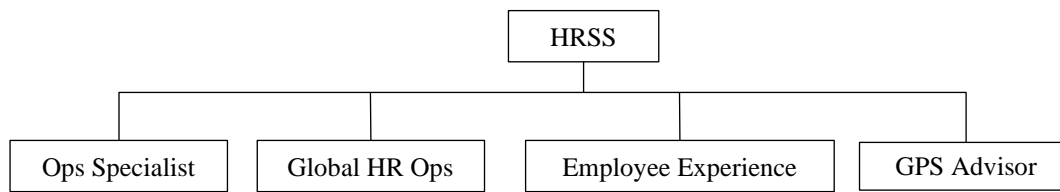
The Compensation and Benefits is responsible for actively forming, enforcing, and administering pay and other employee benefits based on business relevance and company policies. The People Development and Culture is the learning and development center that is also in charge of the organization's cultural initiatives, the department's primary goal is to improve the learning environment and assist employees in their career development. The Talent Acquisition department is in charge of recruiting, allocating, and positioning the required talent in the business regularly, according to the company's needs. The HR Operations do the pre-hire, onboarding, payroll administration, internal query handling, HR information system management, off-boarding procedures, policy implementation, employee engagement events, and documentation of the responsibilities. The HR Business Partnering must collaborate with business units to assist in strategic employee planning and management, performance management, and off-boarding agreements as appropriate, policy development, and team requirement mapping.

### THE NEW MODEL FROM HR OPERATIONS TO GLOBAL PEOPLE SERVICES (GPS) IMPLEMENTED

With task bundling, specialization-based divisions, and efficient management, the HRSS model has been very transformative for the organization. However, some potential issues needed to be addressed. The situation became more complicated when a proposal was made to relocate its operational wing worldwide to India to create a global HRSS center in one country that would



**Figure 1.** HR services.



**Figure 2.** New HR shared services.

optimize and unify the process. As previously stated, the HR operations team is in charge of administrative duties, employee experience, and support HRBP in each region. These responsibilities can be delegated when the team becomes global. As a result, a new model was created to improve the functions as shown in Figure 2.

In the new HRSS, the team involves the Operation Specialist with critical duties of the Operations to the operational tasks that are unique to the region, such as documentation, on boarding, audits, and other miscellaneous activities. The Global HR Operations function's responsibilities include global payroll, HRIS, automation, benefits administration, documentation, etc. The Employee Experience team's primary emphasis will be on query handling, wellness services, and other people management activities. The Global People Services Advisor's key responsibility includes handling the Global People Services Advisor to collaborate with the centers of excellence and HR Business Partners to develop ways to increase the efficiency of HR shared services and improve employee support. Owing to the division of roles based on specialized tasks to be performed, this model is expected to increase the shared service model's success and productivity while also reducing the workload of HRSS team members. In the long run, this should make it easier for other HR departments to collaborate with the HRSS team more organized.

The resources were also focused on improving the HR self-service portal in tandem with the function's restructuring. Enabling HRSS makes it easier for employees to look for answers to their questions and get the details they need. They can also submit tickets for any additional questions, which will be monitored and resolved by the HRSS team in order of priority. According to a survey conducted employees' preference for using the HR portal rather than contacting the HRSS team increased by 60%. This results in a better employee experience and better teamwork organization, contributing to increased productivity, which is the ideal situation [9, 10].

## TEACHING NOTES

### Learning Objectives

Students should be able to understand the evolution and implementation of Human Resources Shared Service model in detail:

1. Understand and critically analyse the HR Shared Service models used in organizations.
2. Examine the applicability of an HR model in a company based on the locations of operation, organizational culture, and organizational goals
3. Evaluate the HR Shared service model and identify the advantages and disadvantages of implementing them in organizations;
4. Design HR structures that complement the strategic intent of the organization

### Target Audience

Graduate and Undergraduate students pursuing courses in the different management areas, especially Human Resource Management or professionals interested in Organisational restructuring, Change management, or Organisational effectiveness.

## RELEVANT THEORIES FOR DISCUSSION

HR shared service model is derived form of Ulrich's Three-legged Stool Concept. According to Ulrich, the complete HR function separates into three fragments in large organizations. Shared service

activities should be focused on a call-center kind of function with a supporting intranet facility to provide administrative and essential support functions to the remaining business. The Business partners refer to the individuals or small teams who work closely with the managers or leads of the business units or different project teams on key initiatives and specific change management. Finally, centers of expertise act as sources of critical technical knowledge on resourcing, reward, employment relations, etc., and develop core policies while providing crucial support to business units and shared services. At the top of the three-legged model, according to Ulrich, should be a small, corporate HR team that will be responsible for all the functions as a whole and provides strategic direction to the organizational decisions.

### Case Synopsis

The company is specialized in IT cloud-based products and has been in the industry for over 11 years. It is also a market leader in the area of its offerings. With its offices spread out into 4 regions, namely the US, India, Europe, and Asia, more than 14000 customers in over 90 countries, and 6000 plus employees, the company has created a mark for itself in cloud infrastructure. The company has a hybrid organizational structure focusing on maintaining a flatter hierarchy and giving the employees the space to develop, grow and learn. Over the years, the structure has changed to accommodate the industry's requirements and the company. We understand that there is a need to look into new models to meet the changing times. Through this case study, we understand the HRSS model adopted by the company and its benefits derived from it. The HR functions in the company are divided into sub-functions, namely Compensation and Benefits, People Development Centre, Talent Acquisition, HR Operations, and HR Business Partnering. Each function has a director heading at the global level followed by managers leading at regional levels. The company shifted to a global shared services model last year, with implementation in progress.

The company had two considerations to look into; a shift of the HRSS team to a global People Services team centred in one location and addresses any possible challenges of the HRSS team in general. A shift to a global team can only be possible when the efficiency of the team is enhanced. The HRSS team is the common support to the other functions. They are the custodian for the employee data, policyholders, and change implementers at the organization level. The main issue they face includes time and scope constraints and lesser resource allocation. They also identified that for implementing a global model successfully, there is a need to restructure the HRSS team to limit the work within the scope and lead to better time and resource allocation. Hence a new model was proposed. This model is expected to improve the performance and efficiency of the shared service model and reduce the workload of the employees of the HRSS team. This may happen due to the segregation of roles based on specialized tasks to be performed. In the long term, this should also help the other HR teams collaborate with the HRSS team in a more structured manner.

### TEACHING PLAN AND TIMING

The case study needs to be given in advance to the students; later the instructor discusses the concept of shared service. The instructor links the concept of HRSS with the progress of the company, can emphasis on the efficiency that model brings to the company. The discussion flow follows the four questions discussed in the teaching note, the instructor can plan allocation of time given in the Table 1. The time allocation is given for 90 minutes, the instructor could vary the timings as applicable to the class timings and the time availability.

**Table 1.** Allocation of time.

Introduction to the concept of HRSS	10 minutes
Explain the criticality of HRSS for the business	15 minutes
Question and answer	40 minutes
Key supporting factor for HRSS	15 minutes
Conclusion with key learning	10 minutes

### Case Analysis Applied Questions

HRSS brings the apparent difference to the team efficiency that is working on it, this difference is notable compared to other traditional HR teams. The Table 2 represents the task performed, description and the support that HR function gets.

**Table 2.** Benefits derived by HRSS.

S.N.	Task	Description	Support to Function
1.	Payroll and benefit Administration, review and audit	Passing on the pay slip and benefit details to the finance team monthly after examining the applicability and exceptions, auditing the records to ensure no errors and duplication, and reviewing the payroll with the compensation team	Compensation and Benefits
2.	Pre-hire documentation, onboarding, and off-boarding formalities	<i>Pre-hire:</i> We collect the recruits' details via the online recruitment portal for new hires, auditing the data after document verification, feeding it to the employee database, sending out the initial emails to the new joiners, and ensuring that all information regarding joining has been passed. <i>On-Boarding:</i> Conducting the onboarding process from New Hire Orientation, assigning work buddies, providing the new joiners kits and goodies, educating about the company and its inception, setting the organizational culture in the recruits, and breaking the ice to ensure a smooth transition to the project assigned. <i>Off-boarding:</i> Assisting the Exit interview, initiating withdrawal of employee privileges, documentation check, and ensuring a hassle-free exit process to the employee leaving the company.	TA team and HRBP
3.	Managing the HRIS in the organization	The company uses an HR information system for practical employee experience and monitoring, which serves as the platform for all data exchange, including absence management, payroll, benefits, and even learning and development initiatives. The management of the HRIS platform is done by the HR Operations team and ensures that the process is smooth and streamlined.	HRIS team
4.	Facilitating performance reviews	Support in terms of data facilitation and feeding it in the online portal to ensure participation of all the employees.	HRBP
5.	Employee engagement initiatives	Conducting mandatory awareness sessions, initiating wellness plans, other office activities for team building and enhancing workplace experience	People Development and Culture
6.	Policy implementations	All the new policies are passed on to the employees via the HRSS team. Hence, they keep track of all issues related to policies and direct the queries to the concerned department continuously	Corporate HR
7.	Employee data custodian	They keep track of all employee data and ensure the validity and applicability of the data from time to time via emails and notices. Also, they provide all the data are in alignment with the company policies and legal requirements.	HRIS
8.	Supporting the HR automation process	As the company moves towards automation in HR, many processes need to be streamlined, tested, and broken down for simplification. HRSS team helps in the process to ensure that employee requirements are met and provide an effective transition to the workflow for the employees.	HRIS and HRBP

### ***What are the Possible Common Challenges for Any HRSS Team?***

HRSS team is the employee-facing unit of HR and is the primary guardian for employee experience and support. The employees reach out to the HRSS team for any grievance or queries, and any company policy or procedural changes reach the employees via the HRSS team. Hence, the HRSS team cannot compromise the employee experience unless it is assigned to another team.

However, due to the multitude of responsibilities assigned to them, prioritizing and tracking the work becomes cumbersome for the team. From a focus group discussion conducted, the concerns raised by the HR Operations team include:

- Lack of resources in terms of time and people
- Lack of career growth and diverse opportunities
- Lesser recognition is given to work done.

When we deep dive into these concerns, we can find many more consequences. Some of them are:

- Career plateauing
- Lesser career growth and learning opportunities
- Lesser work-life balance
- Shortage of resources
- Lack of clarity in goal setting
- Insufficient recognition and rewards for the work done

Hence, it becomes essential that the challenges are considered in companies. The new model implemented is expected to help the teams improve in terms of time, scope, and quality of work.

### ***Evaluate the HR Shared Service model and Identify the Advantages and Disadvantages of Implementing them in Organizations***

The HRSS provides the one-point access to the employees, it helps better data management that saves time and cost. The regular notifications on the actions help users to take on time actions. The HRSS streamline the HR process, it standardises the HR workflow to seamlessly integrate various departments.

#### *Advantages*

- Cost and time saving
- Better efficiency
- Better productivity
- Better employee engagement
- More alignment with the overall strategic intent of the organisation

#### *Disadvantages*

- Shared services team may feel the tasks are monotonous and provide less opportunity to grow due to operational nature of tasks
- Might take time to implement based on the structure of the company

### ***Design HR Structures that Complement the Strategic Intent of the Organization***

This is the new model we talked about in this case study. The Ulrich model provides valuable insights for various stakeholders to design a HR structure to contribute for the strategic achievement. Wherein we segmented the HR Shared Services team to different functions like HR operations, GPS advisor, employee experience etc., so that we specialise the tasks and thereby increase the efficiency even more due to expertise in that particular area. The major contribution of HRSS lies in its alignment with the strategy of the company. It spells out clear HR actions required to achieve the defined strategy. HRSS model has been implemented in many organisations for decades. It has evolved in terms of technology, skillsets and manpower, changes to become the need of the hour. With organisations experimenting with their internal structure and trying to accommodate the different generations together in the workplace and a dynamic workplace in construct, there is a necessity to realign the HR functions to match the requirements of the organisation and its people with HRSS.

### **Contribution of the Teaching Note**

This case study tries to conceptually and practically analyse the HRSS model in a software product-based company. It helps understand the concept of the HR Shared service model, its benefits, and

challenges as well. It also clarifies that organizations change and adapt their internal organizational structures to meet the company's needs and ease the operations of the employees.

It seems quite a paradox that the support given by the HRSS team to the other HR functions ends up paving the way for the challenges faced by the team. The issue seems to stem from a lack of resources and planned tasks. Even though the HRSS team is the support centre for other HR functions, subdividing the functions based on specialist roles can bring more productivity, efficiency, and effectiveness to the team, leading to better employee experience and a smooth functioning place. The new model proposed can be an answer to the challenges if implemented with care and attention. Along with the teaching note, the case helps understand the same and gives insights into the different parameters to be considered while implementing a change and when to opt for change. The case study is in alignment with the learning outcomes and applied questions. It would require one to two hours of discussion in the classroom setting to understand the case, identify the constructs and analyse the impact of the different considerations involved.

## CONCLUSION

HRSS model has been implemented in many organizations for decades. But with evolution across technology, skillsets, and workforce, changes become the need of the hour. With organizations experimenting with their internal structure and trying to accommodate the different generations together in the workplace and a dynamic workplace in construct, there is a necessity to realign the HR functions to match the organization's requirements and people. Every organization is unique with its own set of vision, mission, and core values that sets it apart, and those need to be cascaded across the business units and line and staff functions.

People are the most critical assets to any company. However, many a time, the people taking care of the HR staff are left behind in work satisfaction. When automation and AI interventions are introduced, employee experience is a factor that is found difficult to be reengineered. Hence, the need for an able and competent HR team that can enhance the employee experience through various engagement activities and catering to the needs of the employees becomes crucial for any organization. With a new normal in place and work from home as the theme, the organizations may need to realign their HR structures to enhance efficiency and optimize the costs. Though this case gives a glimpse of the changes under review in a company, such interventions may or may not be effective for other organizations. The critical factor to be considered before making any change decisions should be the concerns of the HR staff and the employees who are the stakeholders of any such changes. An all-rounded analysis should be conducted considering the time, cost, and quality dimensions of such changes and how well the employees across the organization will welcome that restructuring.

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