# Changing role of HR: How to transition from transaction "policy police" to leading strategic and trusted business advisors

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| Speaker 10:00:05 - 0:01:11 | Welcome to the final episode of The Spark podcast series, I'm Jane Latimer, Principal Advisor at the New South Wales Public Service Commission and I would like to take this opportunity to share that we're absolutely thrilled that we've successfully completed this series. Today we meet Margo Droulers, Head of HR Client Services and Deputy HR Director at Macquarie University. Margo is a seasoned HR Professional with more than 30 years experience across a variety of industries. In this fourth episode of the Changing role of HR suite of podcasts, Margo generously shares the steps taken under her leadership to move the HR function at Macquarie Uni from being perceived predominantly as policy police to that of trusted advisors. Listen also to her thoughts on what are the key capabilities needed by HR now and into the future. Of particular note is her encouragement to all of us to increase and embed our design thinking, human centered design capability to achieve differentiated HR service delivery. Enjoy. |
| Speaker 20:01:15 - 0:01:42 | Hi, I'm Tanya Hammond, CEO of Tailored HR Solutions. I have the pleasure today of talking with Margo Droulers, Head of HR Client Services and Deputy HR Director at Macquarie Uni. I'm speaking to her in relation to how she transitioned her team from policy police to leading strategic and trusted business advisers. Welcome Margo, but first up just some, I'm sure our listeners are also really keen to understand a little bit about your background and your |
| Speaker 30:01:42 - 0:03:05 | roles. Okay. Thanks, Tanya. I have been working in the HR and OD space for probably coming up for 30 years, which is a bit frightening because I don't feel like I've been in this space for 30 years. I've been at Macquarie University for over 10 years and I didn't think that I would actually be here after the first year because it is a very different culture. I had started and worked in, for about 20 years I've worked in the corporate culture and corporate organisations, and I came to the University to do a couple of projects as an OD consultant. I did those projects, one of them was actually implementing a new performance management system, and that was sort of my birth by fire of working in the University. Weren't used to systems and processes and structures that actually are pretty common in the corporate sector, were pretty uncommon in the university sector and so it was actually a real, a bit of a culture shock for me. Also there was something in the university environment, it's a complex environment, and it is actually not a corporate environment and never will be a corporate environment because its focus is really on learning and it's also focused on discovery as well. So quite a different environment, and one that I have come to really enjoy and find quite a unique place to work. |
| Speaker 20:03:05 - 0:03:08 | Wow and your current role you've been doing for |
| Speaker 30:03:08 - 0:03:29 | how long? This current role I've been in for about coming up for 10 years and why I've been in this role for this period of time, it has been such a transformation of the role of the function and HR that it's just kept me interested and engaged and challenged for that period of time. |
| Speaker 20:03:29 - 0:03:46 | That's a great story, and being an educational institution, you would have had to adapt and change significantly in the current times, I imagine. What's been your experience of operating within a VUCA so a volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous world over the last few |
| Speaker 30:03:46 - 0:05:45 | months in particular? Well, it's certainly been a VUCA world, that's for sure. I think for higher education it's been a VUCA world for quite a few years. We have had to face some fairly challenging times with changes in government policy around the capping of student places at university, which has meant that has also, for across the sector, actually capped income for our domestic students. The race has really been on, in terms of international students and obviously in the last few months that has seen a real collapse in student numbers for the sector and therefore student income, which actually directly feeds back to income for our researchers. That has been where I think people are still counting the cost of that. For us in HR, it has meant, really, we've had to turn on a sixpence and actually manage how do we keep an institution running at the same time that people are working from home, and for us, that means our staff have actually had to teach from home. They've had to first of all, turn their hands to putting all of the content online and then actually teaching that content from their home. So I have to say that we have done that very successfully with 95% of our content online within, I think about four weeks. So it was quite a challenge. At the same time, the University having to basically put itself in mothballs and deliver or be a university virtually. So everybody kind of working from home. We're now starting an orderly process around how we actually returned to work. I think some of the key takeaways there has been, you know, how do you, how do you respond in times of very rapid change where there's information that is changing on a daily basis and the people listening will understand what that actually felt like. |
| Speaker 30:05:45 - 0:06:34 | That information was coming out and changing really rapidly. And I think that we've had some really outstanding leadership here in terms of, particularly around communicating whatever those changes were and how the University was responding to that with also a very strong message of gratitude to staff in terms of how responsive the staff in fact could be and hold it together in a time of great crisis not just for the University, but also for the sector. Those messages were repeated quite constantly. Communication was coming out on a daily basis and it actually really did hold people together, and there was very little confusion in a very confusing time around what people needed to do in order to do their job. From your perspective |
| Speaker 20:06:34 - 0:06:41 | then HR played a significant role in helping with that transition? You know, working from home, the messaging, that |
| Speaker 30:06:41 - 0:08:31 | kind of thing. Yes, so in terms of, then how do you actually communication. What do you need to do in terms of working from home from a work health and safety perspective, from a mental health perspective. There were a lot of people at home who were actually, you know, they had their children at home because schools were closed, they had probably partners also at home, who also worked, had to come, and everybody's working off the dining room table. So it wasn't flexible work as we normally think about it. It was actually a real response to a crisis, and we have then gone out and actually surveyed people as to, well what was that experience like. Was that good, bad, indifferent, stressful, not stressful? We had a real range of responses, so depending on people's circumstances, it was either actually a really happy time, quietly working at home with no distractions, through to it was hell. I had to manage my child's school work, my partner was taking calls and I also had to deliver lectures at the same time. So we had quite a range of responses to that. I think at the same time, we weren't quite so involved in this but we also had to then look after our students. One thing we did do, and HR was involved in this, was we in fact had to, we had closed our pool, we closed our gym, we closed all of our eating places across campus. We had a lot of staff that actually had time on their hands. So we had to stand some of them down or some of them actually moved onto Job Keeper. We did get those staff that were actually familiar working with students, on the phones and they were calling students throughout this period, just checking in. Every student got one phone call from the University to check in and see how they were doing and how they were coping throughout that and the feedback from students was a big thank you. |
| Speaker 30:08:31 - 0:08:43 | Someone out there knows that I'm still here and even though I might be listening to lectures on my own in my bedroom, I have a sense that I am still part of, at university as well. Thinking |
| Speaker 20:08:43 - 0:08:54 | back over the last 30 years in your career, what's been the most significant changes that you've observed of the HR function over that time and what do you thinkare the key drivers of that |
| Speaker 30:08:54 - 0:10:28 | change? Significant changes in HR. I think that HR has become I think in many ways they are managers of change, and I mean any sector will have gone through their own corporate changes. The idea of so much of that, particularly when I worked in finance, the finance sector in the 90s, it went through profound transformation, and HR was very much there on the front line. We had to not only respond obviously to whatever agreements that we had to operate by, but there was also a very major piece there around, how do you manage people going through this transition? How do you help them get through this? As a lot of organisations moved from, from wherever they were, in many cases leaner, meaner, much more technology they had to engage with and actually a different way of looking at the customer. And so that was something that HR really had to work towards. That piece around change management I think has been really significant. I think the other thing in terms of the last 10 years, I have worked in a particular sector that actually has gone through massive transformation and HR needed to really professionalise itself. I think that that's probably the other big change in HR, is that it has become a profession rather than a personnel function. Music to my ears. Also, |
| Speaker 20:10:30 - 0:10:45 | then there's obviously different capabilities that have as the results of that change, what's been your observation about the key capabilities you believe HR practitioners need now to be effective, you know to lead that change, to be that professional. Generalist |
| Speaker 30:10:45 - 0:11:42 | HR, I think there's two things. I think in generalist HR there is a real need for generalist HR staff to have good consulting skills, so they're not just there to take the order from the client, go away and do that. They need to, if they're going to be partners and good advisers, they actually have to work in partnership and that's, that at times means questioning what the client actually wants to do and helping find not just a solution, it might be multiple solutions, really getting underneath and understanding what is really going on here, what is the real problem? This is the presenting problem but what is the actual problem underneath? Because in fact, what we're here to do is actually change our system, possibly, as opposed to just solve the presenting issue. So I think that's one of the skills a generalist really needs |
| Speaker 30:11:43 - 0:11:46 | and the second one for specialists. I think that they |
| Speaker 30:11:46 - 0:12:14 | really need to understand what their specialty is, but be capable of translating that into everyday solutions so that they have a pragmatism as well as a depth of expertise. So the combination of those two, I think, makes a great specialist inside,inside an organisation as opposed to a consultant that you buy a knowledge and skill in. |
| Speaker 10:12:14 - 0:12:23 | Okay and so from your perspective then it's the ability to understand the problem and then apply that knowledge and expertise to help |
| Speaker 30:12:23 - 0:12:45 | solve that problem. Yes. OK. Specialist expertise when it's actually needed so it's often a combination of a number of people that may well be solving that problem. And I think the latest probably technique to bring into that is trying to solve really complex problems, you really need to bring in that design thinking capability as well. Thank you. |
| Speaker 20:12:46 - 0:12:49 | I'm just curious, what does that mean? What is design thinking? |
| Speaker 30:12:49 - 0:13:27 | I think that's about,you know, you're designing a new system or a new process or new way of doing things by actually understanding what the problem is but what the problem is from the perspective of a number of users, not just a singular experience, but actually, you know, a multitude of experiences and to then be able to actually bring that group of people together to, in fact, design and develop those solutions together. That requires really good diagnostic skills, but not necessarily you being the expert that actually has to come up with the solution. |
| Speaker 20:13:28 - 0:13:56 | I think our listeners have certainly heard a lot, and will hear a lot through these podcasts around human centered design and the importance of it and that's essentially what you're describing, which is obviously really important in almost a very different way to how we've probably delivered our HR services in the past, you know, being the kind of, you know, this is how it is to being, what does it need to be in terms of the problems that we're looking to solve? I |
| Speaker 30:13:56 - 0:14:45 | think for me in this role, one of the really useful things that our Vice Chancellor talks about is that our University is one of service and engagement. And I've really taken those two words, service and engagement, and looked at, you know, and those principles around human centred design, that we are a service delivery function, and that's what we're there to do. That piece around engagement is about bringing people together and helping them find their solutions. We offer our expertise, but we don't, I think it is really that move away from, we'll tell you the rules and we'll tell you what you can and can't do and you just have to actually follow our instructions as opposed to, yes these are parameters that you've gotta work within but how can you actually arrive at the solution that's going to work for you. |
| Speaker 20:14:47 - 0:15:15 | I understand then, you know, I guess leading through in terms of the you know where HR is today, I'd be really interested to understand significant transformation that you've led at this university. I'm sure that our listeners will be keen to learn about the journey and how you went about and really to the point of the conversation today around that moving from that policy police to that trusted advisor. What were the sort of key steps along the journey that happen for |
| Speaker 30:15:15 - 0:17:12 | you? Well, I think, I mean, it's been a really, it's been very, a very interesting and a very challenging journey. We and one that actually, really I feel like we can talk about a lot of dimensions in that, and it certainly wasn't linear. We started with bringing in the business partner model about 10 years ago, but that was really the start of the journey. It wasn't actually the end of it, and we quickly realized, and we knew that we wanted to move away from being the policeman to saying, telling people what they could and couldn't do and what you know, the big rulebook that people think that HR has. What we knew that we needed to do was changed our capabilities, so we had to move away from being that but what were we actually going to move towards? And what did it actually mean to be business partner? What did it mean to be an advisor at the same time? So these are the things we wanted to have but at the same time, our clients, and I was new to the role of Head of HR Client Services, so I went to my clients and was asking them, well how do we actually become a business partner? I was given pretty clear feedback was I don't care about being a business partner until you actually fix the processes, go fix the processes and then you can actually come back and then we can have a conversation around being a partner. And so for me, the first thing was we had very poor recruitment practices. They were clunky, they were very risk averse. They were very big on process. But, you know, we're we actually getting the right people in, you know, into the University. So we did major process reviews around our recruitment and we looked to streamline those processes. We looked to engaged people better and in fact, our teams |
| Speaker 30:17:13 - 0:19:06 | we needed to in fact, build their capability around how they engaged in that recruitment process to become better recruiters. We worked on that for some time, as we did that that actually, it was what I always talk about, earning the right to advance. That opened the door for us to in fact become closer in terms of advice and that was sort of when those other conversations started around, you know, what am I going to do about the performance of this particular team or that particular team? What was I going to do around workforce planning? Let's have a look at our workforce profile. Is this the right profile that we need? And for an academic, workforce planning you're not just planning for the next 3 to 5 years you're actually planning for the next 20 years. So it becomes quite a different prospect. That meant that our teams actually had to understand our clients so much better than they in fact did. You had to push them out of HR and actually make them go and sit with their clients, go and talk to their clients, go and understand what their clients, the client issues that they had. So that was sort of our relations, you know, as we kind of worked through some of the changes that we needed to make for our clients and build, just build, simply build a better relationship because the relationship when we started really was not very good. We did a review of HR and the feedback that came through was that really we in lots of ways, we're not fit for purpose. So as theUniversity was changing, HR was not keeping up. Now, mind you, we still had our business partner model in place, so you know, textbook wise, it looked like we were actually kind of going okay. We then moved to, so feedback around, you know, certainly the service delivery was, there was complaints around the inconsistency of advice. |
| Speaker 30:19:07 - 0:20:58 | So, you know, people would shop around for advice and they would get different answers. There was a sense of, you know, we didn't really understand the University, we really didn't understand the academia and we were actually quite risk averse. So our tendency was to say no rather than yes and out of that, there was a lot of frustration. So what we then decided that we needed to do was we actually needed an HR strategy and we needed to focus on, you know, what kind of culture did we want to have? What kind of leadership did we wanna have? What were the capabilities that we actually had to have within HR and in fact, what was the structure and was our service delivery model? Was it good enough? From that our strategy, we came out with a very, very simple strategy but it was one that really people took to their hearts. So HR really took it on and it was three parts. It was a focus on really getting the basics right. So cleaning up our own backyard, getting our processes in shape. We had quite clunky systems that didn't talk to each other and it's only today, so 10 years later, we're actually fixing that bit. But we basically wanted to deliver the fundamentals flawlessly. The second part was that we actually wanted to be trusted advisers and how we're actually going to do that. So we wanted to in fact, change our model to be solutions focused. We actually needed to build better knowledge within our advisor group so that in fact, the advice that they could give was much more sophisticated advice and advice that actually supported good decision making. And then the third part was actually that strategic services. |
| Speaker 30:20:58 - 0:22:53 | So it was really going to be that strategic partnership, and that was actually about better understanding of the University, supporting you know key people priorities and actually that kind of that value add that transformational value add. And in that sense, that was where we were having a lot of conversations with the University, inviting the University into HR to talk about what it is that they did, what it is that they needed out of HR. So ultimately it was actually going to, it was those three components that we really focused on, and over a period of time we built up those capabilities. So there was a massive amount of work done on processes and cross functional process improvement. We did a lot of work on, so basically I developed a two year training plan for the Client Services team which went through training on every aspect of the HR life cycle so that people actually had consistent information about it. They knew how to use all the systems consistently and then from there we actually started building up more of the strategic skills around service, delivery and also the consulting skills. And then from that, we then have taken our managers also on that change management journey. So we actually have got them all accredited in Prosci which is a standard change management methodology. So they're all accredited in that. So by building the skill, we could then start going out and actually having those conversations with our clients, we then did a review. So we then went and got feedback from our clients and the feedback was, yes, you know, things were actually on the |
| Speaker 20:22:53 - 0:23:02 | right track. And where are we on the horizon now? So is that kind of, was that, you know, you talked about, sort of, you began that 10 year journey. Where were you at that point in |
| Speaker 30:23:02 - 0:24:46 | the sort of timeline? In timeline, that would have been probably around 2000 and the strategy we developed in 2014 we worked on that for about the next couple of years to about 2016. We, in that we not just did the process improvement pieces and the capability development pieces, we shifted our leadership team so we actually brought in business transformation leadership into that team. And that made a seminal difference because it was a person who could really reframe problems, knew a lot about the systems, knew universities, knew HR processes and so could really help extract enormous value out of what we, basically out of the systems that we had, we didn't have enough knowledge about those systems. So a person coming in with that could actually really ring the max amount of value out of those systems, which also helped us. In 2015 we then started to look at our culture and what kind of culture we wanted. So that was actually with. So as a HR team? As a HR team and in across, across all of the functions within HR. We had a whole of HR what we called accelerate service culture program that we put everybody through. We then developed an HR service champion group and that was staff it was no, there was no senior leadership in there. It was all staff and we had some HR managers in there. Why did you do |
| Speaker 20:24:46 - 0:24:47 | that, just out of |
| Speaker 30:24:47 - 0:26:54 | curiosity? Because we wanted to embed a sense of service culture all the way through HR. And so we wanted ideas to come from every level of HR and so the service champions we commissioned them to develop a reward and recognition scheme so that reward and recognition scheme wasn't one that was imposed from above. It was actually one that was developed by the staff themselves, and that was where we came up with a program called our ACE awards, which is two parts to it. One is every six weeks, we have our regular HR meeting, all staff meeting, and that is a time where we do acknowledge HR staff and the things that they've done especially consider people that we have worked with across functions, and it's basically thanking people for the work that they've done supporting you in your job. Anybody can put an ACE award in, and anybody can receive one and you can have multiple. You can write to multiple people. It's not just, you know, one ACE award for or one ACE card for, you know, for one person, and then every six months we also do a team award, so we'll have an ACE award for an individual and we'll have an ACE award for a team. And there's a prize money that kind of goes with that enough basically, for the people to go out to dinner as a team. That's really popular, given that we have fragmentation in terms of we've got people who work all the way across the University. They aren't necessarily housed in one spot. We had a bit of a drop off, once we put that online, it took off again, and that actually remains really popular, a popular kind of artefact of culture here and one that people take great pride in and just simple things like people get their rewards. It's all written out and people post them up on the notice board in the kitchen. |
| Speaker 30:26:55 - 0:27:27 | And generally when we have recruitment and we have candidates waiting, they will actually go and have a look of that board and will often comment on wow, that's a great idea and I find that that's actually a really wonderful way of introducing people to organisational culture for the whole University. That we are a university based on people, we are all about people and so people see that as one of their first, the first, they witness that as one of the first things that they see when they arrive at the University. |
| Speaker 20:27:27 - 0:27:47 | And therefore I guess, going back to something that you raised earlier, Margo around that human centered design so that cohort of your HR service champions was really, you know, at the heart of that human centered designas well, so it is a really terrific experience. And then the other thing that they |
| Speaker 30:27:47 - 0:29:41 | did was they actually developed a service charter. So it's just four statements that actually are around, you know, team and the kind of service or quality of service that people deliver, and I guess the values and characteristics that we would want to see in a really high functioning team. So when people put an ACE award in, they reference those values because they see them in action. So it's a reinforcing model whereby people are, do feel that they are actually living out that service charter. So it's a constantly reinforcing piece. That's great. So that was sort of, that was 2015. We have turned over that service champion group, so I think we're now onto our third group. We've refreshed it so people don't get stale and also a sense of everybody has an opportunity to participate in that and they continue to do really, really good work. In terms of leadership we did a few things. We didn't really know each other very well. So even though we had worked together a sense of, well, who are you as a leader and what are your strengths as a leader, as opposed to what are my strength as a leader? So we did a couple of sessions around who are we as a team? How do we want to work as a team? What matters to us as a team? What are the different strengths that we bring? What are our areas where we're not so strong? That was really, I think, quite a good bonding, not only a bonding exercise, but actually an exercise where we got to understand each other better. We also I think, went back and had a look at, are we clear about the boundaries around our functions? Do we understand what each other does? What do we need from each other? What are our expectations of each other? We then also had individual development, so we brought in executive coaching for those that wanted it. |
| Speaker 30:29:41 - 0:31:46 | We got some personalised feedback from our Director. We also you know, if people wanted to develop particular management skills, they could do so. And then we also gave people transparency over their budgets. So a sense of accountability around, well this is your part of the budget, this is the thing that you actually need to manage. So again, it made people step up in terms of, you know, really understanding this is part of leadership is actually kind of managing your own part in the budget as well. And then I think the other thing that we also did as I said we had a two year program for staff development and we have continued that onto today. So we will run frequent master classes. So we started off with, you know, there was a sense of the client services team didn't really understand very much around the enterprise agreements and how they worked. So we ran master classes on that we did the same with diversity and inclusion. We did the same with recruitment. We did the same with things like, you know, unconscious bias, for instance. So my team spent a lot of time in recruitment panels and being aware of their own unconscious bias, but actually being able to then talk to the panels around unconscious bias. Actually, really, you know, that adds value to that recruitment process. So we're always sort of looking to see where is it that people need to grow and develop. We understand that most development happens on the job. So that was the other thing that we have also commenced doing was moving people around HR so giving them alternative experiences in it. In employee relations, in the organisational development team, getting them to work up into different levels of a generalist role so that people have a sense of growth and opportunity and that has worked really, really well as well. |
| Speaker 20:31:46 - 0:31:56 | I'm curious then and I'm sure the listener are as well, when you talk about a master class were they classes delivered by individuals within HR? |
| Speaker 30:31:56 - 0:32:16 | A mix, so some of them were individuals within HR, or we brought in, say, for instance, the piece on unconscious bias, we actually brought in a person who that was their expertise was working on cultural diversity, a gender diversity and also issues around bias as well. And did you |
| Speaker 20:32:16 - 0:32:28 | as part of your change process, did you have, like, a HR capability framework that you used it as a bit of a sign post in terms of the capabilities required? Or how do you kind of |
| Speaker 30:32:28 - 0:32:58 | know? I mean, if I was talking is if it was a textbook model, I should be saying yes, we did but actually we didn't, that came later. So actually, we arrived at a capability framework sometime later. Probably like last, maybe last year, we ended up with one, and we have used that actually to then plan our next round of succession planning and looking at, certainly within the client teams, where are people at? What's the next step for development for them? |
| Speaker 30:32:59 - 0:33:02 | But at the time, a lot of the |
| Speaker 30:33:02 - 0:33:13 | skill sets and the knowledge sets that were required was so, so you know that everybody needed them, we didn't necessarily need a capability framework to work |
| Speaker 20:33:13 - 0:33:28 | with. And so does that then go to the heart Margo, you mentioned earlier, around the fundamentals, getting the fundamentals right? So is what you're saying then is you've got the fundamentals and from your perspective, what would you describe as a fundamental? |
| Speaker 30:33:29 - 0:34:24 | Good advice. So when I say good advice, advice, that's correct, knowing what policy goes with what process and being able to point people in the right direction. Interestingly, one of the things I've noticed is that one of the pieces of feedback that was often sheeted home to us was that, you know, you could never get a straight answer out of HR, that I would ring up and I'd get, five times and I'd get five different answers. We don't get that feedback today. Right. You know that is actually delivering the fundamentals flawlessly. The recruitment experience for clients is consistent and so whoever they're working with, they're going to have a very similar and good experience, you know, with their recruitment, not a very highly variable experience, where then I start getting feedback as to, I only want to work with this person because they actually are going to deliver me what I want. |
| Speaker 20:34:25 - 0:34:44 | Yeah, the complexity around any kind of transformation is that just because you've gone and done a transformation, it doesn't necessarily mean that stakeholders and your client's are gonna go, oh fantastic HR's great. So how do you know that what you've done has worked. Well, little things like what I just |
| Speaker 30:34:44 - 0:37:00 | said before around, I just you know, you just don't hear people say I get five different answers from five different people. We have had consistent feedback across the University as to things like, often people will say, well I want a model like HR. So Finance will be saying well, we want to actually model ourselves and our reputation on the reputation that HR has now. So there is a perception around the place that HR always delivers and that we are prompt in our responses we are helpful, and we give good and appropriate advice where it's required. The constant, so in terms of, you know what's changed and changed for the better, I would certainly say those are the things that have changed for the better, and that is the feedback. And we did go back and actually it was 2018, we went back and revisited our strategyand we went back and re-interviewed people that we had interviewed in 2014 on what was their experience of HR now and overwhelmingly it was one of, you know, we have seen a massive improvement in HR. We feel like we can partner with them, we want them in the room, we seek out their help. And I would see that in terms of when we started, no one really wanted to talk to us to now being one where every HR Manager, so every one of my direct reports, had a seat at the table for their particular clients, their leadership team meetings. Now that doesn't come if you're not seen to be adding value. They're not going to want you in the room if you don't add value. So, so those changes, I think are all for the better. The constant that we get back from our clients as well is you know, when are you gonna fix your systems, when are you gonna fix your processes, they're clunky, they're out of date, they're cumbersome, we want something better. |
| Speaker 30:37:01 - 0:37:16 | So that's sort of our next stage of our journey is actually really revising, bringing in an end to end HR system. So we are really kind of behind the times on that and that will actually do a lot of streamlining of our processes as well. |
| Speaker 20:37:16 - 0:37:33 | By the sounds of it, though, the human side of your service delivery model at this point is working. And so if you were to describe it, what does it look like? So you've mentioned about specialists. You've talked about your business partners. Just in a general way, how would you describe your framework and your structure? |
| Speaker 30:37:34 - 0:39:27 | Well, we call them HR Managers, others would call them HR Business Partners. Our structure is one where we, sorry just to add to that, we used to just support the University. Again I guess it speaks to the credibility that HR had when we have a number of entities wholly owned subsidiaries of the University but they are separate companies. They came to us and asked us to actually do their HR for them. So their HR was not working for them and they said, look, we'd like to hand it over to you we see that you know, people are getting a better experience, so come and help us as well. So from that, we have grown to now have eight teams who deliver HR support and service to the whole University and its entities. And instead of just having a standalone business partner or a number of business partners for each function, we actually haven't let go of our recruitment because in theUniversity, particularly the faculties, recruitment is it's a really important function for them. And as I said to you before, often you were recruiting somebody for not just for a few years for a very long time. So the need to get it right is paramount, particularly Macquarie's a pretty ambitious university and so they want to, you know, they're out there trying to get the best researchers, trying to get the best teachers, the best academics for their, at whatever level they're actually trying to recruit for. So the need for bringing recruitment in close was really important. So the team's range from a HR manager, a consultant and an officer is the kind of the standard model and then we scale up depending on the size of the faculty or the particular division we're supporting. |
| Speaker 20:39:28 - 0:39:52 | Right okay. And I guess one of the things that we've experienced, how you've actually gone more to about sort of fixing a problem. Right. I think you mentioned earlier around just solving the problem. Can you give me a real life example, you've already provided just that rewards and recognition in the service champion. But can you give a complex issue that you've had to solve? One example would |
| Speaker 30:39:52 - 0:41:57 | be whilst we've been changing ourselves, the University's being changing itself, so we spend a lot of time doing restructuring. We had a particular area in one of our faculties that we've also had because we've, we've also had financial constraints with the capping of places. Obviously, our budgets were all hit. So in the Faculty of Science, they were told that they had to save substantial millions of dollars, at the same time they were then looking to, I guess you know where they could in fact cut. And at that point, they were looking at three different functions that were supporting, you know, the academics and they were going to look at making just wholesale cuts in these areas to meet their budget bottom line. We thought this is an opportunity to kind of take a different look and a different approach to this, and we actually thought we did need some help with it, so we were looking to bring in consultants, and no one quite got the problem or we didn't feel that they got the problem. We have what we call an incubator on campus, which is basically young entrepreneurs and we helped them with their innovation. And I thought, you know, this guy's got a really wonderful and different way of seeing problems. So we talked to him and we came to the conclusion we're actually gonna work on some design thing. We're gonna bring in design thinking, and we're actually gonna look at this issue which started off as you need to make wholesale cuts, into something that, in fact, we needed a better functioning capability to support the faculty at the same time as getting those financial efficiencies. So we did set about doing a piece of design thinking where we brought in a group of staff who were incredibly dispirited. The morale I have to say it was rock bottom. |
| Speaker 30:41:58 - 0:44:02 | They'd been made a lot of promises over time, they had been stuck in their roles for many years. Their big complaint, so their problem was there is no career path here. We also had a number of their clients, so basically the academics who, they also had a whole set of issues, which again were all about, they couldn't turn over their staff, that they also felt that they didn't get the most out of their teams as well. Working through that and working through a number of, you know working through the methodology, we came to in fact, an amalgamation of those three areas into one. A number of people did take redundancies, we redesigned the roles, we opened all of those roles up for people, we went through extensive, universities are renowned for going through extensive amounts of consultation, so we did that. But the process itself, the design thinking process itself is a highly consultative process, so it actually fitted quite nicely in with the culture of the University. We did a number of iterations for that. Academics, one of the big changes was that academics could no longer own their staff, so the staff weren't necessarily going to report into them but they got better resourcing of, for their particular laboratories or their workshops. We're just finishing off doing that change. It had, kind of there was no union issues that came out of it. We achieved our financial goals. And the other part of it was that we actually now have a sensible career path for staff who often are highly educated but that was the main feature of their complaints. Was there is nowhere to go here. I'm here and I get stuck in my role. And through those changes that we made, we've actually created that career path. So that gives you an example of HR working with the business in a way that was highly collaborative. |
| Speaker 30:44:04 - 0:44:16 | It was creative. We still fulfilled all the policy requirements. We still stayed within our parameters of our enterprise agreement. And yet we actually achieved a number of goals. Right, |
| Speaker 20:44:16 - 0:44:30 | yeah. So, again demonstrating that you have transitioned from those policy police to that, I guess, trusted advisor which is really important. And I guess part of that I'm really curious around. Sorry, |
| Speaker 30:44:30 - 0:44:50 | by the way, no one thought that we could change these functions. They had operated like this for well over 15 years. I have to emphasise how stuck people felt. So you know, certainly the Director of the area, he is beside himself that he can't believe, like it for him it was a problem that seemed to be unsolvable. |
| Speaker 20:44:50 - 0:45:24 | Wicked. Yeah. Okay. That's a great story and thank you for sharing Margo. I'm interested, you talked earlier about the fact that you did some work to get your team around, you know, the culture that, that it needed to be, that your HR needed to be successful. And I understand that part of that was being more agile, adaptable and flexible as well as other sort of key areas, how did you do that? How did you, you know, you talked about master classes, etc. What about the cultural change in terms of the function? It's funny because culture's everywhere, nowhere and everywhere. So it's |
| Speaker 30:45:24 - 0:47:17 | sort of hard to, hard to explain really. I think, I think the first thing that we did was I'm a very big believer in investing in people and there's two parts to that. One is you've got to get the right people in. So did we actually have the right team? And by and large, we actually did. But there was a sense that training HR people themselves is sort of it's almost a bit like the Carpenter's Gate. You know that it's the thing that never kind of gets the attention because we're busy out there attending to everybody else. My view was if we were going to actually deliver the things that our clients were saying that they needed, we actually needed to invest in ourselves. I guess that culture of investment and development and service really came from giving people the knowledge that they needed. We built in, I guess, also a culture of feedback, so feedback wasn't to be feared. It was to be there as for purposes of development, and we gave the feedback and we moved on. So people stopped being fearful of feedback. They would actually start to seek it out. And that was actually about, you know, great people taking pride in their work. And so that's sort of, the reinforcing piece was obviously the ACE awards. People had a sense of, you know, we're on a virtuous cycle here. There was reinforcement from our Directors and from our other parts of our leadership team around the service culture is getting better and better, and I think for me I also would hold monthly meetings, and I've made it really clear to people that those meetings were really important to attend. So it was the place where I could reinforce service messages around service, you know, comes first and also at the same time |
| Speaker 30:47:17 - 0:47:29 | some quite practical ways of keeping people informed of changes that actually had meaning to them so that they felt that they could in fact, deliver better service to their clients as well. Yeah. |
| Speaker 20:47:30 - 0:47:49 | Yeah,okay. And I guess one of the things that's important in our world of HR is remaining abreast of what's going on outside our organisations. What advice would you give to our listeners about, you know, are there great people that you listen to, work that you read? Have you got any advice forhow you stay |
| Speaker 30:47:49 - 0:49:24 | contemporary? Good question. I think what we, we've done is also in that capability framework. We have then developed a development framework. And so, for each level that people are working at, we have got, you know, articles, books, podcasts. My advice is not just to listen to what's the latest in HR. It's actually you know, what's the latest in the world like, what else is happening out there in the community that, you know you, that's going to be of interest to you and that you really should know about. For us we've done a lot of work of bringing the University into us so that people understand when you're actually doing your job, what you're doing that job for is to help this person who actually studies spiders or this person who is trying to find a cure for motor neurone disease, or this person who's actually looking at health economy, or this person who's over doing research around hearing so that people can actually understand the breadth of what a university has to offer but also the breadth of the discovery that's actually, you know, that people are working in those spaces. My experience is that our teams come away absolutely inspired by that, so there is a real sense of connection with I get why I do my job because this person is doing their job over here, and that is really fantastic. So yeah. And I guess |
| Speaker 20:49:24 - 0:49:31 | I'm thinking about the future, what's next for this team? So you mentioned that you know, you're going to be looking more at the end to end processes. We're |
| Speaker 30:49:34 - 0:51:11 | implementing an end to end HR system that will actually integrate all of our HR processes. So at the moment we work off about, I think something like five different systems. We will have one system that we actually work on, so that will integrate a whole lot of work. It will also take a whole lot of work away from people that, you know, it's very, a lot of it's self service that people can actually now start doing that sort of work themselves. It actually then opens up also our ability to then do far more comprehensive succession planning, much more comprehensive workforce planning and helping people build capability, you know, wherever they are in the organisation, whatever capabilities they actually need to build it gives us better line of sisght around that. So in terms of what's next for us, obviously that's a very big piece of work to deliver. It's what comes after that, and then what will we need from our teams with that, I think is it means that we need to again grow that better consulting skill, I think. So you can have these tools at your fingertips, but you actually always still need to go to the client and understand where is the client coming from? What is you know, you've got to meet them where they're at. That's one of my maxims is you've got to meet people where they're at. And are they ready for a new system or how do we get them ready for a new system? Are they ready for what that new system has to offer? Well, we've got to actually walk beside them and help them with that as well. |
| Speaker 20:51:11 - 0:51:45 | Yeah, and I guess the key from any process or project like that too, is about coming away with actionable insights. So that you know, you can take that data and, you know, imagine that some, your system would be supporting that to be able to say so what can, what can we do? What do these insights and what does this data tell us as well? I'm also curious then finally, if you could give the audience today one key take away when thinking about the changing role of HR into a strategic partner who's trusted by the business, what would that be? |
| Speaker 30:51:46 - 0:52:20 | I think it is a really understanding our role as a strategic partner is one and, and as of a trusted adviser, is one, we are here to serve. We are not the main game. We're not, we're not the main game. It's the client that this is the main game. So that I think sometimes we can often get overly involved in what HR is all about. But you've actually always gotta look out and it's, it's really what is that the client is really asking of us and how do we actually support that? |
| Speaker 20:52:21 - 0:52:32 | That's great. Margo, thank you so much for your time today. And I'm sure the listeners also thank you in sharing your massive insights. So thank you very much. Thank you. |
| Speaker 10:52:37 - 0:53:25 | Thanks so much Tanya and Margo for another sensational podcast. I appreciated Margo reminding us of the importance of HR focusing on a culture of service and making sure that we grab opportunities ourselves to grow our own skills and knowledge as we always encourage our client groups to do. So goodbye from Tanya and me, we truly hope this series of podcasts and master classes has provided a meaningful development opportunity for you and that you have developed some new ideas and approaches to your work as a result. We certainly enjoyed developing them for you. We're planning to introduce further innovative HR up-skilling initiatives in 2021 to continue to support your professional growth and we'll be back in touch in the new year to share these with you. Thank you. |