

## VERTICALLY INTEGRATED – HR ROLES IN ‘09

As always, significant column space is currently being dedicated in the HR trade media advising HR practitioners about what they ‘should’ and ‘shouldn’t’ be doing in their roles. The usual comments are being quoted such as the need to be “commercially focused” and “be at the business table”.

Whilst this is all good (and somewhat obvious) advice, the current economic cycle is providing some clear distinctions between the last cycle and the present.

In this month’s Instep, we look at the change of focus for HR roles that are being recruited in this economic cycle. A clear message appears to be that roles in the market are asking for HR professionals who can still manage the big picture, but be mainly paying attention to the detail and on delivering ‘execution excellence’.

As one senior HR practitioner said about a role for their team, “HR roles in this business need to be **vertically integrated**. We have an eye on the big picture, but the business is expecting us to be down in the detail with a delivery focus”.

### Relationship management and influencing was the big ticket in HR in 2008

The importance of cultural fit is always the most important focus of any recruitment decision. The ability to manage relationships across business client groups and influence key decision-makers has been the main culture fit filter when recruiting HR professionals.

The view has been that an HR professional’s successful cultural fit with a business hinged on their capability to work with business leaders in a credible and respected relationship as the business grew and moved through change.

To manage relationships well and to influence decision makers requires HR professionals to be focused on the business strategy – the big picture. Whilst this is still important, HR roles in the market in 2009 are asking for more of a focus at the ‘doing end’ of HR.

### In 2009, ‘detail’ is King

In an environment where there is a greater focus on cost containment, and regulation and compliance, a much stronger focus is being placed on the ‘detail’ in HR (along with all the other support functions within organisations). From boards and senior management to external regulatory and compliance bodies, there is a continuing and growing need for HR roles, to be forensically across the detail on a wide range of areas.

On top of the need to be detail focused, HR professionals in Australia have the challenge of dealing with fundamental shifts in public policy, such as IR and remuneration, as well as continuing changes in the macro settings for workplace safety. No wonder most HR functions are frantic just keeping up with day-to-day information overload whilst dealing with HR resources being pared back.

### In 2009, they also want ‘cut through’

One of the most profound changes in the HR recruitment market in 2009 (compared to 2008), is the focus on work execution excellence and the ability to ‘get things done’. This capability is at the heart of recruitment for HR roles (at all levels) in 2009, from generalist through to specialist positions.

The key HR capability identified in many specifications has become, “ensures closure and delivers on intended results”. Words that describe the key attributes of the desired and in-demand HR professional include – resilient, tenacious, structured and detail oriented. In terms of skills, project management and technical excellence are at the top of the list.

The current challenge existing for HR professionals who are in the market, is to demonstrate their ability to get ‘cut through’ in a business environment and deliver irrespective of the many and various barriers that exist.

### Two questions on relationship management:

- Is the ability to manage relationships and influence decision-makers still important for HR professionals in this cycle? Of course! No question or doubt about it.
- Is relationship management and influencing the main focus of HR recruitment decisions now that the cycle has changed? No, not as much as last year.

The fact remains that in this cycle, it doesn’t matter what support function is in a business. Whether it is finance, information technology or human resources, the detail has got to be right and, as always, the HR recruitment market will reflect the overall trends in the broader market.

The HR recruitment market in 2009 is definitely focused on professionals to prove that they have the capacity to operate in fully **vertically integrated** roles. HR professionals must focus on delivery and being across the detail, so that the platform is in good shape for the upturn in 2010.

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