

# **Human Resource Management As A Career Choice: Perspectives For Placement Departments In Higher Education Institutions In India**

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## **Abstract**

*HR or Human Resources is one of the popular specializations and career options chosen by the students today. HR entails studying about the employee journey in a company from entry to exit. However, a career in HR is not for everyone. This is an area that requires specific skills and functional knowledge. An interest in the subject is a must. Students generally take up HR thinking that they cannot do Sales and Marketing nor Finance, so the popular option left is HR. And that is how they end up taking it. There are very few students who have genuine inclination to make a career in this area, and these are the ones who actually become successful in their careers. This paper shares perspectives of practitioners who have adequate experience in the corporate and in academics. The paper provides a direction to HR aspirants to help them gain an understanding of what HR entails.*

**Key Words:** *Human Resources, Careers, Career Path, Skills, Education*

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## **I. Background**

Mohamed et al (2025) conducted a study that emphasized the critical role of HR directors in strategically shaping the different human resource functions to improve organizational performance, underlining the need to invest in developing the strategic capabilities of HR leaders. The practice of HR has experienced noteworthy transformation over the last three decades (Ulrich & Dulebohn, 2015). HR has transitioned from being a lower level, administrative, personnel and maintenance function to being a strategic business partner, playing a critical role in the core business decisions. Heaton & Ackah (2007) in their study discussed how the Human Resource (HR) function has been experiencing significant change in the organization, with immense pressure to demonstrate added value and also, a trend to outsourcing. In another study, Khushk (2025) conducted research to explore the potential of artificial intelligence technologies to facilitate human resource transformation in automobile companies in China, highlighting the need to adopt technological advancements by the HR professionals in order to sustain themselves. Their research indicates that the careers in HR are rapidly changing and there are new trends in the field which implications for educational institutions offering programmes in HR. This has also led to an increasing demand for HR as a career, that not only offers job satisfaction, but also has a high growth potential. It has the ability to influence both individuals and the entire organization in meaningful ways. HR is responsible to building the team culture, setting employee code of conduct and processes in place. It offers an opportunity to assist people, task variety, telecommuting prospects and flexible working hours. These exciting roles and what they bring along, have made HR or Human Resources as one of the popular career options today.

## **II. Introduction To HR As A Career**

Human Resource Management (HRM) entails studying about the employee journey in a company from entry to exit. It involves human resource planning and acquisition, onboarding and induction, training/learning and development, performance management and appraisal, compensation, benefits and rewards management, industrial relations and employee welfare. Contemporary organizations are talking about employee engagement, empowerment, retention and inclusion. The word Talent is also being used more frequently to acquire, manage, develop and retain the potential employees who demonstrate superior performance in organizations.

While majority of business schools across the country see high enrolments in Marketing and Finance, comparatively, there are lesser numbers in HR domain. It is a general view that HR does not have too much scope. However, it is a myth. Since long the top management and owners of organizations have had a perception that HR is a cost-incurring function. But it is a perception that has changed in the past decade. HR professionals are now part of all Board meetings, contribute strategically to the organizations and participate in all decision making of the firm. In fact, titles like CHRO (Chief Human Resource Officer) and CPO (Chief People Officer) have been created for the HR Heads of large organizations, which are at par with the CMOs, CTOs and CFOs of the companies. HR is an equally rewarding career for those who are meant for it. There are ample opportunities for growth and advancement. Students can create their own career path in HR. Today, a lot of seasoned HR professionals have started their own consulting companies and are enjoying a flexible pace of life.

### III. What It Takes To Make A Career In HR

Aspirants should pursue HR if it is a conscious decision and not an afterthought. Students who enjoy interacting with people should opt for HR. Anyone who feels they have the knack of dealing with people from all backgrounds, levels of experience, knowledge, skills and attitudes, is the right fit for HR. To be a successful HR, one needs to have strong interpersonal skills and the patience to deal with people. Flexibility, adaptability, attention to detail, excellent communication and negotiation skills are some of the key requirements for joining HR. Also required are good listening skills and a positive approach. The HR should be able to build trust very quickly amongst the peers and colleagues. Creativity should be their second name, because one will have to propose interesting ways to engage and retain the employees in the organization. If an individual has these skills, HR is the field for them.

One should not go for HR if it is the only option left. Most common response received from students in the past is that they want to get into HR because they are not interested in Marketing or Finance. HR is serious business. Not everyone has the skills required to deliver as per company expectations and perform the HR functions effectively. In HR, like in any other field, the person- job role fitment is extremely critical, else one will be wasting their time and that of the organization's. HR as a career must be a conscious decision to take, not a stop gap arrangement and certainly not because they have nothing else to do.

There is also a common perception that HR is a *girl's profession*. But the case is not true. Today, if a quick survey is conducted, it will be found that boys also taking up HR and excelling in it. Majority of the CHROs (Chief Human Resource Officer) and Head-HRs are males. So, it is actually a myth that HR is a profession taken up by girls only. Anyone who has the relevant skills can join HR.

### IV. Education In HR In India

Education in HR is offered at various levels and of different types. Some of the options that are available to aspirants in India are given below in Table 1.

**Table 1: Available Educational Qualifications in HR**

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Bachelor of Business Administration – BBA (HR specialization)</li><li>- Master of Business Administration – MBA (HR specialization)</li><li>- Post Graduate Diploma in Management – PGDM (HR specialization)</li><li>- Doctor of Philosophy (HR area)</li><li>- Certificate Course in HR</li></ul> |
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*Compiled by authors*

Also, at post-graduate level, HR does not require any prerequisites with respect to the academic background. Any Bachelors' degree will suffice. It does not affect the admission eligibility in PGDM or MBA in HR. A common practice seen amongst students is the large enrolments for BBA. Those aspiring for MBA, opt for BBA at the undergraduate level. Given that BBA is considered as a mini-MBA, they find it easy to cope up with the academic rigour at the post-graduate level. To get through premier institutions, one needs to acknowledge that there is a huge competition and limited seats. So, an early preparation for the national level exams helps students to get admission in the good B Schools. Serious candidates start preparing for these exams in Year 2 of their graduation itself, so that they can give the entrances well on time, and not waste a year for the same.

Several students make the mistake of pursuing an online training in HRM after senior secondary while pursuing another degree. After Class XII, students should primarily focus on the syllabus and examination pattern, on getting exposure, on strengthening their personal profiles and participating in the Institutional activities. An online training in HR can help students only if they are pursuing a General BBA course. They can

pursue this training to get additional knowledge in HR. They will definitely get a better understanding of what HR is all about. Recruiters may consider them for the fresher positions in HR, particularly in the area of recruitment. MBA or PGDM from a reputed institution is extremely important as it ensures students to get the required knowledge, skills and abilities, to get adequate exposure, to interact with industry experts, to network with the distinguished alumni, to study from the best faculty, working on areas of improvement through dedicated mentors - all this leads to their holistic development making them market ready. So, doing an MBA/PGDM from a premier institute assures a student to be employable, get good placement opportunities and step into a promising career.

Also, since MBA/PGDM is the last fray into formal education for the students, they must make the most of it. Every B-School gives students an opportunity to enhance their personality and develop themselves. During MBA/PGDM, they must not only pay attention to the academics to strengthen their conceptual knowledge, but also participate and volunteer in every relevant activity and event possible. This will help them hone their team and interpersonal skills, while improving their confidence. And most importantly, they must pursue online certifications in HR during MBA/PGDM so that they are updated with the prevalent trends. Popular websites where this can be accessed from – Coursera.org, Edx.org, Udemy.com, Linkedin.com, Oxfordhomestudy.com, Ocw.mit.edu, Alison.com, Swayam.gov.in, Bernieu.bernieportal.com etc. This will enhance their employability and make them ready for the team-based work that they would be required to do once they join an organization on the completion of their post-graduation.

Additionally, students can pursue internships, live projects and even temporary jobs to get practical experience in HR. This will help them make a decision on what kind of career in HR they would like to make.

### **V. HR Electives Offered During MBA/PGDM In India**

MBA/PGDM curriculum is divided in two parts - studying the common core courses in the first year and specialization subjects in the second year. In most Business Schools, there are some typical subjects which one gets to study under the HR Specialization. Table 2 below gives a basket of traditionally offered HR Electives (or specialization courses)

**Table 2: Traditional HR Electives**

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Manpower Planning and Acquisition</li><li>- Training and Development</li><li>- Industrial Relations and Labour Laws</li><li>- Performance Management and Appraisal</li><li>- Compensation Management</li><li>- Strategic Human Resource Management</li><li>- International Human Resource Management</li><li>- Organizational Change and Development</li><li>- Competency Mapping and Career Development</li><li>- Human Resource Information System</li><li>- Cross-cultural Management</li></ul> |
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*Compiled by the authors*

However, over and above the traditional electives, there are some contemporary subjects also that are being offered, given the fast-paced advancements in the business environment. The industry experts also recommend to incorporate discussions around the new trends in the classroom. Chatbots, Artificial Intelligence in HR, Mindfulness, Employee Well-being, and impact of Remote working on HR. There are some new subjects also that are proposed here that must be offered to the students of HR. The same are shared below in Table 3.

**Table 3: Contemporary HR Electives**

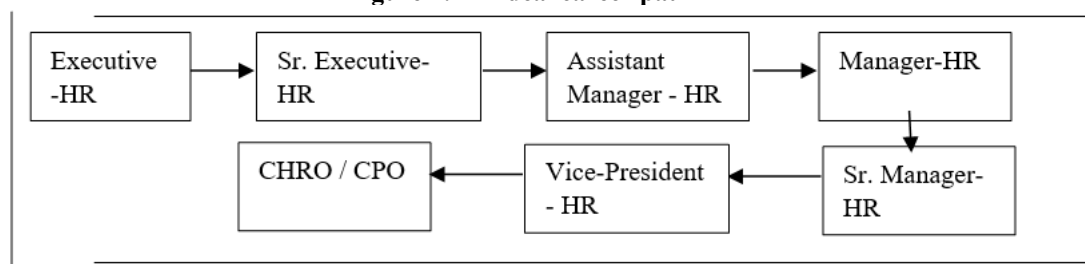
- |   |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- People/HR Analytics</li><li>- Learning and Development</li><li>- Employee Relations and Compliances</li><li>- Total Rewards Management</li><li>- Digital HR</li><li>- Talent Management Strategy</li><li>- Coaching, Counselling and Mentoring</li><li>- Diversity and Inclusion</li><li>- Managing Virtual Teams</li></ul> |
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*Compiled by the authors*

**VI. Skills, Roles And A Career Path In HR: Perspectives For Placement Departments In Higher Education Institutions In India**

To be a successful HR, one needs to have strong interpersonal skills and the patience to deal with people. Flexibility, adaptability, attention to detail, excellent communication and negotiation skills are some of the key requirements for joining HR. Also required are good listening skills and a positive approach. The HR manager should be able to build trust very quickly amongst peers and colleagues. Creativity should be their second name, because they will have to propose interesting ways to engage and retain the employees in their organization. If one has these skills, HR is the field for them. A Human Resources Officer needs to have good planning, organisational, analytical and decision-making skills. Excellent verbal and written communication skills are added advantages. Being tactful and discrete when dealing with people and confidential information is a pre-requisite. Students who enjoy interacting with people should opt for HR. Anyone who feels they have the knack of dealing with people from all backgrounds, levels of experience, knowledge, skills and attitudes, is the right fit for HR. Initially, major job roles are generalist roles, or HR Business Partner, or as recruiters, or as training and development coordinators, or as HR Operations roles. These are the entry level roles in major cases. As the freshers gain experience, they rise up in the organizations and take on senior roles.

**Figure 1: An ideal career path in HR**



*Compiled by authors*

The above figure indicates that there is an upward movement towards the highest position in HR, that is the role of CHRO (Chief Human Resource Officer) or CPO (Chief People Officer). It indicates that not only has HR paved its path to the C-Suite, but also, it is a feasible and achievable position for those serious towards HR as a career.

The students can join HR as a Generalist or a Specialist. A HR Generalist performs all the functions from HR planning, recruitment and selection, onboarding, induction, goal setting, training and developing the employees, appraising their performance, administering benefits, managing employee relations, ensuring all processes as per the regulatory framework. As a Specialist, one could start their career with any of these individual functions, depending on the departmental structure in the organization one gets selected. Though there is no preference, it is upto the individual what role they want to get in – generalist or specialist. There are junior, middle and senior level positions corresponding to any role one goes for. At the fresher level, the jobs are primarily into recruitment and sourcing. However, there are also options as HR Generalist, Training Coordinator - L & D, Executive – L&D, Comp and Ben specialist, Executive – Employee Relations, HRBP (HR Business Partner), HR Operations Executive, Payroll Executive, Executive - HR Shared Services, Verification Executive etc. The starting average salary in any of these roles from a good B-school is anywhere between INR Three lakhs per annum to INR Six Lakhs per annum. If we look at the work of HR professionals, we see that they are performing multiple tasks as generalists - recruitment, selection, document & background verification, preparing offer letters, placement, induction, learning and development, performance appraisal, employee engagement, employee grievance handling, well-being and wellness of employees.

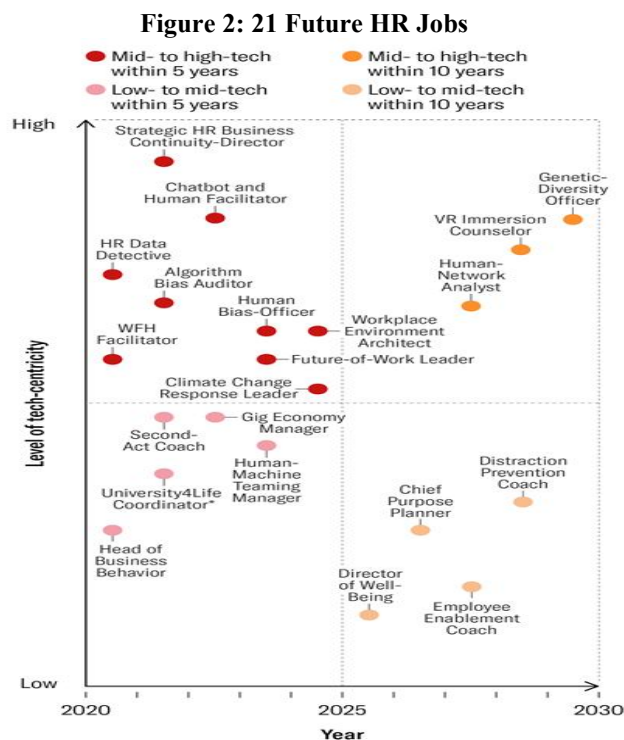
As a HR professional the contribution will be managing one of the most important resources of the company – its employees. They would be connecting the value of the human capital to the bottom line of the organization. They would implement recognition and retention programs, do employer branding, be responsible for employee motivation and ensure not only a low absenteeism but also a low employee turnover and low acquisition costs. They will also ensure the optimum utilization of the human resources of the organization. And this is what is required by organizations today.

**VII. The New Normal In HR And The New Verticals**

HR is the most affected department in the organization in the new normal. With organizations working remotely, the use of digital technologies and tools - all have direct implications on the dynamics of the organizations. Monitoring the geographically dispersed employees, managing social isolation, issues related to employee health and well-being, sustaining the organizational culture, creating flexibility in the virtual workplace, ensuring talent management and offering an enviable employee experience are all the areas where

HR has to focus in the new environment. According to a report on the talent trends by Mercer, the key focus areas for HR include defining future workforce needs, prioritizing reskilling and upskilling, reinventing flexibility and fluid careers, enhancing employee experience, rolling out new HR technologies and redesigning work to incorporate AI and automation. These organizational expectations have created an imperativeness to develop a talent pool of HR professionals who could lead the implementation. In another study published by Harvard Business Review indicate that there are going to be new verticals as predicted by the researchers and experts. These are illustrated in Figure 2 and forecast a totally different job profile in the area of HR. These new age careers will bring in a demand for new skills, new preparedness and understanding of the changing roles of HR in future.

Figure 2 is a testament of the advancements that can be foreseen in the future roles and integration of technology in the HR function, while focusing on the overall well-being of the employees, the organizations and the society as a whole.



Source: Cognizant Centre for the Future of Work and Future Workplace

### VIII. Conclusion

To achieve and sustain exponential levels of performance requires continuous transformation with a strong alignment between the Leadership, HR and the employees. The study indicates a specialist cadre of HR professionals will be required in the future. And for this reason, one should go for HR if it's a conscious decision and not an afterthought. This is the only prerequisite. It is also an opportunity to the educational institutions to timely prepare the students for these future roles. The traditional functions are on the verge of being defunct, and the new – age HR careers call for special skills, a strong HR orientation and a wilful decision to take up HR as a career choice.

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