

Branding HR Processes

An excerpt from the book “Common Sense Talent Management”

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HR processes tend to be viewed by managers and employees as relatively uninteresting administrative activities. One way to shift this mindset is to actively market how HR processes will support the goals of managers and employees. This is referred to as “branding the HR process”. For example, employees tend to view the term “performance management” from a negative mindset, dwelling on the aspects that focus on identifying and addressing under performance. They may not give enough credit to the role performance management plays in supporting recognition and career development of high performing employees. Rather than referring to a process as being about “performance management” a company might refer to it as a “recognition and career development program” to encourage employees to see the process in a more positive light.

The best brands call attention to how HR processes help employees and managers achieve their career objectives, and also create a tie between the HR process and the mission, culture or external brand of the company. For example, a mobile telephone company promoted its performance and development processes using the tagline “It’s about the conversation”. This emphasized that the process was focused on getting managers and employees to actively talk about performance and development. But it also resonated with the company’s identity as an organization that built and sold tools that helped people communicate.

When building a brand, start by examining how the process will address the goals of employees and managers. Why should they be excited about this process? What’s in it for them? Next develop a short phrase that captures these benefits and highlights the “brand promise”. Ideally this phrase will resonate with other aspects of the company culture or market reputation. For example, a large healthcare organization called their strategic HR program “Compass” because it helped employees navigate the organization and identify appropriate career paths. A hotel organization called its succession and development program “Profile” because employees had complained that no one outside of their hotel knew them or their career potential and goals. The Profile brand emphasized that the process is a way for the company to get to know all of its employees at detailed level.

After you develop a brand, it is a good idea to critically review it based on the following criteria:

- ✓ Is it truthful? Can you back it up with real examples and practices? Can you show how the strategic HR process is fulfilling the promise made by the brand?
- ✓ Is it compelling and appropriate? How will it be perceived by different stakeholder groups and divisions? Is it interpreted by people in a positive and appropriate manner? Does it speak to things employees care about?
- ✓ Is it unique? It is distinct from how other companies portray themselves? Does it “feel” like the company?
- ✓ Is it comprehensive? Can it be used to support strategic HR programs? It is ideal if all strategic HR processes can fit under the same brand. Trying to maintain multiple brands for different processes is time consuming and confusing for employees, managers and senior leaders.

Brands can help get employees and managers to view HR processes as tools for creating positive change. But if the brand does not reflect process reality, it can create cynicism about the sincerity of the company and HR initiatives in general. In sum, use brands but use them wisely.