



THE PROBLEM WITH “HUMAN RESOURCES” IS THAT HUMANS ARE NOT RESOURCES

RESOURCES IS TOTALLY THE WRONG WORD TO USE FOR PEOPLE. RESOURCES ARE THINGS THAT GET DEPLETED. WHEREAS HUMANS GET BETTER WITH EXPERIENCE.

3 MINS READING TIME

THE PROBLEM WITH “HUMAN RESOURCES” IS THAT HUMANS ARE NOT RESOURCES

We were brainstorming the other day. Well actually we were drinking beer around the barbecue with friends but we will henceforth refer to it as brainstorming. One thing that came up was use of the term “Human Resources”. It’s used so frequently that we just take it for granted. It’s shorthand for a whole range of business processes and activities. Everyone knows what it means. It’s widely referred to by the acronym “HR”.

Our flagship product is called “HRCompleteManager”, so we are pretty clear what it means. Or so we thought.

During our brainstorming session the argument was raised that “Resources” is totally the wrong word to use for people. The word “Resources” tends to be used for things that get depleted. Natural resources such as Oil and Minerals get exploited and consumed. We use the word “Resourceful” to describe someone who is full of the thing we call “Resources”. When a person is totally exhausted we often say that “They have used up all their resources”.

On Wikipedia the entry for [“Resource”](#) states: A resource is a source or supply from which benefit is produced. Typically resources are materials, energy, services, staff, knowledge, or other assets that are transformed to produce benefit and in the process may be consumed or made unavailable.

The problem with applying this routinely to the people who we work with is that it affects the way we think about them. I grant you that this effect may be subtle but the words we use to describe things have a bearing on our perception.

At its worst it could lead some to think that the Humans in their business are there to be exploited, to be consumed, to be used, like sucked and spat out oilfields. To be replaced by another Human when a particular well runs dry. Okay, I know most of us do not think of employees in such an extreme way but the words we use affect our tendencies.

So what is the alternative? I don’t think for one second that anybody is going to change the name of Human Resources to something else. I personally, am not in a hurry to make such a change. After all, we have named our software “HRCompleteManager” and we have too much vested in the name to abandon it just now.

Instead I would just suggest that we should just be a bit more mindful of how we use the word “Resource”. Nowadays, every time anyone in our team says “Human Resources” there is a small but perceptible mental pause. That can

only be a good thing for people who are in the people business.

It is my experience that people get better at their jobs. As they accumulate knowledge they get more and more valuable to us. For that reason it is preferable to think of our Humans as "Assets". Most other people feel the same way I am sure. Even though it might sound a bit clichéd, the phrase "People are our greatest assets" is the truth of the matter.

Resources deplete but Assets accumulate.

With the view of people as assets it naturally follows that we probably value experience more than we did before. We also see that as people get more experienced they are better in many ways. After all, with experience comes knowledge and with knowledge comes wisdom.

I would be interested to know your view.

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