

Impacts of Technology on the Human Resource Manager

by Don Phin



What follows are the top ten tasks performed by human resource managers according to the O*Net job description.

The question that will be answered is what impact will technology have on the future of the HR function.

1. **Serve as a link between management and employees by handling questions, interpreting and administrating contracts and being resolve work-related problems.**

The “customer service” aspects of HR will be largely be replaced by programs such as Watson or Amelia. There are only so many unique questions anybody will ever ask HR. Let’s assume 80 percent of them are redundant. What makes us think an algorithm can’t be programmed to answer the vast majority of these questions? Even if it’s a work related problem—we might send the manager or employee to algorithm which helps them to think through solutions before they take a step further. If perhaps they identify the problem as something greater than a 5 on a scale of 1 to 10, then HR will be notified to help monitor it. Remember—humans will only be used where they have to be used.

2. **Analyze and modify compensation and benefit policies to establish competitive programs and ensure compliance with legal requirements.**

This is a robot no brainer. We already have websites such as salary.com. You can imagine how improved they’ll be within even a few more years. At the press of a button you’ll receive a report identifying whether you are paying to scale, and your variances in any position. Depending on your compensation philosophy, software can quickly set salary ranges and also tie any increases into clearly identified performance metrics, consumer price increases or mandated wage or salary requirements. One impact should be a decrease in unequal pay claims. What’s an HR executive left to do other than to help identify the compensation philosophy and run the program?



3. Advise managers on organizational policy matters such as equal employment opportunities, sexual harassment and recommend needed changes.

This is what we have online training and compliance programs for. When managers face a problem odds are they'll first go through a quick algorithmic analysis to help guide their actions. That may help them to solve the problem on their own or ratchet it up to HR or even legal. There may even be an API interface with your employer practices liability robot who will help determine whether a "trigger event has occurred" for purposes of conducting a formal investigation.

4. Perform difficult staffing duties, including dealing with understaffing, refereeing disputes, firing employees and administrating disciplinary procedures.

Robots are already sourcing candidates, reviewing resumes, conducting tests and assessments, and other information to help make preliminary recommendations to HR. HR will be involved with setting up the initial parameters or algorithms and then managing the final interviews of candidates. Data will quickly inform HR when they're facing the possibility of understaffing and their ability to quickly adjust based on supply and demand in the marketplace. Even when refereeing disputes, firing employees or administrating disciplinary policies, HR executives will be guided by an algorithm to help them make wise decisions. Think of it as a check list on steroids.

Good news: You will be bombarded with less "gotta minute" questions.

5. Plan and conduct new employee orientation to foster a positive attitude towards organizational objectives.

Why would we need an HR executive to do this when videos, virtual tours, policy manuals, and learning management systems can help do it for us? The only thing left for HR is the human touch i.e. making sure they feel welcomed. Making sure their desk is properly set up on their first day of hire (you go through a checklist to make sure that's the case). With their time freeing up, HR has a great opportunity to help brand the workplace environment to foster and enhance its culture. This is the high cognitive, creative work left to do.

6. Identify staff vacancies and recruit, interview and select applicants.

Not surprisingly there is overlap in these duties. One could ask what algorithm put them together in the first place! Advanced HRIS, performance and succession management programs will let us know when we have staffing shortages and can automatically begin the recruitment process.

7. Plan, direct, supervise and coordinate work activities of subordinates and staff relating to employment, compensation, labor relations and employee relations.

Workflow software and performance programs like Success Factors and Halogen are taking many of these tasks away right now. Recent changes to the exempt status of many white collar employees will continue to dampen the need or desire for managers. Since the nature of work will change rapidly, these programs and algorithms must be better geared towards working in a project/team based environment. They will do a better job at help assessing skill sets available in the organization to better assign tasks. For example, in the insurance industry, Vertafore's agency workflow program claims a 20 percent efficiency. That means unless one out of five workers can engage in more cognitive/creative work they will be out of a job.



8. Plan, organize, direct, control or coordinate the personnel, training on labor relations activities of an organization.

To the extent there are strategic activities involved there is an opportunity for the HR executive. To the extent it is simply assigning routine tasks and activities (i.e. taking your sexual harassment training) an HR executive is no longer needed. Yes, HR executives may still be instrumental in labor management negotiations. Or in setting strategic direction for the department and company as a whole. This is where opportunity lies.

9. Represent organization at personnel-related hearings and investigations.

Finally something I don't think we'll use a robot for in many years to come! But just how many of these hearings and investigation go on at your company? One or two a year? Or is the company so big that there's a full time job available? In the future much of the hearing or investigation will be managed online.

10. Administer compensation, benefits and performance management systems and safety and recreation programs.

Again, some overlap. Human resource information systems, employee self-service, and similar tools help take HR administration out of the picture. Employees can stay on top of their pay and benefits and receive total compensation statements all without ever interacting with HR. HR will be involved to make sure that mandated safety programs are being followed and are free from human error. There will always be an opportunity for HR to engage employees through recreational or similar programs.

When you look at the rest of the task list it is fairly redundant. HR executives can still investigate claims (when not using their attorney to do so), hand out employee awards, analyze exit interviews, etc.

NOW LET'S LOOK AT SOME OF THE SKILL SET REQUIREMENTS:

Technology HR is rapidly moving towards technology.

There is technology for payroll, benefits, training, personnel management, hiring, performance management, surveys, training, employee expenses, time keeping and more. Today savvy HR executive understands they have to be a master of these programs, or work with someone who is.

Knowledge

When you look at the knowledge required by an HR executive ONET talks first about understanding the principles of personnel management and human resources. However anything that is available in written form will be easily absorbed by a robot. They will have no memory failures and total recall of all available inputs and data. What they won't have, at least not yet, is the wisdom behind the information.

Administration and Management

Any time you see the words administration and management know most of these tasks will be replaced by computerization.



Psychology

What's left: psychology. The knowledge of human behavior and performance, individual differences in ability, personality interests; learning and motivations; and more. The problem is we already have robots that can do a better job of discerning personality problems than psychiatrists can. What makes you think HR can do a better job than those robots or psychiatrists?

In looking through the rest of these job description these skills and abilities came out as something that would be slow to be robotized:

1. **Active listening**—Are you good at listening? A robot can listen forever without becoming impatient or needing to interrupt.
2. **Social perceptiveness**—If you are in fact socially perceptive.
3. **Critical thinking**—It must be high cognitive, creative critical thought.
4. **Judgment and decision making**—Robots are already good at that and they don't get in trouble with hidden human biases either.
5. **Negotiation**—There will come the day when my robot will negotiate with your robot.
6. **Persuasion**—The ability to change the minds and behavior of others. Not yet.
7. **Inductive reasoning**—The ability to connect the dots in the way that computers cannot do so.
8. **Idea generation**—Humans are still the most amazing idea generating machines on the planet. How are you tapping in to this creativity?

Here's at least some good news—The use of all this technology should reduce the typical work week of an HR executive. According to O*Net, 82% of HR executives work over 40 hours a week. Theoretically they will unburden us from routine tasks, reduce our work weeks and allow us to do more of the high cognitive, creative work we desire.

The day will come when having a job with routine work to do will be viewed as luxury.

