

# BALANCING HR TRICHOTOMY WITHIN THE NGO SECTOR: STRATEGIC POSITIONING OF HUMAN RESOURCE FUNCTION

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## Abstract

*The role of human resource (HR) has been changing over the years but the speed of change may not have been met by a corresponding understanding of the emerging intricacies and complexities of the HR tasks and responsibilities. For a long time, the HR function has been confined to a dichotomous relationship between advocating for employee rights (employee activist) and aligning the human resources to organizational strategies to ensure achievement of its goals (employer defender). Yet, there is also an increasing emphasis on HR professionals as change champions. These different perspectives have often conflicted with each other especially in the non-profit sector such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs) where there are competing interests by the donors. HR professionals working in the NGO sector may find juggling responsibilities of being an activist as well as a defender presenting two opposing tensions that can potentially wear down the officers professionally and personally. For the overall success of the organization, the need for linkage and harmony of strategic needs of the organization with that of the employees that subsequently brings about both success to the organization and satisfaction and willingness to change by workers is critical. That implies therefore that HR professionals cannot choose sides between being an employee advocate, a business partner, or a change interception of the trichotomy in a way to achieve win-win results, which is the subject of this paper. This paper calls for an appropriate balance in job operationalization identifies the various tensions and conflicts and attempts to provide a suitable framework to recognize and balance the trichotomy in a way that provides assurance to the organization, its workers as well as the HR professional.*

**Key words:**  
Trichotomy,  
Human Resource  
Management,  
Change Agent,  
Employee Advocate,  
HR Strategy, HR  
Activist.

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## Introduction

### Background and Recent Changes in the Human Resource Function

The role of Human Resource Management (HRM) has been changing over the years. The initial function was mostly confined to administrative or clerical duties involving keeping employee records and supervising work. In the global arena, HR personnel were seen as efficient bureaucratic administrators in recruitments (Novicevic & Harvey, 2001) as well as the dismissal of those who were not meeting set standards, especially incorporates. Nyambegera (2017) observes that in the 1960s Kenya recruited mostly the police as personnel officers and managers because of the belief that people needed to be directed, controlled, and disciplined to work effectively. Later on, there were changes in building relations based on employee protectionism. In this case, the expectations were that the HR personnel's main goal was to defend the rights and promote the well-being of employees. This also saw a different

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nomenclature ranging from personnel officers, personnel managers to welfare officers.

More recently, human resource professionals were tasked with more strategic roles including aligning the human resources to business strategies to ensure the organization meets its goals. As such, the HR function involves participation in organization strategy development as well as execution by being business partners and strategists. This has also led to a shift in titles to human resource managers (See for example Brown, Metz, Cregan, & Kulik, 2009) but the speed of change may not have been met by a corresponding understanding of the intricacies and complexities of the HR tasks and responsibilities. In a way, this function sees the HR professional sitting on the same side as the employer in crafting the strategy and mobilizing staff towards implementation. Progressively, this role requires negotiation with the staff on behalf of the employer rather than talking with the employer on behalf of the staff, which has traditionally been the case.

The two different sides of being both an employee-activist and employer-defender present a dichotomy that was and often still is in conflict with each other especially for NGOs, leaving HR professionals at the center. However, being a champion on strategy brings a third angle that introduces a trichotomy within the HR function. Subsequently, the challenge becomes how to balance these three roles while remaining true to employees as their protector and being loyal to the organization as its promoter. This harmony is more often difficult in the non-profit sector, which in Kenya is mainly comprised of NGOs.

Many NGOs go through a constantly changing internal and external environment that exposes many to difficulties in securing adequate funding. As a matter of fact, many NGOs tend to be affected because of their substantial reliance on external funding. According to NGO Council (2010), most of the local NGOs in Kenya intervene in areas that improve the livelihoods of people and the environment. However, difficulties in raising adequate funding for their operations means that they can only set aside limited financial resources for the benefit of staff. That explains why most NGOs will either not have an HR department, or perhaps keep a very lean HR staffing. For HR professionals working in the NGO sector, balancing responsibilities of being an activist as well as a defender is generally a huge task and may present opposing tensions that can potentially wear down the officers professionally and personally. Similarly, this tension may also widen the gaps between their aspirations and the actual role. The main challenge, in this case, is how to manage the two-fold roles effortlessly and efficiently in order to promote proper motivation within the workforce while safeguarding the smooth functioning of the organization.

The third role is often forgotten, that is, the place of HR professionals as change champions. Nadiv, Raz, and Kuna (2017) assert that there continues to be an endless and unsettled debate in the HR community as to whether the HR strategic role is a myth or reality. Indeed, there are further arguments that HR management is more doing and less thinking. Hence, while the more traditional and popular tasks may be seen in duality, the participation in strategy development and continuous assessment of the effectiveness of the organizational results should focus attention on the HR professional as a champion for change. Caldwell (2011) emphasizes that HR management has been a strategic role since the 1990s especially in strategy development and key decision-making of the organization. What that implies is the need for linkage and harmony of the strategic needs of the organization with that of the employees that subsequently brings about both success to the organization, and satisfaction and willingness to change by workers.

Within the NGO sector, the HR professional will essentially be positioned to develop and execute successful change strategies, which is always a sweet aroma to

NGOs' leadership. Staffing changes aligned to organizational vision and mission touch on organizational structure and culture, which fully establishes the trichotomy. Of course, this has not taken cognizance of the HR professional's own struggles for excellence performance in order to maintain job security. As a result, that calls for an appropriate balance in job operationalization, and this paper thus identifies the various tensions and conflicts and attempts to provide a suitable framework to recognize and balance the trichotomy in a way that provides assurance to the organization, its workers as well as HR professional.

### **Evolution of HR**

Employees are normally viewed as the most important asset for any organization, and NGOs are not any different. In implementing organizational strategies and plans in order to meet specified goals, employees are therefore positioned as the key drivers of organizational success and this emphasizes the need for supporting and empowering employees. Part of this may require HR personnel to be enabled to discover innovative approaches to resolving any employee-related matters. Therefore, understanding and supporting the HR function is essential in not only managing employees effectively but also in enabling the organization to achieve performance excellence.

According to Goldin (1994), the 20th century witnessed severe labor unrest because many of the employers could fire employees at will. This situation became worse since the laws at the time were constrained as a result of increases in minimum wages, and associated regulations that also restricted employees from participating in union activities. The unrest and frequent strikes, with dwindling manpower, forced a lot of companies to introduce personnel departments whose responsibilities were critical in performing administrative functions related to workers. Against all odds, labor unions became prevalent in fighting for employee rights, and consequently, the personnel department was expected to take lead in resolving wage and other related issues including differences between the union and management. Thus the responsibility of employee attendance and involvement, general compliance of laid down policies, and labor-dispute management was bestowed on personnel managers. The charity sector was not well established at this point and therefore not heavily affected by these developments.

In the United States of America (USA), The Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) of 1938 was instituted, and Grossman (1978) argues that this was about the time of the great depression. He further argues that this law brought optimism to the working class since FLSA mandated minimum wages along with other provisions and laws that safeguarded employees' interests. In response, companies established teams with responsibilities of handling various facets of their business, and personnel departments evolved in their functions to address increasing cases of statutory compliance as well as health and safety concerns of staff. There was also more emphasis on training and development, which further expanded the HR horizon. Consequently, apart from staff training and development, the HR function included performance management and succession planning.

In the 21st century, changes in the economic conditions necessitated the widening of the HR role to encompass participation in the decision making of the company. In particular, and to avoid potential court cases as a result of more informed workers, HR personnel were included in management decisions around recruitment, disciplinary issues, redundancies, and downsizing. As a matter of fact, this marked the beginning of the redefined role of the HR function as an employer defender. Furthermore, they got involved in handling the cost of benefits such as insurance and pension for the employees, and in developing policies and standard operating

guidelines. It can be deduced that the success in the devolvement of roles required comprehensive conceptualization at the individual, team, and organizational levels (Intindola, Weisinger, Benson & Pittz, 2017). In the developing world, the working population is increasingly being sensitized on their rights and as a result, the HR role has to address aspects of activism to ensure that agitation for the rights by employees does not reach an unmanageable level.

### **Overview of NGO Sector**

Overall, NGOs are viewed differently in diverse contexts but Nachmias (1999) describes them as formal, non-profit, public, and non-governmental organizations, which may be operating in various parts of the world. In Kenya, NGOs are generally seen as loosely established voluntary organizations that are locally based and largely grass-roots in nature. Mutua (2009) adds that NGOs may also be national or even transnational voluntary associations with formalized articles of association and structure for operationalization. As a result, many Kenyan NGOs vary in how they are structured and operate as well as their mandate. The structure includes staffing where the HR function sits squarely in the middle. According to the United Nations Research Institute for Social Change [UNRISD] (2000), NGOs conduct their activities largely as independent agents, and hardly accountable to either national or international authorities.

Riddell and Robinson (1995) are of the opinion that most NGOs may be working in emergency, relief, or long term development work, but sometimes a mixture of all the three functions. This view is confirmed by Nachmias (1999) who contends that NGOs that exercise functional sovereignty will often assume specialism over a selected issue within an area on an exclusive, or a shared basis. The National Council of NGOs (also NGO Council), a member of national, regional, and international NGOs functioning in Kenya, notes that most of the NGOs intervene in improving the welfare of people and their environment (NGO Council, 2010). Mutua (2009) concurs that NGOs are now important players in good governance, economic intervention, and social development in many areas all over the world. Consequently, the operational arrangements for most NGOs will vary from community-based groups on specific interventions to shared responsibility with national governments or other institutions in similar fields to full autonomy. This implies that the HR role is quite varied, with community-based organizations often lacking a strategic approach to how they deal with their workers.

Riddell and Robinson (1995) point out that many NGOs make a contribution in efforts geared towards reducing poverty and supporting the lives of the poor to be a little more bearable. Goddard and Assad (2006) support this view by asserting that the significance of NGOs can be demonstrated by a major swing in development funding that is currently routed through NGOs. As a matter of fact, the capital inflows from the donor community to operating NGOs in developing countries have increased by about 700 percent (Randel, German & Ewing, 2000), and this has created an environment of high expectations about potential growth and opportunities. More recently, however, donor funding has become unpredictable. There is numerous turbulence for NGOs especially around funding, and according to Bray (2008), the struggle to survive for a huge number of NGOs continues as many donors withdraw their funding. As a result, the leadership of numerous NGOs are at crossroads on how to strengthen the financial performance and general health of their organizations. Kameri-Mbote (2000) observes that small and medium-sized development NGOs in Kenya are especially affected due to their low levels of funding. Indeed, their reliance on singular donor funding, she adds, has not made much of their working easier. This means that such small and medium-sized NGOs

struggle to keep their staff let alone their own sustainability. This is a great challenge for HR personnel who have a great responsibility of assuring staff together with leadership that their employer remains a going concern despite difficulties. Unfortunately, there are no guarantees. Management Accounting for NGOs [MANGO] (2009), states that the fundraising strategy of NGOs need to be characterized by a diversified funding base if they are to survive into the future. Their survival is an important ingredient in determining to what extent employee rights can be guaranteed.

## **TENSIONS AND CONFLICTS IN THE HR ROLE**

### **Causes of Tension and Conflicts**

HR functions have undergone significant changes over the years, and Truss et al. (2002) confirms that this has resulted in several role dimensions. Some of the changes have been consistent with employer-employee expectations while other changes have led to confusion. For instance, in moving away from one role to the other, the transformation may have led to the neglect of responsibilities. Whether the neglect talks to the diminishing the importance of those responsibilities is an area of discussion.

What is obvious is that the full performance of the HR role requires professionals to serve both as administrative experts and as change agents. Moreover, Cannings and Hills (2012) suggest four levels of HR audit including compliance, functional, service, and strategy, which in a sense recognizes many aspects of the HR role that ought to be assessed. As such, the outcry regarding HR professionals who transition to strategic roles while ignoring other functions is an area of dissatisfaction. Balancing of such roles is critical; otherwise, it brings undesirable conflicts and tensions in employer and employee expectations.

### **Tensions Arising from Strategic Planning for the Organization**

There are many situations where trichotomy plays out. A typical example is during strategic planning, which focusses on how to mobilize and plan resources to achieve organizational goals. According to Sirmon and Hitt (2003), this is very much premised on the resource-based view (RBV) as a managerial tool to determine the strategic resources able to bring about competitive advantage to an organization. One of the key resources is the workers within the organization. In this case, it is expected that the resources would be exploited in a way that achieves sustainable competitive advantage for the organization. For NGOs, the purpose would be different particularly in targeting social benefits since their bottom-line has nothing to do with profits.

The overriding assumption is that resources are limited, and this is similar to the NGO sector. The implication of this is that planning is about having human and financial resources available for the implementation of activities despite the condition of those employees. For example, an organization in the health sector may put more resources in buying medical supplies and educating communities in disease prevention, but very little allocation for staffing and staff welfare diminishing their own cognizance of the need to take care of their workers.

On the other hand, Grillo (2013) explains that some people only see the dichotomy of being an employee activist and employer defender as being mutually exclusive, in a sense omitting the third element. In this case, focusing on the former (employee activist) often undermines the HR's voice in being trusted as a business partner. This is particularly pronounced in the NGO sector where the focus around

delivering specific missions diminishes attention for internal stakeholders including employees. As a matter of fact, cost-cutting is the norm rather than the exception and therefore limits the offerings for employee benefits. This is definitely a huge task for HR personnel to convince employees that the organization is keen on their welfare. The only exception here may be the international staff working in the country who is reported to earn up to four times the salaries of local staff with similar job roles, skills, and education (NGO Coordination Board, 2016). While this may be common in international NGOs, it must not be seen as a standard acceptable practice.

Besides, as an employer defender and particularly for NGOs, an HR professional would be expected to be a business partner with organizational leadership in convincing employees that they need to do more with less where resources are allocated to critical activities of the organization. This may seem to contradict the HR role as an employee activist where the same HR professional ought to advocate for employees in ensuring that the employer provides better working conditions and benefits for workers. In the end, there is obvious tension and the task of balancing these roles is often quite conflicting as well as daunting. It is also important to note that for a number of NGOs the budget to employ an HR professional may not exist. In such cases, senior managers as well as the chief executives would be the ones playing the role of HR focal point. There is no documentation as to the level of success in such cases but it is obvious that they may be conflicted in trying to push the interests of both organizations and employees at the same time. Doubtless, this situation becomes murky where the donors have differing priorities.

### **Conflicts from aligning Organizational Priorities with Internal Stakeholders**

Generally, stakeholders are entities and individuals who stand to gain or lose depending on the performance of the organization (Freeman, 1984), and there are both internal and external stakeholders. Normally, stakeholders' voices play a critical role in terms of the priorities for the organizations especially in crafting the mission and strategies for the organization. The NGO sector is well advanced in collecting and harmonizing stakeholder perspectives particularly those who may be the target beneficiaries.

Parks (2008) notes that most non-profit organizations experience fluctuations in funding due to the perpetual shifting of priorities by international donors. Therefore, NGOs dependent on such funding are also forced to re-align their priorities with donor interests. Ordinarily, many donors tend to be so focused on their mission that internal stakeholders including employees are often not given much attention. Anecdotal evidence indicates that there are many examples of thriving NGOs with miserable staff and that is why the NGO Coordination Board has occasionally come out to reinforce certain minimum standards.

In any case, since most donors are more interested in external stakeholders, their interests and demands will more likely be conflicted with the internal stakeholders. For example, the communities targeted as beneficiaries may only be keen to see how the organization impacts on their lives without much regard to whether the workers who are the agents of change are taken care of. This is one area where the work of HR professionals becomes very challenging, to the extent of conflicting with donor priorities and interests. Indeed, the issue of realigning these differing interests could be a cause for great pain and distress, yet the HR personnel ought to remain objective in assessment and putting a case forward especially from an employee perspective.

## **Discriminative Compliance of Policies**

Broadly speaking, HR policies and guidelines can normally be classified into two categories: those that are pro-employer such as code of conduct and termination guidelines, and those that are pro-employees such as employee retention, compensation, and benefits policy. It is public knowledge that employers will always be more enthusiastic about implementing the former while the latter is always implemented grudgingly. Very few NGOs if any would qualify for the award of best employers.

In legislative provisions, there are always minimum standards designed to provide a benchmark of decency and fairness within the workplace (Dickens & Hall, 2006). HR professionals will by the design of their responsibilities push towards compliance and fairness, but for NGOs, this is often conditional and contingent on funding environment. Thus, NGOs make a business case based on economic arguments that hardly take any actions on grounds of lack of resources. As a result, it provides a context where corporate interests as defined by the organization get a privileged justification against responsibilities towards employees. This presents a dilemma for HR professionals specifically around wages and benefits (Heyes& Gray, 2003), and who on their own must also think about their job security – essentially following and being on the side of who butters their bread. In such cases, fairness may be emphasized in the policies but hardly translated into practice for the organization.

It is not strange therefore that the continued reluctance of employers in improving workers' conditions and the environment has made the trade unions very popular especially with profit-oriented companies (Kimunya&Nyambegera, 2017). Bryson (2007) notes that the union's primary goal has been about maintaining and improving workers' terms and conditions, particularly workers who are members of the union. This is usually accomplished through collective bargaining with employers. In other words, the extent to which unions are successful depends largely on their bargaining power (Dinardo& Lee, 2004) but also their ability to control labor supply to the employers (Dominguez & Rodriguez-Gutierrez, 2004), and willingness of the employers to pay above-market wages. The HR professional becomes the negotiator in this case even though leaning more towards safeguarding the employer.

## **A BALANCED HR POSITIONING AND PHILOSOPHY**

### **Systems Theory Perspective in Employer-Employee Relations and Synergy**

HR professionals working in NGOs have a great opportunity to build fantastic employer-employee relations and synergy. Indeed, employee relations is an HR discipline targeted at strengthening bonds between employers and employees. One way of appreciating the importance of employees is to view them as a cog in the wheel, which is a sub-system with a system. This is the essence of general systems theory, which when applied to HR reveals that organizations are made up of interrelated parts and any changes in one part affect other parts. The concept helps to acknowledge that any initiatives will only have a desirable outcome if other parts are considered (Broedling, 1999). As a system, an important phenomenon is the realization that improvements to any organization require the elements to interact with each other. Systems theory principally argues that organizations, like living organisms, are composed of various component subsystems that ought to work together in harmony in order for the entire system to succeed. Skyttner (2005) supports the view that the theory relies on interrelations, interdependence, and synergy amongst different subsystems for organizational excellence.

Without a doubt, therefore, employees make up a vital subsystem just as the leadership in an organization. HR personnel, even though seen as an element within the subsystem also serve as facilitators of subsystem interactions. That calls for balanced positioning in employee-employer relations so that teamwork is synergistic. Consequently, the employees should be committed to contributing to what is best for the system and not just their own motivation. Equally, employers cannot just look at their mission without due respect to the agents that deliver the mission. Notwithstanding, who is better placed to explore and bring to reality this mental model on how an organization should ideally function than the HR personnel.

Similarly, Skyttner (2005) reiterates that employee relations embraces a range of ideas and practices geared towards working collaboratively. In this case, it is a fundamental opportunity to break down barriers in relationships between employees and employers. In addition, recognizing excellent performance by employees is an important element of employee relations, as is respecting the demands of employers in meeting organizational objectives. This is what creates synergy in an organization, that is, an enhanced outcome from teamwork. Obviously, NGOs with strong relationships with their workers can create an atmosphere of creativity and innovation, encouraging staff to work together at different levels and drive growth and success.

For this to succeed, the HR function must go beyond administrative roles to include employee advocate or activist, business/strategic partner and change agent. By default, systems theory must be integrated as a way of thinking, allowing a process of developing and deploying processes, tools, and systems that create synergy and improve relationships. Unfortunately, while such fresh philosophy may position HR personnel differently including operating at a loss to themselves in order to optimize the whole system (Broedling, 1999), these invaluable initiatives to spur organizational success must always take primacy.

### **Theoretical Foundation in Positioning of HR role using Ulrich's Model**

Nadiv, Raz, and Kuna (2017) cite Ulrich's pioneering work as the most popular and highly cited model of strategic HR. The model suggests that the role of HR may be seen as a combination of four distinct roles: administrative expert, employee champion, strategic partner and change agent. Pritchard (2010) notes that Ulrich's model is one of the most commonly cited models in the study of strategic HR roles. This view is supported by Bhatnagar and Sharma (2005) that the model is backed up by empirical findings as well as methodological instruments allowing replication. This means that there has been wide adoption of the distinct roles and activities of HR practitioners.

The four elements suggested by the model can obviously be seen in the trichotomy of the HR function, and many NGOs have adopted these selectively depending on their contexts and resources. Caldwell (2011) however suggests that the benefits that accrue from HR professionals can only be realized through full integration of the four HR roles. It is also important to note that the success in creating deliverables in HR systems and processes also relies on HR personnel having appropriate competencies to accomplish these tasks.

The importance of shifts in HR roles has been subject to studies in the UK and the USA (Nadiv, Raz & Kuna, 2017) leading to wider acceptance of HR personnel as strategic partners. Anecdotal evidence shows that there has not been a corresponding shift in Africa. It is therefore expected that Kenya is lagging in recognition of the important role HR ought to play in corporate strategy implementation. That will also explain why the most common daily roles and activities are related to administrative functions. Despite these challenges and



limitations, Pritchard (2010) concludes that the strategic positioning of the HR role requires a persistent experience and transformation.

Table 1 below presents a summary of various studies related to the HR role and strategic positioning. The studies provide the gaps firming the basis for the review of literature and recommendations made.

### **Importance of Communication in HR Role**

One of the key ingredients to correct positioning is in communication. As a defender, HR professionals ought to execute an assessment of needs and opportunities for the organization including communication, mentoring, coaching, and how to engage with leadership. The responsibilities related to this function also make it easy for HR professionals to play their roles fully as change champions. This should provide a basis for addressing any concerns by employers but most importantly, that they can benefit from any proposed changes. As an activist, such a strategy will also help to keep employee wellbeing at the forefront of organizational agenda, recognized as the key asset for the organization through which change is achieved. Overall, HR experts cannot forget about their triple roles of being an employee activist or advocate, a change champion and employer defender, and perhaps more important is how the respective activities are operationalized and interlinked.

One way of guaranteeing success is putting in place a communication strategy that addresses the concerns of both employees and employers. Bowen and Lawler (1992) contend that human resources management systems should be designed and structured in a way that encourages an open flow of information about quality and performance so that leadership has the assurance of strategic direction. Of course, it is not just about employers needing information; this should be extended to employees as well as touching on their areas of interest. Indeed, Borden (2011) is of the opinion that the quality of communication influences the entire functioning of the organization and that all relationships are based on how well organizational communication is effected. In this case, organizational communication opens channels for feedback while helping to identify and use incentives that can motivate employees. NGOs have been known to develop and implement good strategies and thus, a communication strategy that is befitting in profiling HR functions would be a doable task.

### **Integrated Approach in HR Functioning**

Grillo (2014) points out that the two dichotomous roles of employer defender and employee advocate do not have to be necessarily at odds with one another. As a matter of fact, she adds that HR is uniquely positioned not only in promoting mutually beneficial, healthy interaction and relationship between the organization and its staff, but also providing strategic input to organizational success and excellent performance. The latter is indeed what cements HR role at the leadership table, playing the role of change champion. Moreover, Nadiv, Raz, and Kuna (2017) indicate that prior researches have evidenced the correlation between the strategic role of HR practitioners and organizational abilities in adapting to the external environment.

Therefore, the threefold functions are critically important, and excellent performance can be achieved if there is a balance and integration of these roles. The execution ought to be carried out to the extent that organizational objectives can be pursued without violating employee rights or eroding the employee value proposition or playing a lip-service to the organizational mission. In a wider structure that is typical of large NGOs, the HR focal point is duty-bound as a strategic partner to

encourage and influence other business partners within the organization to understand the importance of striking this balance for the long-term success of the organization. No doubt, many NGOs stand to benefit significantly in their service to the communities if this can be achieved.

### **The Role of Emotional Intelligence in Positioning HR role**

Generally, HR professionals can make a great impact on their organizations and bring about remarkable achievements and exceptional value to their role through emotional intelligence (EQ). Embedded in EQ are aptitude and competencies that provide the basis for building trust, developing relationships, and widening influence. EQ is particularly useful where there is an environment of doubt and mistrust; workplaces where tensions and conflicts are common. Doubtless, the enduring positive emotions of emotionally intelligent staff who are endowed with positivism, optimism and self-assurance will not only thrive even under adverse circumstances, but also be influential cures that suppress the negative energy engendered by mistrust and cynicism (Abraham, 1999). This is the secret to high performance by HR professionals.

Any working environment is about people and for NGOs whether in the service industry or providing direct interventions, dealing with people vertically and horizontally is at the core of everyday work. At the organizational level, EQ provides the wherewithal needed to have a deep awareness of people, build rapport and trust, and establish collaboration. Therefore, emotionally intelligent HR professionals would be in a position to explore and exploit the potential benefits for both individual employees and the organization as a whole. Barry and du Plessis, (2007) support this view that human resource management requires soft skills, competencies, and abilities, which are pivotal to organizational success.

### **Raising the Value and Profile of HR Function**

Many NGOs do not have a fully-fledged HR department because of a limited understanding of their roles as well as funding. At best, one may find a single HR person whose function is merely administrative with very little or no strategic impact. Unfortunately, the neglect of this role is evident through numerous employee lawsuits against employers that arise from non-compliance as well as violations of employees' rights. There are ways to raise the profile and value of HR function in order not only to have a seat at the management table but also to be viewed as a more strategic business partner. One important step is being an expert regarding matters to do with employee entitlements and rights on one hand, and employer obligations and responsibilities on the other hand. This also requires an understanding of employee interests when it comes to concerns and issues affecting them, and advising the employers appropriately, Heartfield(n.d) contends that HR can save its employment and labor-related laws.

By guarding organization millions of dollars in potential lawsuits and bad publicity. This is not any different from the situation locally. Anecdotal evidence indicates that Kenyan organizations have witnessed an increasing number of employment and labor-related court cases in recent times. This has costed huge sums of money, which could have otherwise gone to useful projects. On a related note, HR is positioned to prevent injustice towards individuals who are often at a disadvantaged point when they stand to lose their job and source of livelihoods. Dealing with such cases can go a long way in not only positioning HR function within strategy orientation but also safeguarding HR role both as employee activist and employer defender.

Perhaps the best illustration of appropriately positioning human resource function is in total quality management (TQM). Sasmita and Nayantara (2005) are of the view that the quality policy of any organization highlights critical areas of compliance to the laid down specifications and standards. To achieve this end, the HR plan should, therefore, emphasize continuous skills upgrade and competence building to ensure that workers have what it takes for adherence. Sasmita and Nayantara (2005) have provided a framework for the involvement of HR professionals in quality processes given below.

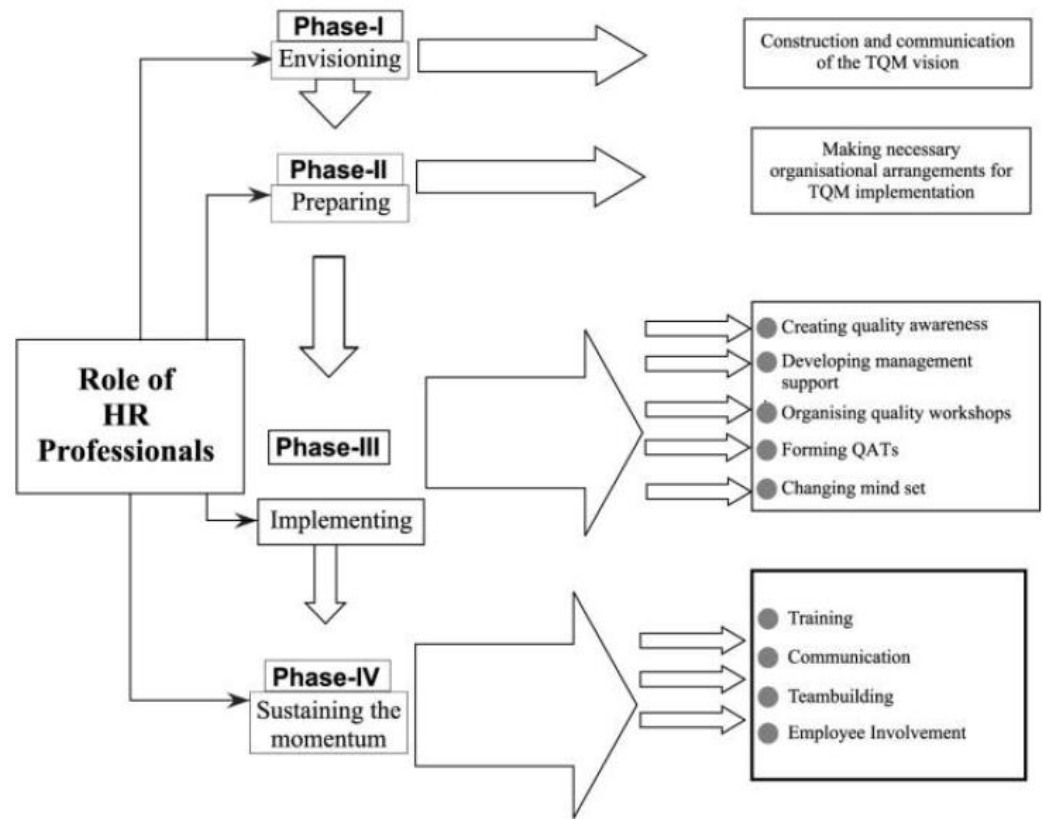


Figure 1: Framework for the involvement of HR professional in quality processes (Sasmita & Nayantara, 2005)

## CONCLUSION

No doubt, HR functions have undergone significant changes over the years, and Truss et al. (2002) confirms that this has resulted in several role dimensions. Ulrich (1997), who has been a key architect in the re-designing of HR function was instrumental in introducing the HR role as a business partner. For full performance, this requires HR professionals to also serve as administrative experts as well as change agents. Notwithstanding, Lawler (2011) notes that there is concern that the strategic competence of HR professionals is underutilized as they remain caught up with operational tasks.

Incidentally, HR professionals trying to transition to strategic roles always ignore the importance of accomplishing administrative tasks. In any organization, including not-for-profit, every single person is a valuable piece of the puzzle and therefore equally important to the overall success of the organization. That means everyone needs the other, and no one is best placed to recognize this than the HR professionals. Lack of or inadequate balancing of such roles, therefore, leads to tensions for the HR professional who is trying to balance employer and employee expectations.

Consequently, their task as strategic partners require them to communicate the expectations of the employer to the employees while aligning job roles, skills, and competencies so that the organization achieves its goals. While doing that they must also be alive to their role as employee advocates who influence other leaders and promote the well-being of employees to create an environment of superb performance. What that means is that HR professionals cannot choose sides between being an employee advocate, a business partner, or a change champion. Of course, this will not always be easy, and the context for NGOs make it particularly challenging. Nevertheless, they must balance their roles through integration to ensure the interception of the three elements in a way to achieve a win-win result.

Essentially, HR must always participate in strategy development and implementation, and strive to create value for the organization through designing appropriate organizational policies, systems and structures, and empower workers to give their best towards performance excellence. No doubt, as organizations see results in achieving goals and value creation, businesses will be compelled to honor, protect and motivate their employees. Eventually, HR then stands in a unique position as a partner in attaining success, aspirations, and long-term growth for the organization. Notwithstanding, a key pointer in organizational confidence in the HR strategic role would be representation at the topmost decision-making level. As a matter of fact, Caldwell (2011) concurs that HR representation at the board level would provide the recognition, status, and respect deserving of such a critical role. Indeed, that is where there should be a seat for the HR role if proper positioning is to be achieved.

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