

HR Glossary

This document includes (in alphabetical order) commonly used terms and definitions that are significant to the human resources (HR) function.

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360-degree feedback/Multi-source feedback:

A process in which someone's performance is assessed, and feedback is given by several people who work closely with the individual, including his/her peers, subordinates, colleagues and customers.

Absenteeism:

The practice of regularly failing to turn up for work.

Accountability:

The requirement that officials answer to stakeholders on the disposal of their powers and duties, act on criticisms or requirements made of them and accept (some) responsibility for failure, incompetence or deceit.

Action learning:

A method of management development based on the completion of practical assignments and problem-solving tasks. It encourages both organisational learning and self-development, anchored in work and 'real time' and allows participants to transfer learning directly to work.

Adviser:

A person who gives advice in a field. Sometimes denotes a person who is not in a full-time established post and may be a political appointment.

Allowances:

Current rewards other than base pay. These can be provided as part of the employment contract (e.g. transportation, housing, meals, telephone, travel, cost of living), or can be provided on a non-contractual basis or as intangible rewards (e.g. trips abroad or training).

Annual leave:

The number of hours or days employees of an organisation are permitted to be away from their employment position within a single calendar year without consequences.

Annual hour contracts:

Contracts of employment where the total hours to be worked in a 12-month period are specified, rather than the weekly hours.

Application form:

A form completed by job applicants which provides the information on which initial selection decisions are based.

Appraisal:

The process of evaluating the performance and assessing the development/training needs of an employee or the performance of an institution against its work programme, budget or strategic goals.

Appraiser:

The person responsible for undertaking an appraisal of an employee (known as the appraisee).

Attendance record:

The official log of an employee's presence at work.

Attended time:

The time the worker spends at the workplace in any single period.

Attitude survey:

A tool used by management to assess the opinions and morale of the staff.

Back pay:

Payment in arrears to make up for past under- or non-payment of wages.

Balanced scorecard:

A technique for measuring organisational success and identifying areas for improvement and action.

Band:

A range of pay which is offered to workers in the same job or grade.

Base pay/basic pay:

The rate of pay for a job or grade in an organisation, to which can be added various supplements, benefits, bonuses and allowances.

Basic working time:

The number of weekly or annual hours set out in an employee's contract of employment or in a collective agreement between a trade union and an employer.

Behavioural event interview:

An alternative term for situational interview.

Behavioural Observation Scale (BOS):

A technique for evaluating the performance of an employee which can be used as part of the appraisal process.

Benchmarking:

The technique of comparing organisations or ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs) to identify and share best practice.

Benefits:

Employee benefits or fringe benefits form part of remuneration and consist of a broad range of special payments or benefits in kind.

Bio data:

Pieces of information that can be objectively categorised (e.g. qualifications, years of relevant experience and positions of responsibility).

Body language:

The set of non-verbal signals a person transmits through his/her posture, eye contact, gestures and facial expressions.

Bonus:

A payment made in addition to the basic wage or salary and which in most cases is linked to the achievement of a specific performance target or behavioural standard of some kind

Brainstorming:

A problem-solving technique for generating ideas.

Bureaucracy:

An organisation's formal rules and procedures are usually referred to as bureaucracy. It is common for the term bureaucracy to be used as a criticism of an organisation. For example, employees will sometimes complain that the organisation is too bureaucratic, meaning that they feel too constrained and have a lack of autonomy.

Capacity, capacity development, capacity building:

Capacity – the skills, knowledge and resources needed to perform a function.

Capacity development – the process by which individuals, groups, organisations, institutions and countries develop their abilities, individually and collectively, to perform functions, solve problems and achieve objectives.

Capacity building differs from capacity development in that the latter builds on a pre-existing capacity base. The aim of capacity development and capacity building is to help

governments, organisations and people attain a level of self-sufficiency that enables them to effectively manage their own affairs.

Career:

The series of jobs that a person has throughout his/her working life.

Career management:

The process through which the motivations and abilities of employees are accessed, and their personal development is planned and guided, in line with the opportunities available.

Career path:

A metaphor to describe the progress an individual makes through an organisation.

Champion of change:

A temporary role given to an officer which entails taking responsibility for a change initiative or a programme of change within an organisation.

Chartered Institute of Personnel Development (CIPD):

The professional association of personnel/human resource practitioners in the UK.

Civil service:

Those branches of public service that are not legislative, judicial or military and in which employment is usually based on competitive appointment. The body of civilian employees of any level of government, not subject to political appointment and removal, normally hired and promoted in merit. The entire body of persons employed by the civil branches of a government.

Civil servant:

A term generally referring to administrators, technical and professional staff and their support staff paid for implementing the policies of national, state or local governments. Essentially those who work for a government ministry or department (but not a parastatal) at the federal or state level.

Clocking on/in:

The act of registering attendance at work.

Coaching:

A regular series of training or development sessions where an experienced employee with considerable expertise guides and advises a less experienced officer.

Code of conduct/ code of ethics:

A written set of conventional rules, principles and expectations that are considered binding on any person who is a member of a group, in this case the civil service.

Collective bargaining:

Careful interactions with labour or employee unions, addressing their grievances and settling the disputes effectively in order to maintain peace and harmony in the organisation. It is the art and science of understanding the employment (union–management) relations, joint consultation, disciplinary procedures, solving problems with mutual efforts, understanding human behaviour and maintaining work relations.

Compensation:

The payment for work that compensates the employees for the utility of labour.

Competency:

The behaviours and attitudes required to deliver policies, services and functions efficiently and effectively and on which individual and team performance is assessed. The underlying behavioural characteristic of a person that results in effective or superior performance.

Competency-based pay:

A payment system that relates salary progression or a cash bonus to the display of specific competencies by individual employees.

Competitive advantage:

Occurs when an organisation is implementing a strategy that has not yet been adopted by or been adopted as well by its current or potential competitors.

Conflict resolution:

The process of settling industrial disputes, which in many cases will involve the use of third-party intervention to conciliate, mediate or arbitrate between the two sides.

Consultant:

A person who offers advice to others based on a sound analysis of a given situation. Usually employed under a fixed-term contract to produce predefined outputs.

Consultation:

Occurs when managers seek the views of employees and take them into account when making decisions. More widely, when government seeks the views of its citizens on issues that affect them such as service delivery standards.

Continuous improvement:

The concept that encourages employees and managers to look constantly for ways of making changes to any system or process that will improve performance.

Continuous learning:

The process through which employees and managers meet the challenge of perpetual change that faces many contemporary organisations in a highly competitive, turbulent environment.

Continuous professional development:

The concept that the members of a profession should commit themselves individually to improving their knowledge and understanding throughout their careers and keeping up to date with all developments within their chosen profession.

Contract of employment:

A formal, written agreement that an employee will work for an employer in return for wages, which comes into effect as soon as an offer of employment is accepted.

Core competencies:

Key activities and skills present within an organisation or MDA that are required for the effective delivery of the mandates or strategy of that entity.

Core employees:

Are those who undertake value-adding activities considered by management to be vital to the success of the organisation.

Corporate plan:

The result of a process in which an organisation, institution or business analyses its objectives, priorities, strategies and environment considering its mandate, and determines how to bid for, organise and apply resources to achieving objectives, and meeting service delivery standards and targets. The plan guides the management and staff in a cohesive effort to carry out the organisation's mandate. It informs everyone involved (including the public and stakeholders) about the organisation's priorities and objectives. In the public sector a ministry, agency or other body will usually produce a corporate plan.

Counselling:

The provision of supportive and confidential advice to employees to help them overcome problems and cope with work or home-based crises.

Cross-functional team:

A group of employees who are from the same level in the organisational hierarchy but who all have specialist skills to offer.

Culture change programmes:

Processes and systems designed to transform the attitudes and behaviour of employees and elicit their commitment to the values that senior management deem important to the success of the organisation.

Culture:

The set of shared understandings and assumptions the members of the organisation have about what the organisation is (beliefs), how it ought to be (values), and how organisational members should behave (norms).

Curriculum vitae 'CV' or résumé:

A record of achievements – a personal history detailing education, qualifications, previous work experience and achievements and current job responsibilities.

Customer care:

The idea that service organisations and their workers should be highly responsive to the needs of customers and deliver quality service as a means of cultivating customer loyalty

Customer service questionnaires:

Information about employee performance that is gathered by managers from consumers and used to discipline, reward and identify training and development needs amongst employees.

Dead wood:

The term sometimes used to describe managers and professionals who are deemed to be ineffective.

Decentralisation:

Occurs when power and control cease to be concentrated in a single location and instead are dispersed throughout the organisation.

Deduction from wages:

Amounts deducted from an employee's gross wage by the employer before payment.

Demotion:

The act of moving employees down the organisational hierarchy, reducing their responsibilities and status and lowering their remuneration.

Demotivation:

A loss of the motivation to work by employees.

Direct communication:

The process whereby managers contact employees through various techniques such as team briefings, cascaded communication and newsletters.

Direct reports:

The employees accountable to line manager.

Disability:

Arriving at a robust definition of disability can be difficult because different social groups have different views on what constitutes ability and disability. However, from an employment perspective a person may be considered disabled if he/she has a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on his/her ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. Long term means that the condition must last, or be likely to last, for more than 12 months, or is likely to last for the rest of the life of the person.

Disciplinary interview:

An interview to which an employee is called to reply to a complaint or charge under a formal disciplinary procedure.

Disciplinary procedure:

A formal procedure that is established by managers to uphold disciplinary standards.

Discipline:

A process of setting and enforcing acceptable standards of behaviour within the employing organisation, in many cases through the medium of a formal disciplinary procedure.

Discrimination:

in very broad terms, we can say that discrimination occurs when, on grounds that are not relevant to a particular purpose, one person, or a group of people, are treated less favourably than others on grounds such as religion, ethnicity, gender, disability, etc.

Dismissal:

Occurs when an employer terminates the employment contract.

Dismissal with notice:

The final penalty for employee misconduct that falls short of gross misconduct.

Dismissal without notice:

The immediate or summary dismissal that should only occur in the event of gross misconduct.

Dispute:

An employment or industrial dispute is an expression of conflict between employers and employees.

Diversity:

Concept of recognising the wide variety of qualities possessed by people within an organisation.

Downsizing:

Getting rid of employees. Planned reduction of organisation headcount due to changes in business strategy or goals.

Early retirement:

Occurs when employees retire from their job before the normal contractual age of retirement.

Earnings:

The remuneration employees receive in return for work.

Effectiveness:

The capacity to realise organisational or individual objectives. Effectiveness requires competence; sensitivity and responsiveness to specific, concrete, human concerns; and the ability to articulate these concerns, formulate goals to address them and develop and implement strategies to realise these goals. A measure of the extent to which a project or programme is successful in achieving its objectives.

Efficiency:

The ratio of useful work and output performed by a bureaucracy in relation to the human and financial resources put in. Working efficiently with a minimum of wasted effort or expense. A measure of the 'productivity' of the implementation process – how economically inputs are converted into outputs, or the optimal transformation of inputs into outputs.

E-learning:

The acquisition of competencies, knowledge and skills through electronic media such as the internet or an organisation's own intranet.

Employability:

The possession of marketable skills and attributes by an employee that are in demand from employers.

Employee:

A worker who is hired under a contract of employment.

Employee development:

The system of providing opportunities for employees within an organisation to reach their full potential (through improving skills and competencies).

Employee relations:

This is concerned with preventing and resolving problems involving individuals, which arise out of or affect work situations. This maintains good employer – employee relationships that contribute to satisfactory productivity, motivation and morale.

Employment:

A term with two primary meanings. First, it is the state of being paid at work under a contract of employment. Second, it is the state of being gainfully occupied whether it is in an employed or self-employed capacity.

Employment law:

The body of law that governs the sphere of employment relations.

Employment status:

The classification of workers according to whether they are permanent employees who are employed under a contract of employment, or independent, temporary or self-employed workers who may work under a contract for service.

Equal opportunities:

The concept of ensuring fair treatment for all employees (or prospective employees) throughout the organisation.

Equal opportunity policy:

The set of procedures an organisation has established to ensure the fair treatment of employees.

Executive coaching

The development or strengthening of managerial competencies among senior managers through intensive dialogue with an independent consultant or senior HR officer

Exit interviews

Used to gather data to improve working conditions, retain existing employees and identify operational and strategic areas for improvement across the MDA and the service.

Human capital

This may be defined as the collective knowledge, skills, abilities and capacity to develop and innovate of the people working in an organisation.

Human resources:

The set of individuals who make up the workforce of an organisation.

Human resource development (HRD)

A subset of human resources management (HRM). A set of policies and processes for training and developing staff to meet the requirements of their current jobs and to underpin career development. HRD covers a broad spectrum and includes: induction, job-related knowledge skills and attitudes, competency development, professional skills and qualifications, coaching, management and leadership, and succession planning. It should always be planned and resourced to meet the requirements of the ministry or organisation and its impact regularly evaluated.

Human resources management (HRM)

The laws, regulations, policies and practices related to people in organisations: recruitment and selection, employment law and practice, HR development and training, promotion, discipline, grievance, dismissal, remuneration and reward, redundancy, retirement and pensions. HRM differs from personnel practice in that it is more strategic and not simply procedural. It is a strategic, proactive approach to the management of people. HRM is aligned with the goals of an organisation and its future direction. It ensures that once organisations have outlined their strategic goals, key people measures are then introduced to aid policy and strategic delivery.

Induction

The process of receiving and welcoming employees when they first join an organisation and giving them the basic information they need to start work

Industrial relations

Aspects of formal and collective relations between management and workers' representatives which are normally covered by collective bargaining.

Job:

An organisational unit consisting of a group of defined tasks or activities to be carried out or duties to be performed.

Job analysis:

Detailed examination of the tasks (performance elements) that make up a job, the conditions under which they are performed, and what the job requires in terms of aptitudes (potential for achievement), attitudes (behaviour, characteristics), knowledge, skills, and the physical condition of the employee. Its objectives include (a) determination of the most efficient methods of doing a job, (b) enhancement of the employee's job satisfaction, (c) improvement in training methods, (d) development of performance measurement systems, and (e) matching of job-specifications with the person specifications in employee selection.

Job description:

A job description or schedule is a list of the tasks, or functions, and responsibilities of a position. Typically, it also includes to whom the position reports, specifications such as the qualifications needed by the person in the job, salary range for the position, etc. A job description is usually developed by conducting a job analysis, which includes examining the tasks and sequences of tasks necessary to perform the job. The analysis looks at the areas of knowledge and skills needed for the job. Note that a role is the set of responsibilities or expected results associated with a job.

Job evaluation:

The process of assessing the relative demands of jobs with a view to allocating jobs to positions within a pay structure.

Job redesign:

A range of techniques that attempts to increase or alter the variety of tasks that employees perform to improve motivation and satisfaction at work, as well as more effective service delivery.

Key performance indicator (KPI):

A measure of achievement that can be attributed to an individual, team or department. KPIs are used to evaluate whether specific, pre-approved strategies and targets have been met in a predetermined timeframe and must be objectively measurable.

Learning and development:

The process of ensuring that the organisation has the knowledgeable, skilled and engaged workforce it needs. It can be used to describe specific, strategic HR interventions aimed at bettering the performance of individuals and groups in the organisation.

Learning culture:

A learning culture is one in which learning, and improvement is recognised by senior management, line managers and employees generally as an essential organisational process to which they are committed and in which they engage continuously.

Learning organisation:

An organisation that facilitates the learning of all its members and continually transforms itself.

Mandate:

An official order or authorisation, usually written, given to a public organisation or person, to act on behalf of others. A legal authorisation given to an organisation or an appointed official to act on behalf of other people; permission to govern according to declared policies, considered to be given to a public organisation by a legislature or legal ruler or leader.

Mission statement:

A brief written statement of the purpose of a public (or private) organization, ministry or department. Ideally, a mission statement guides the actions of the organisation, spells out its overall goal, provides a sense of direction, and guides decision making for all levels of management. Mission statements often contain the following:

- Purpose and aim of the organisation
- The organisation's primary stakeholders: clients, stockholders, etc.
- Responsibilities of the organisation towards these stakeholders
- Products and services offered.

Nominal roll:

The list of persons occupying approved and funded posts (the establishment) in a public organization.

Organisation behaviour theory:

Describes how people within their organisations act individually or in groups and how organisations function in terms of their structures, processes and culture.

Organisational capability:

An organisation's ability to manage people to gain competitive advantage.

Organisational climate:

Refers to the perceptions of members of an organisation of organisational features such as decision making, leadership and norms about work.

Organisational culture:

Refers to the deep structure of organisations, which is rooted in the values, beliefs and assumptions held by organisational members.

Organisational development:

A planned and systematic approach to enabling sustained organisational performance through the involvement of its people.

Organisational learning:

Is about the development and acquisition in organisations of knowledge, understanding, insights, techniques and practices in order to improve organisational effectiveness.

Organogram:

A diagram that shows the structure of an organisation and the relationships, lines of responsibility and relative ranks of its component parts and positions/jobs.

Pay band/Pay range:

A range or band of pay that is offered to workers in the same job or grade.

People management:

The ability to manage and develop people and gain their trust and cooperation to achieve results.

Performance:

Is defined as embracing both outcome and behaviour.

Performance management:

A systematic process for improving individual, team and organisational performance.

Performance planning:

Involves agreement between manager and individual on what the latter needs to achieve to raise standards and improve performance.

Person specification:

Also known as job/role specification and defines the knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs) required to carry out a role, as well as the education, training, qualification and experience needed to acquire the necessary KSAs.

Personnel:

The planning, organising, compensation, integration and maintenance of people as a means of contributing to organisational, individual and societal goals. A series of reactive, administrative tasks that enable the basic day-to-day employment contract to be fulfilled

Policies:

The principles and statements of intent that should guide decision making, i.e. what does the state as an employer stand for, what is it committed to doing? Policies differ from rules, which detail the specific regulations that all officers must comply with, and from operational

guidelines or procedures, which outline how policies should be administered, with practical step-by-step instructions.

Probation:

The initial period of employment, often lasting several months, during which an employee is assessed in terms of his/her capability and suitability for permanent employment.

Procedures:

Step-by-step sequences of actions that should be taken to attain objectives, which may be outlined in each policy.

Programme:

A group of related projects or services directed towards the attainment of specific (usually similar or related) objectives. A time-bound intervention that differs from a project in that it usually cuts across sectors, themes and/or geographic areas, involves more institutions than a project, and may be supported by different funding sources.

Project:

A planned undertaking designed to achieve certain specific objectives within a given budget and within a specified period. A time-bound intervention that consists of a set of planned, interrelated activities aimed at achieving defined objectives.

Promotion:

The act of moving an employee up the organisational hierarchy, usually leading to an increase in responsibility, status and a better remuneration package, based on his/her individual merits and performance.

Psychometric test:

The generic term used to describe a wide range of tests that measure cognitive ability, behavioural preferences and attitudes/values. These may include verbal or numerical tests.

Reward:

The system of pay and benefits used by an organisation to reward workers; money is not the only method.

Reward strategy:

A declaration of intent that defines what the organisation wants to do in the future to develop and implement reward policies, practices and processes that will further the achievements of its strategic goals and meet the needs of its stakeholders.

Role profile:

Defines key result areas, accountabilities and competencies for an individual role.

Role:

The position, which includes specific requirements, that people are responsible for in their work.

Service charters:

Statements of service targets published by service-providing agencies that set standards for the delivery of public services by the agency to the public and can define service level expectations and compensation to be provided to the public if they are not achieved. These are known by such names as 'Citizens Charters' or 'Public Service Charters'.

Shared service centres:

Provide shared services that are required across an organisation (or sometimes, across several partner organisations), in areas such as finance, IT or HR, from a centralised or single unit.

Social inclusion:

Gives targeted support through initiatives specifically designed to address rights or needs to women or men or vulnerable groups.

Stakeholders:

Groups that have a role and interest in the objectives and implementation of a programme or project. They include target groups, direct beneficiaries, those responsible for ensuring that the results are produced as planned, and those that are accountable for the resources that they provide to that programme or project. A person, group, organisation or other body who has a 'stake' in the area or field where interventions and assistance are directed. Target groups are always stakeholders, whereas other stakeholders are not necessarily target groups.

Strategic human resources development (strategic HRD):

This involves introducing, eliminating, modifying, directing and guiding processes in such a way that all individuals and teams are equipped with the skills, knowledge and competencies they require to undertake current and future tasks required by the organisation.

Strategic human resources management (strategic HRM, or SHRM):

May be regarded as an approach to the management of human resources that provides a strategic framework to support long term strategic goals and outcomes.

Strategic learning and development:

An approach to helping people to learn and develop that is concerned with how the organisation's goals will be achieved through its human resources by means of integrated learning and development.

Strategic performance management:

Focuses on what needs to be done to help the organisation achieve its business goals.

Strategic planning:

The formal process that takes place, usually in larger organisations, defining how things will be done.

Structure, organisational structure:

Organisational structure refers to the hierarchy of an organisation (ministry, department, etc.) and how the components of this hierarchy work together to achieve the objectives of the organisation. Organisational structure is comprised of functions, relationships, responsibilities, authorities and communications of individuals within each department and the way in which an organisation has arranged its lines of authority and communication, and allocated duties and responsibilities; the structure may be of a divisional, geographic or functional kind or some combination of these.

Succession planning:

The process of identifying and developing officers within the MDA to fill key positions. 'Key positions' might include leadership positions or specialised positions and roles that may be technical, content-specific, or otherwise hard to replace. Succession planning is generally considered to be a critical element of workforce planning.

Talent audit:

Identifies those with potential, often through a performance management assessment.

Talent mapping:

Identifies the top performing and talented employees to think of ways to develop, nurture and retain them.

Talent planning:

Refers to the process of establishing how many and what sort of talented people are needed now and, in the future.

Talent:

What people have when they possess the skills, abilities and aptitudes that enable them to perform effectively in their roles.

Team orientation:

The ability to work cooperatively and flexibly with other members of the team with a full understanding of the role to be played as a team member.

Vision statement

The guiding purpose and sense of direction that inspires people. An aspirational description of what an organisation would like to achieve or accomplish in the mid-term or long-term future. It is intended to serve as a clear guide for choosing current and future courses of action. See also mission statement.

Work design

The creation of systems of work and working environments that enhance organisational effectiveness and productivity, ensure that the organisation becomes 'a great place in which to work' and are conducive to the health, safety and well-being of employees.

Workforce planning

Systematic identification and analysis of what an organisation is going to need in terms of the size, type and quality of workforce to achieve its objectives. It determines what mix of experience, knowledge and skills is required and sequences steps to get the right number of right people in the right place at the right time. It looks at what an organisation needs to accomplish within a period; what knowledge, skills and experience are required to get the job done; and how large and what type of workforce is required to provide that mix of skills, knowledge and experience.