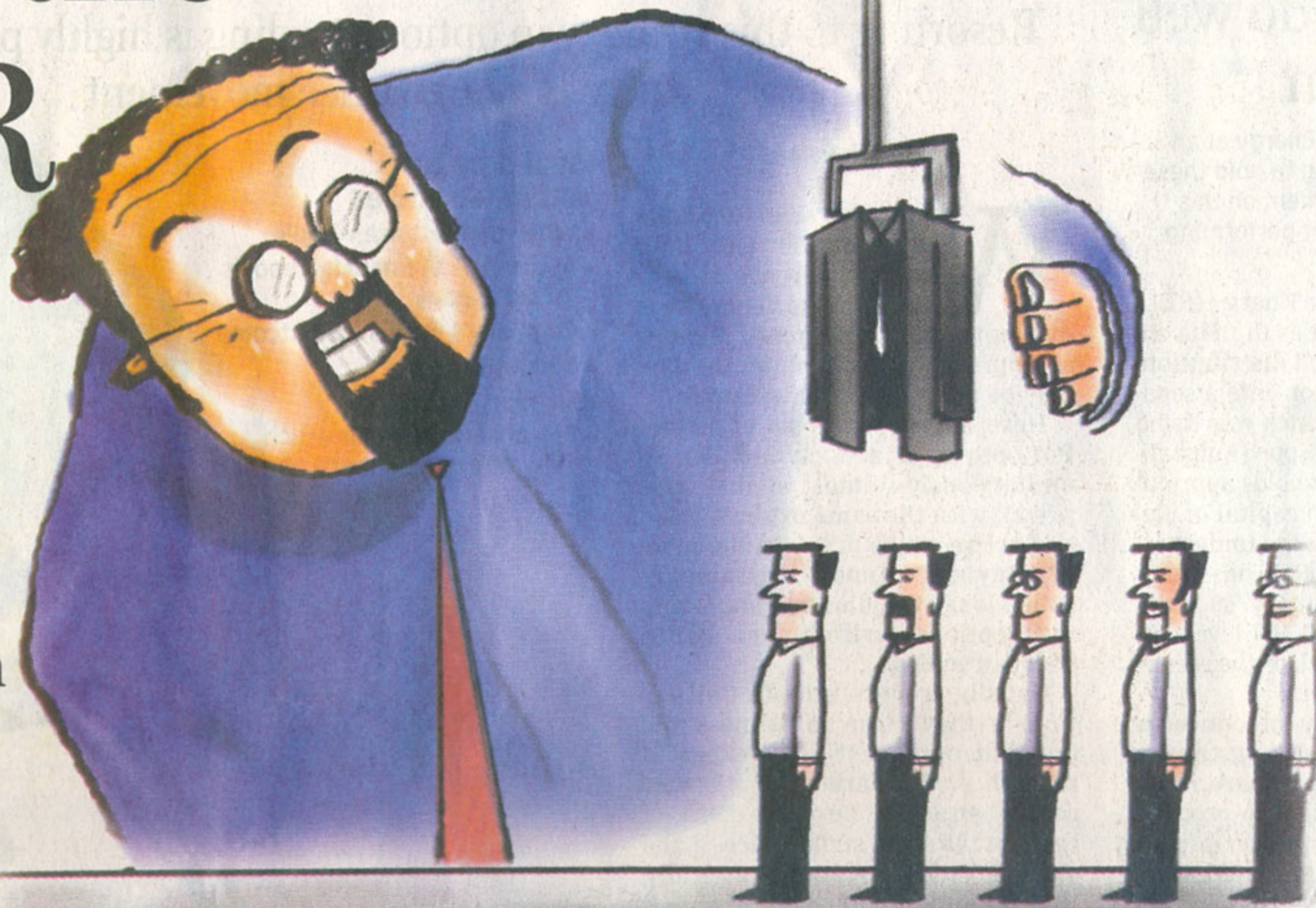


Finding the right HR talent

Everyone talks about managing talent the right way, but how does one find the right person to manage this talent and human capital?

Devraj Uchil



IT'S THE talent crunch across several industries on the one hand and increasing demands on the job — practically all jobs — on the other, that is driving home the most important fact of business: people. Shrikant Rege, CEO - India, American Express Bank, observed during a presentation at a Bombay Management Association conference recently: "Business is all about people and how to manage them."

Finding the right people and then managing them effectively in an organisation has become a challenge that is bigger than the responsibility of one department alone — that of human resources (HR) — as was the norm earlier. The human resources department was responsible for recruitment and HR management on an ongoing basis and the responsibility stood apart from other line functions. Today, that isolated formula no longer works. Unless there is coordination with and cooperation from other departments within the organisation, HR cannot work effectively.

"If an organisation does not give the required importance to HR, it cannot succeed," Rege observes. This fact has been brought to notice in no uncertain terms in recent years, with attrition levels in the HR function touching a high of 30 per cent per annum across organisations, on an average, despite the availability of educated HR talent via HR management specialisation in MBA programmes. Managing people effectively is not easy and if the organisation does not support this endeavour, it becomes very difficult for HR executives to be effective.

Sanjay Teli, MD, ESP Consultants, says that the high attrition rates in HR are due to the "HR executives' inability to deal with hypertension that

comes with the job." Recruiting high-potential individuals for specific departments is one of the most daunting tasks that HR executives face today. Add to it the short deadline that a company's top honchos may often dish out, and it turns into a nightmare.

Beyond recruitment, the HR challenge of people management on an ongoing basis often gets pinned to the HR department alone, although employees work in various line functions. As one HR head grumbles: "If it's good news, the line managers are quite happy to inform their juniors; but if it is bad news, we HR guys are the ones who are expected to communicate it—that's what we are here for, they tell us."

It is also true that some managements are recognising the importance of HR in their strategic business frameworks. As Rege says: "It has often been us, the business leaders, who are to be blamed for the woes of HR. Top management suddenly realises that it needs around 100 more employees for its new venture and orders HR to get them within a week. But now, this trend is fast changing as the top managements involve HR actively in the business and operations process."

In some cases, this has generated coordinated functioning between line managers and executives, and HR managers and executives. Line management gets more actively involved in recruitment interviews as well as training on an ongoing basis. Natu-

rally, the results have been more than rewarding. According to Teli, this process does not only benefit the company but also the HR executives by giving them a clearer perspective of the business.

As the HR challenges have grown, as too HR's role in business management, the demands from the talent that manages this responsibility has also grown. Yes, it's true that "an ideal HR executive needs to be people-friendly, able to identify and channelise talent and have lot of patience," as Gladwyn Pinto, executive director, Bombay Management Association puts it. He believes that "this kind of a person is hard to find as these qualities cannot be taught in a school. An HR executive has to have these qualities inherent in him."

But you can also develop such talent, Prameela Kalive, global HR head, Zensar Technologies, insists. "With increased management programmes focused on HR, the quality of profes-

sionals has gone up," she says, even as she admits that "in an expanding economy, discovering and also recruiting high performing, achievement oriented persons is always challenging in any role and industry today, including HR."

Sharad Gangal, GM - HR, HDFC Standard Life Insurance, agrees with Pinto when he observes that,

"there is no one place from where

you can get good HR executives." A company has to build its own HR talent pool, he emphasises. "We are open to cross-functional moves within the organisation. If any person wants to join the HR department, we encourage it. However, the person should have HR aptitude and the inclination to learn." He adds that the HR head can mould fresh HR executives to suit his/her company's requirements.

In the big picture, more companies are bringing HR out of its conventionally assigned compartment and as a result, the role of HR is expanding. There's absolutely no argument that the role will continue to expand as organisations work hard, through their people, to deal with the rapidly changing competitive landscape, growing demands to better serve customers, to differentiate themselves better and to deliver better value to the bottomline.