



### Line vs. Staff Tussle: A Threat to the Company's Future?

---

The growth of the private sector, intense competition and growing employee demands have gradually resulted in the metamorphosis of the once popular personnel management into human resource management. This in turn has gradually transformed the roles and responsibilities of HR managers over the years. However, in the contemporary corporate scenario, HR managers are no longer restricted to merely filling up job vacancies, organising company outings or tracking employee attendance. On the contrary, HR managers are now expected to deal with a wide gamut of activities from talent management across the organisation to coping with diversity related issues.

HR managers can play a crucial role in fostering a positive work environment where employees are rewarded for performance. Owing to their growing importance HR managers are expected to be effective communicators with the ability to handle even difficult situations rationally.

Interestingly, in the contemporary scenario both the HR and line managers are expected to display skills like conflict resolution and team building ability as they are responsible for the day-to-day operations of the teams and have a greater level of interaction with their team members.

However, the responsibilities to be shouldered by a HR manager may vary across different organisations. The nature of the industry and the size of the company could play a role in determining the role and importance of HR managers. Will the HR manager in a skill-based industry be expected to perform the same functions as that in a labour-intensive company? Will the role of HR managers be clearly defined in a large company as compared to a small firm? The following table may throw some light on these issues.

## Line vs. Staff Tussle: A Threat to the Company's Future?

	Role of HR Manager	
<b>Nature of Organisation/Industry</b>	<b>Labour-Based (LB)</b>	Students may state that in labour-based industries like manufacturing, construction and mining, the role of the HR manager majorly revolves around basic functions like salary and leave administration, employee health and safety, etc. Students may also argue that elements like employee motivation, performance appraisals and training and development are not of primary importance in such industries.
	<b>Skill-Based (SB)</b>	In skill-based industries like IT or advertising, the role of the HR expands over a wider area. It may be stressed that HR managers are expected to understand the needs and demands of employees while devising unique motivational techniques. Further, it may be highlighted that HR managers also face the challenge of retaining these skilled people within the organisation in the long-term. In such industries, the size of the HR team is usually large with specialized members handling the various functions like recruitment, training, etc.
<b>Size of Organisation</b>	<b>Small</b>	Students may be divided in their views while deliberating on the role of HR managers in a small organisation. Majority of the students may highlight that being small in size; the HR manager may single-handedly be responsible for dealing with a wide gamut of functions ranging from leave tracking to performance appraisals. This may indicate a broadening in the roles and responsibilities of the HR manager. However, some students may argue that being a small organisation, the role of the HR manager shall primarily be guided by administrative tasks like wage administration to organising company outings.
	<b>Large</b>	Students may highlight an interesting element that the scope of HR manager's roles and responsibilities cannot be solely attributed to the size of the organisations. Instead, it is dependent on both the size and the nature of the industry the organisation is operating in. For instance, in a large manufacturing-based company, the role of the HR manager may be limited as compared to that in a large skill-based organisation.
<b>Kind of Organisation</b>	<b>Start-Up</b>	The focus of a start-up shall primarily revolve around generating revenues and capturing market share. Further, the role of the HR manager (recruitment, leave planning, salaries, etc.) may be shouldered by the founder/s of the organisation, in the initial years.
	<b>SME</b>	Being a small enterprise, the HR manager may be expected to don multiple roles. Their responsibilities may be broader, expecting them to design specific job roles, nurture a productive work environment and designing motivational techniques.
	<b>Family Business (FB)</b>	In family run businesses, the role of the HR manager, to a great extent, depends on the company philosophy inculcated by the company founders. Depending on the same, the HR manager may either be restricted to a limited set of tasks or may be expected to cater to the wide gamut of employee related issues.
	<b>Joint Venture (JV)</b>	Students may highlight that if the joint venture is formed for a specific business project, the role of the HR manager shall be limited. However, if the JV is formed with the purpose of setting up a long-term business association, the role of the HR manager may depend on the philosophies and expectations of the founders.
	<b>Joint-Stock Company (JSC)</b>	It may be stated that like a family business, the role of the HR manager, to a great extent, depends on the company philosophy inculcated by the company founders.
© IBSCDC, 2009		www.ibscdc.org

## Line vs. Staff Tussle: A Threat to the Company's Future?

HR managers also have a major impact on – the quality of work-life, readiness for change and employee productivity. This growing importance of HR in the organisations has made it imperative for both the line (functional) and HR managers to work in tandem with each other. However, this often paved the way for a power and authority struggle between the line and HR managers.

Will this struggle ultimately prove to be fatal for a company's growth and existence? Though efforts have been made by organisations to chalk out a clear path for both the line and HR managers, the struggle for power and authority still continues.

Author's Name: Deepti Srikanth

### Related Case Studies:

1. [Employee attrition in IT/BPO Sector: Cost and Consequences](#)
2. [Google's HR Dilemma](#)
3. [On-Site Medical Clinics: Perks or Productivity Boosters?](#)
4. [The Tata Group: HR Challenges](#)
5. [Innovative HR Practices at Southwest: Can they be Sustained?](#)

### Related Casebooks:

1. [Case Studies on Outsourcing Trends - Vol. I](#)
2. [Case Studies on Competitive Strategies - Vol. II](#)
3. [Corporate Social Responsibility - Vol.I](#)
4. [Entrepreneurship - Vol. I](#)
5. [Oil Industry - Vol. I](#)

### Related Course Case Maps:

1. [Course Case Mapping For Organisational Behavior](#)

### Related Executive Briefs:

1. [New Recruit MBAs Attitudes](#)
2. [You Can't Play by Rules, Always](#)

## Line vs. Staff Tussle: A Threat to the Company's Future?

### Related Effective Executive Interviews:

1. [Interview with Elaine Eisenman on Managing Downturn without Downsizing](#)
2. [Interview with Kalpana Jaishankar on Talent Management](#)
3. [Interview with Anand Talwar on Talent Management](#)
4. [Interview with Arthur Yeung on Managing Complexity](#)
5. [Interview with Jittu Singh on Global Economy and Global Managers](#)

### Related Video Interviews:

1. [Breaking the Glass Ceiling: Kiran Bedi's Bold Moves](#)
2. [Hyderabad House's Franchisee Operating Model](#)