

Exploration of some of the 7 concepts identified as constituting a “circular” HRM

Business case: RTBF (Belgium)

The RTBF is an autonomous public company active in television, radio, web and social media in Wallonia-Brussels Federation (French-speaking part of Belgium). It employs about 1,920 people (32% of which are statutory employees) on 9 sites (the most important of which is the Reyers site in Brussels - 69% of the staff).

Interview: Christine Thiran, Director General of Human Resources

Date of interview: 30 June 2020

Context

The audio-visual sector is confronted with technological developments such that its companies are being radically transformed. Some companies are making the choice to lay off part of their employees in order to recruit skills more in line with their needs. This is not the case for RTBF, which is betting on the transformation by redeploying and retraining its own staff.

"In the past, RTBF was organized in silos, by platform: television, radio, web. The staff who worked in radio might never talk to those who worked in television or the web, and vice versa. Now, the new competitors are no longer just the other TVs or radios on the media landscape, but players such as Google, Amazon, Netflix... Not adapting to this new situation means running the risk of experiencing very serious difficulties in the coming years, or even perhaps even disappearing. Indeed, media consumption is no longer done on the old model but now operates in ATAWAD mode - Anytime, Anywhere, Anydevice. Thus, the younger generation no longer watches television as their parents did. They listen to the radio more easily, but consume media offline, in non-linear mode, and rather on their smartphone or tablet. Social networks are overtaking traditional media as the preferred source of information. To succeed as a public media, we need to reinvent ourselves" says Christine Thiran. "We are convinced that we will only survive by creating our own content and distributing it on all our platforms. To create this content, we need to be audience-driven. We are thus moving from a model centred on distribution channels to a model oriented towards four categories of audience: two categories defined by age - the new generations and young adults - and two categories defined by type of consumption - the 'us' (for example, family consumption) and the 'affinities' (sport, music, news, etc.). As the model is completely different, the functions involved in managing activities also change completely."

This is why RTBF overhauled its entire organisational chart to place the audiences and the development of targeted content that is broadcast on the different platforms at the centre, all supported by the technologies and support departments. The first mission of the HR department is to accompany this transformation in line with the "Vision 2022" strategic plan, with priority being given to the implementation of a new organisation, supporting managers and teams in the change, and anticipating and managing mobility.

To achieve this, RTBF is counting on the staff in place: a transformation with the employees. Christine Thiran points out, however, that since 2002, RTBF's workforce has been shrinking. They have gone from around 2,730 people at the end of 2002 to around 1,970 people at the end of 2019, but this reduction has taken place through natural departures. RTBF is characterized by a fairly old age pyramid (the average age is 43 years old - the 50+ account for more than 40% of the workforce) and by a high level of loyalty (the voluntary turnover rate is 0.51%). "We wanted to transform the company without resorting to redundancies which would be partly compensated by new hires whose skills would be more aligned with our needs. There was therefore no other option than to invest into training, development, and coaching of our staff."

Concept 1

The design of 'work practices' and 'work spaces', emphasising maximum positive impact on a worker during his/her employed experience

In 2017, a new strategic plan "Vision 2022" was launched, and one of the three ambitions is HR. It consists of making RTBF a "learning company", by working on its culture, leadership, wellbeing and development of staff skills. This approach was a demand from the highest levels of the company. The HR ambition takes up this priority by positioning the HR function as a "supporter" of each employee's development and personal fulfilment. If we want to be, as HR, one of the key players in the development of RTBF, helping it to anticipate the changes that will be required of it and have a real impact, **we absolutely must put in place the conditions to enable employees to develop**, emphasises Christine Thiran. Everyone is in fact an actor in his or her own career. As HR Director, I consider that I don't have an obligation of results, but an obligation of means. You can't lie to people: I don't feel responsible for making someone succeed in a job. He/she is the one who is going to make him/her succeed or not. But it is my responsibility to give him/her the means to succeed."

At the end of 2015, general staff meetings have raised issues with regards to employee wellbeing. The HR department has created "**wellness**" groups by department, made up of representatives from the department concerned. Each group has a coordinator. All groups are supervised by a person from the HR department. About a hundred volunteers who have designated themselves as willing to work to improve the wellbeing of their colleagues are now involved and provide a good feedback of concerns from the field. Each group is free to propose topics, which are generally concrete (improving the department's relaxation room,

organizing a barbecue with colleagues, developing feedback...). The objective is to identify what the staff expects and to respond to what they need to do well in their work. HR tools are developed on this basis. It is a dynamic that works well if the managing director is involved.

Teleworking is possible in the company at the rate of one day per week, and from September 1, 2020, it will be possible at the rate of two days per week. At the same time, RTBF is setting up actions to support the management to operate remotely. There will also be implications in terms of training and recruitment, for example, to integrate distance, while maintaining human contact. It is also important to integrate the issue of mental health in the deployment of distance working, notes Christine Thiran. "Some things can't be done properly at a distance. In human resources management, the word 'human' should not be taken lightly : in a society such as ours today, this dimension must be preserved, otherwise there is a great risk of becoming nothing more than technicians in one's own company. In HR, you have to be able to be at the heart of the organisation, to feel it, to live it from the inside, and the human link cannot be built and maintained from a distance. We must not go too far, at the risk of losing people and the connection within teams."

Concept 2

Processes of understanding and responding to the needs of workers to optimise redeployment within the same company

The first strategic HR focus for 2019-2020 is to change the culture so that we can count on an involved and motivated workforce. To achieve this, RTBF has focused on three areas, including the development of a **policy encouraging mobility and career support**.

"As part of the transformation plan we opened 167 management position (when the company counted about 200) corresponding to the entire core of the company's engine (excluding support functions). This means over three out of four managers had to re-apply for a role within the company! In total, in 2018 we filled 219 posts exclusively with internal candidates. For executives, we worked in waves (3 waves) starting with the management positions in January 2018. In this way, general managers were able to participate in the recruitment of their 'direct reports', and so on. For the 167 positions, we registered 409 applications. "When I said that we were going to fill these positions only internally, no-one believed it could happen, because there was a tradition of recruiting executives externally. Just at that level alone, it was a success: people played along. All the more so as, for each application, you had to submit a file of about ten pages. Many candidates had been with the company for many years and had not applied for a job for a long time. Moreover, when their mandate was at stake and they had to apply for a new position in a brand new position, they had to continue their mission. They had to manage their responsibilities and all the associated pressure, but also question themselves and consider new career directions."

Out of the total number of managers who were invited to return to work, the company recorded three departures. Juries were organized to make the selections. Of the 167 open positions, 143 were filled - 137 by internal candidates and 6 by external candidates. 24 positions are still to be filled, some of which have been relaunched, some of which are awaiting relaunch, and some of which are being considered in the light of the transformation of the organisation.

As these are new functions, the roles and responsibilities described evolve with the company as it transforms. The candidates selected were also selected partly on the basis of their potential and their ability to lead their team. Development centres have been set up to help them develop their skills: this is an investment in people who, at the same time, benefit from a break and a step back from their career. They have been able to rely on external coaches to help them in their reflection. RTBF was able to switch to the new model in September 2018.

During the entire process, extensive communication was carried out within the company. The employees were informed that the management was called upon to take a fresh look internally. Today, the process continues within the teams themselves, not with the same obligation to apply for a new position, but by seeking to develop employees and their skills in the business lines in line with the evolution of the organisation. In this way, we have succeeded in increasing the number of employees who develop. The idea is to ensure their employability by investing in their development during working hours. We have an internal Academy with a large budget and a wide variety of programs. The big challenge is to have a vision of how the business evolves. It is not easy for management to say: 'in a year, the job will evolve in this direction and we will help employees to develop in this direction', or 'in a year, we know that the job will disappear because technologies evolve, but we can envisage such development'. As long as we don't have this vision of where to direct people, it is impossible to get the development machine up and running."

Concept 3

Supporting the reintegration of a worker so he/she, following a period of leave (short/long term) can continue to be employed in his/her original function or in a new role within the same company

RTBF offers two **support pathways** to its staff: a support pathway upon return from long-term illness (minimum 6 months) for the employee who wants to make sure that the return to work goes as smoothly as possible and a 'burnout' support pathway for people who feel stressed by their professional context and/or have suffered from burnout and want to be supported when they return to work (see concept 5, as these two pathways are part of a broader support program).

Concept 5

Categorising the skill set of workers with a view to planning and implementation of worker-centred strategies that optimise the categorised skills sets within a company ecosystem

"I am a great believer in an approach that **supports employees in the transformation because that is where the HR function can ensure the sustainability** of its added value in the company. Rather than carrying out large programs through which the whole population has to pass, it is better to put the person at the centre. We have set up four support platforms, to which two others were subsequently added, each with its own methodology and some (A, B, E and F) are conducted with an external service provider (RiseSmart) :

- A) **support for internal mobility**, for employees who wish to change jobs and/or take stock of their career. I regularly had people coming to me for a transfer as if it were a given or expecting us to make them an offer. This platform is built with a whole path including coaching, training, inter-vision... It is a form of in placement, which can also become outplacement because some people might leave us after this path. To enrol in this one, the person says he or she is ready to move, but needs help to think about it. They work there during their benefit hours, and the process is paid for by the organisation. The idea is to make the employees responsible. Some also choose to stay in their job because they love it, but discover that it is their immediate environment that is causing them problems. We can then work on the right problem.
- B) **managerial support**, for a manager who, for example, feels the need for coaching because of a problem with an employee or who needs help to support his/her employee in developing his/her performance. .
- C) **support to manage burn-out and stress**, with an external partner (CESI) for prevention and multidisciplinary management of employees in difficulty.
- D) **support in the event of job cuts**, a solution to help employees who are forced to move on to another job.
- E) **support for 'new professional impetus'** which targets employees who are demotivated, dissatisfied or feel like they are on the side-lines. In other words, people who are wondering how they can continue to develop professionally and contribute to the evolution of the company, who are looking for meaning and/or energy for their work. A minimum of 25 years of professional experience is required.
- F) **support in returning from illness** after six months.

This accompaniment can therefore concern everyone, and it is being deployed with the intent to gradually extend it - if necessary - by offering new formats adapted to each specific population that needs it. "For example, I've become aware that employees with high visibility (journalists, presenters, etc.) will not fit in with existing routes because they could affect their public image. But they can also be affected by changes in program schedules, with strong emotional impacts. We are

starting to think about the type of platform that could accompany the change for this population."

This type of support approach must be consistent over the long term, insists Christine Thiran. "One-shot formulas are not very useful. In the long term, it pays off for the company, especially because these platforms give employees a sense of responsibility. Developing them internally contributes to the company's sustainability. HR needs to further develop its change management skills, and it is important to free up time for this, for example by focusing on digitalization for all administrative aspects. This is also where they can have the greatest impact."