The new fundamentals: How to

BE A GREAT
HR LEADER

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Introduction

With automation having done away with many daily HR activities, space has been made in the function for new challenges that move on from simple payroll and onboarding processes to concerns like employee experience and engagement, retention strategies, and optimization.

In this evolving world, HR leaders have a chance to show their value by partnering with leadership, making their mark on an organization. In this eBook, we cover the four key ways HR leaders need to develop their skills in order to truly shine as an HR Director, Chief People Officer, or HR Lead.

THE CHALLENGE:
HR LEADERS
NEED TO TRANSFORM

HR as a function has been until recently a broadly administrative role, largely designed to manage payroll and compliance. In recent years, the function has shifted dramatically, and the role of HR leaders has evolved with it. To truly excel in an HR leadership role, there are new fundamentals every current and aspiring leader will need to demonstrate.

Josh Bersin has identified four key attributes of a great HR leader, which we outline below:

1.
Know the basics

According to Folkman Zenger's [5-year global study](#) of 360º feedback on HR leaders, one of the attributes other members of the organization highly value in HR leaders is their knowledge of labor laws, hiring practices, benefits, compensation, anti-discrimination policy, medical and family leave, occupational health and safety.

Three ways to improve your knowledge of HR fundamentals:

Subscribe to trade publications and websites

Trade publications perform a range of functions for the engaged HR manager. Global publications and websites like Harvard Business Review and Bersin by Deloitte offer critical insight into trends and developments, offering the latest thinking and research. This is a great way to stay connected to studies and academic theory as it applies to the modern workplace. In addition, respected publications like this can bolster your proposals for new strategic directions to C-level stakeholders.

Top HR leaders also keep informed of trends and policy changes at a regional level with more locally relevant publications. This way, you'll be up to date with new information about labor laws. Publications focusing on your industry is also a good way to stay up-to-date with hiring trends, compensation expectations, and market news.

Attend events

Connecting with your colleagues in different organizations is another excellent way to stay abreast of the important basics. You're probably already promoting peer-to-peer learning

opportunities within your organization, so doing the same with your counterparts in other organizations can be a key way to keep a finger on the pulse.

You'll hear of tactics and strategies, get help solving knotty problems, receive recommendations for vendors and products, and focus on new and emerging areas of thought – so keep an eye out for location networking groups or companies offering opportunities, and make the most of them whenever you can. Look out for:

- After-work networking evenings
- Panels
- Roundtables
- Conferences
- Webinars

Upskill via courses and seminars

Continuous learning is a hallmark of great HR careers, so look out for degrees, short courses, diplomas, lectures, and online learning opportunities to help fill in any gaps in your (and your team's) knowledge. For example, employment law, tech skills, occupational health and safety, and organizational psychology are all important pieces of the HR puzzle.

2.
Embrace data

In a volatile and unpredictable market like today's, lean operations are essential to surviving and thriving. But organizations have more complexity and ambiguity than ever before, with functions evolving quickly to respond agilely to the business landscape, silos being broken down, and work modes shifting from traditional full-time permanent employees to contractors, remote, and outsourced workers.

A network of teams:

How things were

How things "are"

How things work
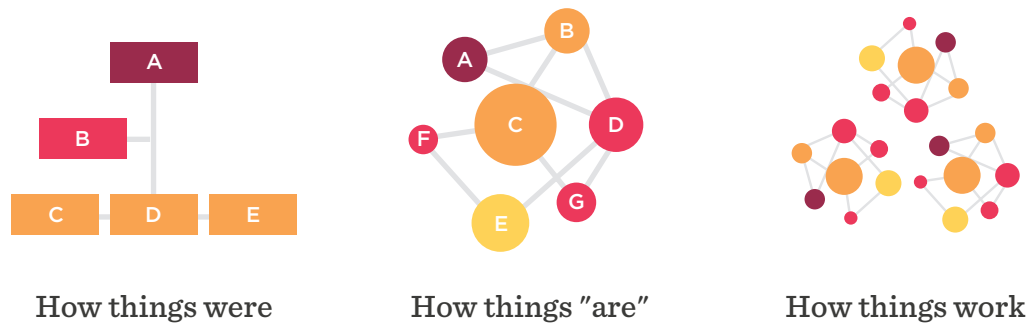
Source

In this environment, big data is the only way to truly measure success and reach optimum performance, so HR leaders have to become fluent in data and ways to capture it. In fact, many have noted that HR and IT are growing closer as a result of the increasing need for technology and people processes to be integrated into organizations in order to collect and analyze data that drive strategic business decisions and improve overall performance.

With a strong foundation in digital tools and capture mechanisms, here are just some of the ways data can be used:

Automate and improve hiring and onboarding
Reducing time-to-hire is a key metric for HR professionals, considering that the best candidates lose interest with a long process, possibly impacting the entire span of that role's employment. With strong data, you can reduce time-to-fill and time-to-hire metrics to ensure that overall productivity isn't reduced.

"

If you're uncomfortable with a spreadsheet... You're not going to be comfortable in HR anymore

"

Josh Bersin

Measure productivity at individual, team, and enterprise levels

Setting up clear project goals and targets, as well as measuring them, means that you can collect data on everything from speed, effectiveness, cost, profit, and many other metrics to a granular level. This can help inform business strategy and people management decisions.

Predict and prevent employee churn at an individual level

With enough data, it's possible to predict in advance when an employee is at risk of leaving their role. Metrics allow you to act ahead of time to either re-engage or start preparing to replace them, to ensuring a smooth transition without a productivity lull and while awaiting a new employee to begin.

THREE WAYS TO GET DATA LITERATE

Understand the benefits of data

As a way to feel motivated to embrace the use of technology and data in your organization, it's worth spending some time reading case studies and reports on just how powerful big data can be to areas like engagement and retention, productivity, and performance.

This may also mean learning from others. For example, accessing the expertise of a consultant or a data scientist to connect the theory to the practicalities of your organization.

Using the right tools

Selecting the right tools and resources you need to transform the way your organization collects and analyzes data is an important task. The wrong choice could be expensive, time-consuming, and detrimental to morale and engagement. PwC has found that employees are willing to put in the time to acquire digital skills, however, over half feel that tech tools are chosen by leaders without consideration of their needs.

The price of getting the wrong tool can be great – in cost, productivity, and engagement, so it's essential that you undertake significant research in the selection of these tools by requesting demos, seeking a range of tenders, asking the sales associates as many questions possible, and trialing the product before buying.

You should look for a data tool that encompasses the whole employee experience that:

- Covers the fundamentals like payroll, benefits, leave, and attendance
- Includes performance metrics and workflow reporting
- Extends to engagement, health and wellbeing, and culture
- Has excellent customer service and training resources to ensure smooth onboarding and operations

Upskill your people

Finally, you'll have to be the biggest advocate for data in order to gain buy-in and traction in your organization. This means leading by example and being within the organization when it comes to any tools selected for data capture and analysis.

You'll also need to create opportunities for your people to learn how to use any tools you introduce, designing training, or bringing in experts.

3.
Be innovative and strategic

Great HR leaders must have a sense of design thinking and innovation, able to adapt quickly to new circumstances and shape organizational culture. The Folkman Zenger study found that top-rated HR leaders were agile problem-solvers who developed a strategic perspective.

Design thinking applies tools from the world of design to human behavior; the idea is to avoid both risky decisions based on instinct and decisions based on past indicators which may not have bearing on the future. There are three main pillars of design thinking:

Empathy: Understanding the needs and problems of those you're designing for.

Ideation: Generating a lot of ideas to solve the problems you've identified.

Experimentation: Testing those ideas with prototyping.

This kind of strategy is often applied to product design, but with many HR leaders considering the employee experience as akin to the customer experience, it's an innovative way to envision the future of your organization, especially when it comes to engagement.

The Zenger Folkman study found that "in general, HR leaders were rated significantly less positively on their ability to have a clear perspective between the big picture strategy and the details… HR leaders often complain that they 'want a seat at the table' to engage more fully with other executives, but without clear strategy and focus they will never have that seat."

THREE WAYS TO INNOVATE

Learn from best practice

Immerse yourself in examples of great HR practices from other organizations in different fields. If your "customers" are employees, learn what it is that they want through surveys and conversations, which will assist with the empathy aspect of design thinking.

Collaborate with other departments

As proven in this study and many others, diversity is a silver bullet for solving problems and for coming up with innovative solutions. And, to use a more colloquial form of wisdom, "two heads are better than one." To brainstorm ways to solve the people issues faced by your organization in the ideation phase, gather people from all areas and levels of the company.

Think culture

Many of the most complicated challenges faced by HR leaders comes down to company culture. Performance, engagement, retention, goal attainment – all of these challenges are influenced by culture in the organization. But culture doesn't just happen. Culture is created and demonstrated by leaders, and as the people leader, the burden lies with you to define and bring to life a culture that keeps employees engaged, healthy, connected, satisfied, and performing their best.

4.
Know the business

One of the ways HR professionals can thrive in the new work paradigm is to step away from the old model of HR-as-administrator. It's time to instead embrace a vision of HR that sees the HRD as the source of knowledge regarding the most critical resource available in the business: its people. To earn a seat at the strategy table, HR leaders must also understand how people resources affect the business as a whole.

In the Zenger Folkman study, it was found that HR leaders were perceived as less effective than other leaders in their understanding of the world outside the organization: "In many ways the function of HR is focused on internal problems, but the lack of understanding of the external environment often caused others to view some HR leaders as not in touch with the issues facing the organization."

HOW TO GET TO KNOW YOUR BUSINESS

Secondment and embedding
As an HR leader, make it your business to get to know the rest of the business by spending time embedded within other teams and encouraging cross-functional cooperation and communication. This first-hand understanding will ensure that you get a holistic view of the company, not only in terms of the tasks and projects going on but also the people.

Familiarize yourself with industry movements
Keeping on top of news and trends is a fundamental way to stay connected with your organization's mission, strategy, and focus. Thorough knowledge of market movements will help you be prepared and proactive when these fluctuations inevitably affect your organization.

Prove your ability to be a business partner
It's not enough just to collect data, but great HR leaders must also analyze and interpret it for the benefit of other leaders in the business. For example, data might reveal that a team is failing; it's the HR leader's position as a people expert that enables them to understand why and solve the problem. Similarly, hiring strategy, products and services, and company culture can all be influenced by an HR leader who is across the statistics, trends, tools, and resources necessary to increase productivity and performance.

Conclusion

HR leaders of today may struggle to find many examples from the past. With the profession having undergone such significant change in recent years, looking to the history of HR will likely yield few results. Instead, HR leaders must be highly engaged in the present moment of their profession, learning from their peers as the best examples of how to create culture, engage employees, and optimize performance is happening all around them right now.

Meet bob

We know how important it is to make holistic, data-driven decisions about your people, especially in light of today's modern workplace changes. That's why we built bob, an employee experience platform that develops great people leaders and keeps them up to speed with the current HR space and the latest tech, while boosting the admin process, talent management, and culture.

The main functions bob uses to evolve and inspire its people leaders can be found in the Onboarding and Workflows features, with Integrations that empower and inform HR professionals.

bob grows
great people leaders

Onboarding

Innovate experience that makes a lasting impression.

- Easy intros with shoutouts and superpowers
- Personalized training and tasks
- Harmonious team collaboration

Workflows

Adapt to tools that embrace data-driven strategy.

- Automate admin tasks
- Track customized data
- Streamline paperwork

Integrations

Stay up-to-date on tech that connects businesses.

- Web apps with G Suite
- Recruiting on Greenhouse and Comeet
- Messaging via Slack

In 2019, it's time to make smarter decisions
when it comes to your people and organization.

To learn more about hibob
and our data-driven tools, get in touch with us at
contact@hibob.com.