FUTURE-READY TOOLKIT

CHRO 3.0

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HumanResources

CONTENTS

FUTURE-READINESS WITH FIVE CRITICAL LEADERSHIP SKILLS

Research by the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL®) shows that there are five foundational leadership competencies for a future-ready organisation. Forward-looking organisations and leaders are keeping in tandem with change by preparing their current and next generation of talent for a volatile marketplace where business is done differently from the past.

Effective leadership is more important than ever before. Future-ready leaders are talent magnets who inspire employees to deliver exceptional performances. They attract talent to join their organisations and their teams. They treat them with respect and engage them constantly through regular conversations, coaching and building a positive employee experience.

That is why it is so important to have a business-oriented, forward-looking and people-focused CHRO to elevate this agenda.

It calls for a new type of CHRO who goes beyond administration and business partnering to one who sits alongside the CEO and CFO to drive business outcomes. As the new generation of CHROs, we must accelerate the development of future-ready competencies as part of your toolkit for success.

Organisations who do not step up risk being stepped on by the accelerating pace of innovation and transformation.

By studying organisations that are strongly agile, CCL builds an emerging suite of insights and practical steps to help organisations and their leaders to become future-ready, and to help them grow their talent for the future. With many years of global and local research on future readiness, we uncover some of the critical skills in this supplement as part of the future-ready CHRO 3.0 toolkit:

- Gain commitment and get results through influence.
- Learn leadership with return-on-experience.
- Accelerate performance with learning agility.
- Deliver effective talent conversations.
- Put on the hat of a leader coach.

Drop me an email at **gohth@ccl.org** or join our knowledge-sharing groups if you want to stay current on our research. Change, transformation and innovation need not be hard if we are well-prepared. Transformation is an exciting journey if we leverage on the opportunities that help us succeed rather than belabouring on the challenges and difficulties. Only then can we be future-ready organisations and leaders.

DR. THOMAS GOH
Chief client officer and managing director, Asia Pacific
Center for Creative Leadership

At *Human Resources*, we aspire to bring you HR insights from a variety of perspectives, and this month we have a new initiative up our sleeve. Partnering with the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL®), we are pleased to present this future-ready toolkit for CHRO 3.0.

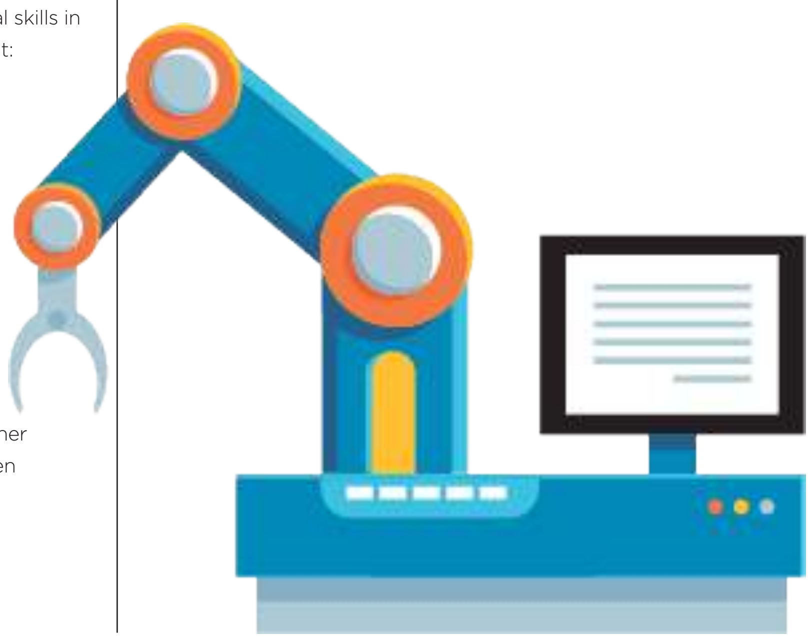
This partnership comes at a most interesting time. This is a not only a transformative era for economies around the world – but also for the rapidly evolving HR profession and its impact on business, which we are passionate about covering.

Through this supplement, we hope to provide a ready reckoner to the changing face of HR through not only an overview of the critical research and literature, but practical tools and actionable advice that you can seek to imbibe the very next day at work.

Head to page 8 for a snappy overview of what you can expect to read in the pages ahead, as well as a guide to the resources available in this supplement around what the future of HR holds.

As we move remarkably quickly into 2018, we are confident that this guide will serve you well in the business of HR. As always, we look forward to your feedback.

ADITI SHARMA KALRA
Regional editor
Human Resources



A GIANT LEAP TOWARDS CHRO 3.0

Comprising seven transformational shifts, find out how HR leaders can evoke the most important ingredients for tomorrow's business success.

The past two or three years have seen the breakneck speed of change in both the internal and external environment of organisations.

No matter which industry one looks at – HR solutions, advertising and PR, healthcare, IT and ITeS, manufacturing, construction, services or the financial sector – each one has been impacted by substantial changes in the form of changing expectations of stakeholders, realignment of business models, and newer forms of competition.

You would be hard pressed nowadays to find a senior executive who isn't spending sleepless nights worrying about human capital. Developing human capital as well as developing leaders who can lead into the future, almost always shows up in the top three priorities for most CEOs.

Against this backdrop, the role of the chief human resources officer (CHRO), or the HR director, has never been more prominently in focus. Through policies and systems, the CHRO can evoke the most important ingredients that employees need for business success – passion, ownership, accountability, and most importantly, engagement.

The urgency for HR directors to join in the business conversation, and stand out for their contribution to developing future leaders is one of the biggest drivers behind this special edition toolkit, spearheaded by the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL).

The CCL team reached out to senior HR professionals across Asia in 2016 to identify how HR can deal with the changing environment, and stay relevant in the future. The study identified mindset shifts, skill set shifts, and tool set or experience shifts that senior leaders and the function must undertake over the next decade. Senior HR leaders, in fact, pointed out that incumbents must prioritise mindset shifts over skill set shifts. This is quite in contrast to what most organisations are doing to prepare the workforce of the future.

The seven shifts for Asian HR leaders

To prepare themselves for the future, Asian HR leaders will need to make serious efforts to upgrade their capabilities and change their perspectives across seven key areas, as identified through CCL's interviews with 21 heads of HR working for Western and Asian MNCs.

Shift 1: From technology shy to technology savvy

In the words of a survey respondent, HR was never best friends with technology, and the head of the function is rarely viewed as the most technology savvy executive.

But what does the tech-savvy executive look like? Awareness of technological innovations in HR; leading the adoption of technology in the enterprise; and the ability to negotiate internally with boards, CEOs, and global HQ for budgets – these are some of the ways that HR can overcome its image of being the hesitant or slow adopter of technology.

Shift 2: From metrics to insights

Data suggests that only 5% of heads of HR feel they are effective in using talent analytics, with unclean data, lack of in-depth understanding of analytics, and non-availability of analysts within HR, to blame.

But data and analytics are not the only things in demand. "We don't need to become analysts," clarified an HR leader. "Instead, we need to understand the insights our data can give, and perhaps learn to ask the right questions of data analysts," she added.

This boils down to a move away from standalone indicators such as engagement scores to predictive indicators such as information around which a salesperson is most likely to succeed. Organisations also need HR to link multiple sources of data, such as engagement scores with sales numbers, to come up with a holistic strategy.

Shift 3: From chief HR (process) officers to chief employee experience officers

CEOs are increasingly expecting heads of HR to craft their role with the employee in the centre. CHROs can take a lesson or two here from the customer experience executives, who ensure a seamless experience to customers while managing all the back end dynamics.

"My role is people experience director; we call it 'people experience' because that's our job in HR – to deliver superior employee or internal customer experiences," explained an HR leader in an APAC-based MNC that has made a switch to its HR being called an "employee experience" function.

The job description of a chief employee experience officer requires the incumbent to not just champion processes, but own the complete employee life cycle. Throw the rule book-centric mentality, and replace it with a user-centric experience for today's Millennials!

Shift 4: From doing-all to doing-what-matters-most

Is HR the right owner for payroll? "Payroll belongs under finance with maybe a dotted-line reporting structure to HR because of the nature of their work."

How about the diversity agenda? "Employment law prohibits diversity mandates in hiring and promotion practices, so companies try to change line managers' attitudes and priorities instead. But such efforts are effective only if top executives lead them, transforming the culture."

"ANOTHER IMPLICATION IS FOR HR LEADERS TO GET BETTER AT IDENTIFYING AND MEASURING VALUE CREATED THROUGH TALENT INTERVENTIONS."

Views from the respondents prove that some of the activities traditionally falling under HR's ambit may not be yielding the kind of returns they demand in terms of time, effort and investment.

Evidently, HR heads will need to get better at having uncomfortable conversations with business leaders in order to push back taking on responsibilities that may not add a lot of value, or that may be best housed elsewhere in the organisation, or even outsourced.

HR leaders may need to apply the responsibility-authority lens to key activities, taking on new assignments only if they have the complete or at least well-defined ownership to execute, and authority to make necessary changes to fulfil the responsibility.

Another implication is for HR leaders to get better at identifying and measuring value created through talent interventions. This ability will enable heads of HR to negotiate better with business as they prioritise interventions and initiatives to go after from a talent standpoint.

Shift 5: From inside-out to outside-in

Thinking outside the box takes on a new meaning for the future CHRO, where the requirement has moved from knowing your organisation well based on years of tenure, to looking over the fence to see the outside world and bringing in the best from competitors, consultants, and vendors.

CHROs will hence need to replace years of experience with multi-country and multi-industry experience; internal networks and stakeholders, with an external pool of allies; and most of all, replacing the question, "Why it will not work in my company" with "How can I adapt it to make it work in my company."

Shift 6: From rule enforcers to equal partners

How many times do you catch your team saying – "you cannot take more than 20 days off", "you cannot delay performance reviews" or "you cannot not put the annual goals in the system"? Long known as the company policeman, the HR function needs to "stop talking about HR and start talking about business" in the words of a head of talent.

Automation of HR is contributing to ending HR's rule book regime. As the self-service delivery model becomes the norm, rules enforcement will happen online, and HR will not need to play the "bad cop."

Not only does this save HR a lot of time, it can instead focus its energy on other value-adding activities, such as execution of strategic interventions in both the business and talent domains.

Shift 7: From helpers to doctors

Just owning annual talent interventions will no longer be enough for CHRO 3.0. The HR leader of the future must play a more proactive role by adopting a more strategic approach – just as a doctor who not only offers a diagnosis, but also advice on prevention. This will entail HR owning critical initiatives such as internal consultant, leadership developer, change agent, and even part business leader role in some cases.

Just as the seven geometrical circles in the seed of life depict the seven days of creation, these seven shifts are geared to make a monumental impact to the life of the HR director, today and in the future.

Reference / CHRO 3.0: Preparing to lead the future HR function in Asia, by Sunil Puri and N. Anand Chandrasekar. The Center for Creative Leadership in partnership with Singapore Human Resources Institute.

BE THE BIG FISH IN A BIG POND

Your ability to influence others depends not just on your learning and practising different tactics. In this action-packed toolkit, find out the factors that affect the complex interaction that plays out while gaining commitment across different levels of the organisation.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could plant our ideas, like seeds, into the minds of others through their dreams – and when they awoke, they embraced that idea as if it was their own?

While this was the basic principle behind Oscar-winning film *Inception*, the reality is far different. In actuality, your position in an organisation and the power it gives you aren't always enough to motivate people to do what you ask. You may negotiate with or persuade your colleagues to make short-term behavioural change, but to create sustained change, you will need to be skilful at the art of influence – that is, negotiation, persuasion and motivation. In this toolkit, we bring you different tactics of influence, and how using these in relevant situations can help HR leaders achieve the results they are looking for. CCL's research has been compiled in this article to bring you a sense of the different approaches to influence in an organisation, the influence tactics you use most often, and a checklist to conduct an effective influence session.

Typically, a total of 11 influence tactics have been found effective in different situations and with different people – rational persuasion; consultation; inspirational appeals; collaboration, apprising; ingratiation; exchange; personal appeals; legitimating; pressure; and coalition – the first four of which are cited as the most widely used ones. Illustration one depicts a self-guided worksheet on your usage of these four tactics.

Checklist: How to conduct an effective influence session

Influence can be highly situational, and you need to read each situation, see how the other person fits in it, and then decide which tactic will serve you best. The ancient Greeks called this kairos, which translates loosely to "the right moment".

The best way to seize the moment? Use a checklist in order to carefully guide your actions and behaviours for each situation. Used frequently enough, when the opportunity to influence arises unexpectedly, you will be strongly equipped to gaining others' commitment and get results.

Setting your goals

Answering questions such as the following can help you work out your thoughts on whom you need to influence and what you want to accomplish:

- What is the situation? Why has your organisation assigned you this task? How much support do you need?
- What benefits do you and the person you want to influence receive if you handle the situation well? What will it cost you and this person to deal effectively with the situation?
- Assess the differences and similarities of personal and positional power between yourself and the person you want to influence. How can you leverage this to increase your influence?

Identifying benefits and challenges

Each influence effort you make includes things that make it easier and things that make it more difficult. For example, you may have had a negative confrontation in the past with the person you are now hoping to influence. How you will deal with the residual effect of that event is going to be a challenge.

On the positive side, perhaps you have some expertise in a particular area that the organisation has recognised and the person you want to influence wants to gain some expertise in that area as well. You are certainly on the beneficiary side of this session.

Tallying up your benefits and challenges in the three broad areas of relationship, politics and power, and skills and knowledge, is a bit like a balance sheet, where you're hoping to emerge with benefits on the heavier side.

> **"EACH TIME YOU ATTEMPT TO INFLUENCE SOMEONE, EVEN JUST TO MAKE A SMALL REQUEST, TAKE THE TIME TO THINK BACK OVER THE ENCOUNTER AND HOW YOU ADJUSTED YOUR TECHNIQUES."**

Developing your influence session script

This step presents an opportunity to reflect in detail about how an influence conversation with a person might go. One place to start is to assess your influence tactics skills (Figure 1), and then identify which tactics may work best given the situation. Pay particular attention to the tactics you use less frequently, and think about how you can develop those in order to increase your chances of success. The good news is that this does not necessarily take a lot of work – for example, you may be skilled with using logical arguments to persuade someone. Perhaps the person you want to influence is known for being generous or creative more than analytical. In that case, you can look at your proposal in terms of how it inspires enthusiasm by appealing to values and ideals.

Conducting an influence session

You are ready to meet with the person you need to influence! What's next? Setting the stage – pick the right time and place, ideally a setting with minimal distractions. Once on site, establish rapport by ensuring the other person understands what you need by asking them questions and clearing up any confusion. Be mindful of your non-verbal communication, that is, body language and tone of voice, and watch their reactions closely. Build on points of agreement to create momentum towards the outcome you want, all the while not forgetting to establish eye contact, and the ever-needed smile.

Reflecting on your influence session

Each time you attempt to influence someone, even just to make a small request, take the time to think back over the encounter and how you adjusted your techniques. What went well during the session? What did not go well? Did you get the outcome you wanted, albeit with any compromises? What would you do differently next time? These answers will ensure learning from experience.

Influencing others is not easy, especially in cases when you do not have direct authority to back up your request. The checklist and advice offered in this article will give you a head start on gaining commitment from stakeholders, as you take on growing roles in your organisation, helping draw on your skills as an influencer again and again.

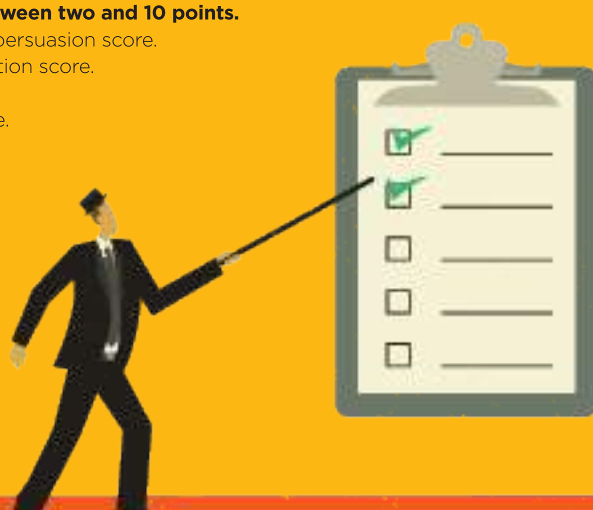
FIGURE 1: YOUR USE OF THE FOUR MOST-USED INFLUENCE TACTICS

Part 1: Respond to the statements below on your most natural response to peers, using a scale of 1-5:
1 – Almost never | 2 – Seldom | 3 – Sometimes | 4 – Often | 5 – Almost always

1. I logically explain to the person the reason for the requested action. __
2. I ask the person for ideas about how to carry out the requested action and incorporate those ideas into the process. __
3. I show the person how the requested action meets his or her individual goals and values. __
4. I provide the necessary resources (time, staff, materials and technical support) the person needs to accomplish the task. __
5. I reduce the difficulty of carrying out the request by removing barriers to success. __
6. I offer factual and detailed evidence that the proposal is feasible. __
7. I link my request to a clear and appealing vision the person can fully support. __
8. I thoughtfully respond to the person's concerns and suggestions. __

Part 2: Add up the points for all your responses using the formulas below. The score for each scale will be between two and 10 points.
Q1 + Q6 = Your rational persuasion score.
Q2 + Q8 = Your consultation score.
Q3 + Q7 = Your inspirational appeals score.
Q4 + Q5 = Your collaboration score.

Part 3: Plot each of your scores on a graph, and then connect the dots. This will help you identify which influence tactics you can develop or use more often, either alone or in combination with other tactics.



***Reference / Influence:** Gaining commitment, getting results (second edition), by Harold Scharlatt and Roland Smith. The Center for Creative Leadership.*

FOR BEST RESULTS, APPLY THROUGH EXPERIENCE

While on-the-job learning is undoubtedly the most effective form of building knowledge, this doesn't always happen automatically. Learn how to use experience as a leadership engine.

Inspirational leader Mahatma Gandhi once said: "Knowledge gained through experience is far superior and many times more useful than bookish knowledge." How applicable this is when it comes to developing leaders at work.

Leadership is best learned from experience, as we know from decades of research. In fact, leaders have consistently identified on-the-job assignments as a major source of development, hence, so many of them follow the 70-20-10 framework where 70% of learning occurs on-the-job.

However, learning from experience is not always automatic. The key to maximising on-the-job opportunities that prepare leaders, develop employees, and advance business goals lies in making experience-driven leader development intentional. What this requires leaders to do is to enter into every experience with a plan – and leave with an understanding of what they are gaining from their experience, what is missing and how to fill any gaps. When channelled effectively, such everyday experiences can be transformed into an engine for leader development.

A new lens: Build, broaden, benefit

It was to fulfil this need that the return-on-experience (ROE) framework was developed in partnership with thousands of executives. Rather than assuming work will automatically teach them what they need to know, the ROE mindset helps learners strengthen their ability to learn and develop important skills on the job.

Build: Heightening mastery

Author Malcolm Gladwell famously said that devoting 10,000 hours to a subject will make you a standout expert in that field. For HR leaders, that means seeking experiences that stretch their capabilities through strategic assignments, job rotations and action-learning projects. At GE, for example, the action-learning process requires managers to contribute ideas to build the business, and then work in teams to implement the ideas.

Broaden: Increasing versatility

While mastery represents a move toward depth of expertise, versatility represents a move toward breadth of capacity, that is, expanding your repertoire of skills. Think mentorship roles, cross-functional projects, working with vendors, management of geographically dispersed teams, and more.

Benefit: Enhancing impact

As the saying goes, the true measure of learning is one's ability to apply it. To create impact and show a return on a leader's experience, learning must be transferable to different situations and people through the application of the lessons learned and new knowledge to others.

For a transfer of learning to happen, there must first be a period of facilitated reflection to make sense of and assimilate the learning. This must be followed by a just-in-time process of knowledge capture to codify the lessons learnt; concluding with a method of dissemination for the lessons to be communicated across the organisation.

Learning from experience is a continuous career-long process. Persevere and you will find cumulative returns over time for you, and by extension, for your organisation.

By using the return-on-experience framework, you have at your fingertips a systematic, easy-to-implement way to get the learning you and your team need as you spend your hours on the job.

Reference / Return on experience: Learning leadership at work, by Jeffrey Yip. The Center for Creative Leadership.

UNLOCKING THE POWER OF LEARNING AGILITY

If you have a strong commitment to seeking new challenges that allow you to acquire new lessons to apply later, you're what experts call "learning agile". Let's decode the anatomy of learning agility.

You know the type – the one where you give them a fresh challenge and somehow, they find a pathway to success. Setbacks are never an issue for them. In fact, they bounce right back from failure time after time, and often come back better than ever. Learning-agile individuals are distinguished by their willingness and ability to learn from experience. But they also excel at applying that learning to perform successfully in new situations. While it is no easy feat to define what makes learners agile, we have decoded four traits of lifelong learning that can lead to endless possibilities.

Seeking

Developing learning agility requires an intentional willingness to immerse yourself in challenging situations that broaden your experiences. Think of it as the opposite of getting stuck in a rut. The successful track record of learning-agile people means they are often sought out to take on fresh challenges to which they invariably say, "yes!"

Sense making

As with most endeavours, what you get out of it is determined by what you put in. This trait is all about asking "why?", "how?" and "why not?" and is essential to gaining the perspective that fuels learning. Failed experiments and criticisms are just part of the ongoing journey. In fact, try using multiple techniques, engaging different senses, and even tapping into your emotions.

Internalising

Whether you're seeking to mine insights from a hardship experience or a breakthrough success, internalisation starts with the right mindset. Agile learners who learn from hardship resist the temptation to put the blame on the situation or others' shortcomings; and are able to step back from the situation to recognise where their own mistakes contributed to the outcome.

Applying

A lesson is only truly learned when it is applied. By integrating past learnings with new challenges, applying a lesson involves flexibility, creativity and intuition.

Application is essential to being learning-agile. It represents that all-important shift that occurs when learning is put into action. It's what allows you to eventually say, "I am now different because ..."

Embracing learning agility is both a tremendous gift and a heavy responsibility. It is not for the faint of heart. But the diverse and exciting challenges it brings and the wealth of learning you acquire makes it all worthwhile.

Reference / Learning agility: Unlock the lessons of experience, by George Hallenbeck. The Center for Creative Leadership.

BUSTING THE MYTHS AROUND LEARNING AGILITY

Myth No.1: The all-around, go-to talent

Given the versatility of high learning agile people, it's easy to assume that they should be called upon for just about any challenging situation the organisation faces. Not quite. Learning-agile people thrive in many new and unexplored challenges where both problems and solutions are ambiguous. Alternatively, some problems are more precisely defined and require a specific solution. These situations are better suited to an expert with a refined set of technical abilities.

No.2 Among the very best

Learning-agile people are better than most on a lot of things, but seldom among the very best at any one thing. In fact, learning-agile people tend to distinguish themselves as generalists rather than specialists. Once they've gotten a grasp of the skills they need to address the current challenge they're facing, their curiosity and restlessness lead them onto the next challenge and the next set of skills to be developed.

ON YOUR MARK, GET SET, GO INTO THE FUTURE OF HR

Landmark 1: Prepare for what's to come

To prepare yourselves for the future, Asian HR leaders will need to make serious efforts to upgrade your capabilities and change your perspectives across seven key areas, two of which are:

- **Shift 1:** From metrics to insights: Understand the insights your data can give, and perhaps learn to ask the right questions of data analysts.
- **Shift 2:** From inside-out to outside-in: From merely knowing your organisation well, CHROs must look over the fence to see the outside world and bring in the best from competitors and vendors.

"Taking on a stretch assignment is an effective way to accelerate learning and to build technical depth. My experience is that highly driven employees often learn best with stretch roles as it pushes them to think beyond what they are currently doing (or what they think they are capable of)."

– Vicki Ng, head of human resources, Asia, Lendlease

Landmark 3: Make a habit of on-the-job learning

The key to maximising on-the-job opportunities lies in making experience-driven leader development intentional. What this requires leaders to do is to enter into every experience with a plan – and leave with an understanding of what they are gaining from their experience, what is missing and how to fill any gaps.

"HR coaching would be the 'new skill' essential for an HR professional in the future. HR coaches offer feedback, assessment and guidance to staff, addressing issues and opportunities. HR coaches could also motivate staff to take on a more active role in their own development."

Landmark 2: Gain commitment from across the organisation

Each time you attempt to influence someone, even just to make a small request, take the time to think back over the encounter and how you adjusted your techniques. What went well during the session? Did you get the outcome you wanted, albeit with any compromises? What would you do differently next time? Answers to questions like these will ensure you learn from your experience.

A ready reckoner on the path to lead the future HR function, based on lessons derived and exclusive comments from expert HR practitioners.

Landmark 4: Enable and equip agile learners

You know the type – the one where you give them a fresh challenge and somehow they find a pathway to success. Setbacks are never an issue for them. In fact, they bounce back from failure time after time, and often come back better than ever. Learning-agile individuals are distinguished by their willingness to learn from experience.

"Two of honestbee's core values are ownership and humility, and we take them seriously. We prioritise providing our employees and managers with the toolkits they need to be successful, and encourage them to tackle challenges head on. Our most successful people are those who have been able to proactively put out fires that arise in the course of doing business, and use those learnings to further build up the toolkits for themselves and their peers. Real learning occurs when one is able to approach a problem with an open mind, and make it one's mission to solve."

– Varian Lim, VP of people, at honestbee

Landmark 5: Give real and relevant feedback to talent

A talent conversation is a manager-employee discussion, where commitment and engagement can be built, and where managers have the opportunity to accelerate development and results. When done correctly, talented employees will know where they stand in the organisation now and their possibilities for the future.

Landmark 6: Excel in the nuances of leader-coaching

As you engage your teams by being genuinely curious, paying attention and using open-ended questions, they will be delighted that you are interested in what they think, how they make decisions and what motivates them. They will see you as a leader with their best interests at heart.

"At Watsons, it is our long-term commitment to groom our talent. Our programme starts with a one-to-one career conversation to find out their aspirations and how Watsons can support them to reach them in the long run. It is a win-win relationship between the talent and the company – whilst they grow and fulfil their potential, they also contribute back to the business. So far, the feedback from our talent has been positive."

– Ng Lip Gee, HR director, Watsons Singapore

"The key focus for the supply chain organisation in AMEA is to ensure that we find the balance between meeting the aspirational needs of our talent to progress quickly, but also ensuring that we build well-rounded leaders. We address this by leveraging our 2x2x2 career development principle, that is, in order to progress to more senior roles in the organisation you would need to have experienced at least two categories, two countries and two disciplines within the supply chain."

– Leanne Goliath-Yarde, regional HR manager AMEA, Mondelēz International

Reference / Center for Creative Leadership and Human Resources

SPEAK UP FOR CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Rather than beating about the bush, leaders have to be able to give real and relevant feedback using the framework for talent conversations, provided here, along with a handy checklist.

Your organisation has invested a significant amount of time and dollars in developing high-potential talent, only to be shocked when they suddenly leave the organisation for another opportunity. Sound familiar?

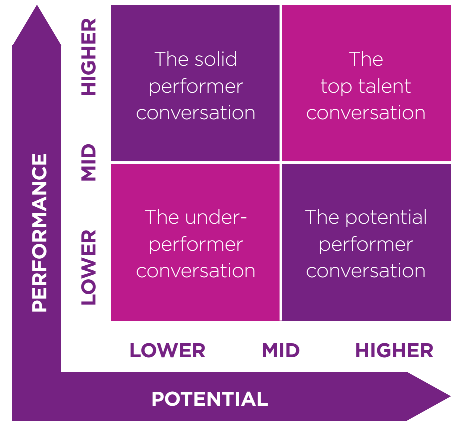
As an HR leader, you're intensely involved in talent management processes around individual and organisational capabilities, development and career success.

Buoyed partly by the rise of today's dominant workforce who isn't afraid to express dissatisfaction with just one annual assessment, companies such as Accenture, General Electric, and Maybank have ditched the traditional annual performance review in favour of more frequent, ongoing, two-way check-ins of performance; and you are probably considering a more evolved system of performance management as well. If your company is experimenting with new ways to evaluate talent, it is crucial for you to ensure managers at all levels are able to give feedback and hold talent conversations well. At its core, a talent conversation is a manager-employee discussion, where talent development becomes real, where commitment and engagement can be built, and where managers have the opportunity to accelerate development and results.

Most importantly, a talent conversation is not done to someone, but with someone.

And, when done correctly, talented employees will know where they stand in the organisation now and their possibilities for the future – thus, increasing their levels of engagement and commitment.

FIGURE 1: FOUR TYPES OF TALENT CONVERSATIONS



The four types of talent conversations

Leaders who want to successfully manage the talent in their organisations need to develop their skills on the four types of talent conversations, as listed in Figure 1, which clarifies exactly who they are engaging and which situations work best for such talent.

The top talent

Top talent comprises employees who frequently exceed performance expectations, demonstrate exceptional managerial skills and exemplify most of the competencies required for executing the organisation's strategy. Think of your employees who learn new skills the quickest and who are always ready for more responsibility. For such employees, a talent conversation must:

- Recognise their high performance level.
- Discuss future aspirations and goals and desired development.
- Find out what motivates the individual and what you can do to ensure you retain the person.

The solid performer

The backbone of an organisation, solid performers are consistent result-getters who have proven technical or professional skills, as well as demonstrated some managerial potential. Typically these are individual contributors who have the potential to take on more responsibility within a business line. When dealing with such employees:

- Convey that the individual is appreciated, with potential to grow in their position.
- Focus on how they can stay aware of opportunities in the next few years.

- Find ways to recognise the person's solid performance level and accomplishments.

The potential performer

Those who may have been recently hired or promoted or been placed in their role within the past six to 12 months are typically potential performers. Evidently, they may not have had enough time in their role to show significant results, yet are expected to deliver on the high expectations placed on them, before they are ready for additional responsibility. In such talent conversations:

- Share your and the organisation's perceptions of their leadership potential.
- Ensure there is a getting-started plan in place and discuss how to execute it.
- Focus on the steps to be taken over the next three to six months to ensure their success.
- Identify how to provide support through an investment of your time.

The under-performer

As the name suggests, these individuals are unable to meet their performance expectations, and require dedicated focus on their job duties. Needless to say, they should not be given any additional responsibilities. When speaking to such employees:

- Be clear about why the individual's performance needs to be improved to sustain their role.
- Concentrate on the actionable next steps required for the individual over the next three to six months.

FIGURE 2: PREPARING FOR THE TALENT CONVERSATION

Stage 1: Assessment

- Which of the four types of talent conversations are you looking to have with the employee, and why?
- Do you have data points about the employee to support the type of talent conversation identified?
- How is the employee likely to react to your assessment – excited, disappointed or neutral?
- What motivates the employee? (Quick tip: If you don't know, ask!)

Stage 2: Challenge

- What developmental opportunities are available?
- What opportunities are realistic?
- What performance goals need to be met and how will they be met?
- How will the individual's goals be aligned with the organisation's goals?
- What obstacles do you anticipate the individual will have to work around to achieve these goals?

Stage 3: Support

- How can I help this person stay motivated to achieve development or performance goals?
- If six months from now this individual has not achieved their goals, what will be the likely reasons?
- What resources can this person tap into besides me?
- How will we create shared accountability for this person's development?

Investing in your team's career

At this point it may be helpful to think about someone with whom you need to have a talent conversation in the near future. Keep this person in mind as you go about preparing for the talent conversation using the ACS model – assess, support, and challenge.

Assessment

In preparing for a talent conversation, the first step for you as a manager is to begin pulling together all of the data and information you have about the person you will be talking with. A good way to accomplish both of these goals is by creating a talent assessment summary. Use the questions provided in Figure 2 to gain a clear picture of the current reality and the future development for the person you are working with.

Challenge

When challenging the employee, leaders should focus on the next steps in their performance and development. These next steps should be based on the assessment you just completed as well as on what you hear during the actual talent conversation. Challenging next steps that take people out of their comfort zones will increase the likelihood of learning and change, with some ideas provided in Figure 2.

Support

A key element of support is finding out what motivates the individual to take on the developmental and performance actions that you determine to be the next steps. Reflect on what needs to happen to keep the person motivated and inspired to achieve his or her goals, using the pointers in Figure 2.

A last bit of preparation leaders can do before entering a talent conversation is to reflect on themselves and their ability and effectiveness at developing others.

When in doubt, do not hesitate to seek feedback from others.

From a business standpoint, talent conversations are a low-cost, high-return scenario for leveraging human capital assets and creating a culture of talent sustainability.

From a HR standpoint they provide an opportunity for relationship building and engaging talent. So do them right, and do them well – your employees and organisation will thank you for it.

Reference / Talent conversations: What they are, why they're crucial, and how to do them right, by Roland Smith and Michael Campbell. The Center for Creative Leadership.

PUT ON THE HAT OF A LEADER-COACH

Most employees want their managers to coach them, but admittedly this doesn't happen often enough – here's a guide to excelling in the nuances of leader-coaching.

How often have you heard someone say, employees don't leave companies, rather they leave their bosses? While this may be a truism for many of us, let's consider the situation from the point of view of these bosses.

Bosses, be it managers or leaders, wear multiple hats. One of your roles is to manage employees' day-to-day performance. Another is to support their long-term development so they can continue to deliver top performances in the face of larger, more complex situations. Arguing about which of these two roles is more important is futile, as both are equally critical.

However, most organisations tend to equip their leaders better for the first role, that is, of managing performance. The latter role of developing your direct reports, particularly coaching for development, often falls by the wayside, caught in the hailstorm of daily responsibilities.

Let's take the time to consider the tools required for leaders to become leader-coaches, with the recognition that leaders truly are in the best position to support the development of their people.

The ins and outs of leader-coaching

Leader-coaching comprises formal, and even informal, conversations between the leader-coach (you) and learners (usually your direct reports) with the intention of producing positive changes in their workplace behaviours. On the practical front, it is about helping your direct reports determine which changes in behaviour they would find beneficial; exploring options for how to get there; providing them with opportunities to experience situations in which they can try out the new behaviours; and finally, ensuring they receive the feedback and support they need to continue to learn and develop.

Put another way, leader-coaching requires all line managers to wear an unorthodox hat, one that relies less on your functional expertise and more on your ability to engage people in a way that challenges their thinking, and enables them to stop, reflect, question assumptions and re-evaluate perceived constraints.

In the long run, as managers and leaders, you save time if you make wise choices about when to use a coaching approach, particularly useful when you want to see a positive change in your staff's behaviours.

What this does is rather than providing them a direct answer to a problem, you are building their capacity to solve more problems and improve their performance on their own. Here are some situations when a coaching approach may be best:

- When there is not an emergency and your direct reports approach you about an idea they have or a problem with which they are wrestling with.
- Following an assessment centre, a 360-degree feedback evaluation, a leadership workshop, or a performance evaluation meeting – essentially, anything that requires a development plan.
- To prepare a direct report for a new assignment or a change of job that requires competencies or skills that he or she has not yet demonstrated.

- To support a direct report on a particularly challenging assignment.
- When you believe that your direct report has a blind spot that others have noticed.

As the next action item, head over to Table 1 for an example of an informal coaching conversation, and use the opportunity to highlight the key questions you can ask in your context.

“DO GO THE EXTRA MILE BY SHARING HOW YOUR TRAINEE’S GOALS ARE RELEVANT TO YOU AS THEIR MANAGER, AND HOW THEIR ACHIEVEMENT WILL BENEFIT THE LARGER ORGANISATIONAL GOALS.”

Activating the formal coaching process

As you conduct the first developmental conversation, keep in mind the key steps in a formal coaching process, the first of which is to really build a rapport with your direct report in terms of stating clearly the benefits and outcomes expected from the session, while taking their expectations into account.

The desired outcome should ideally be an actionable and meaningful development plan. If this session, or parts of it, are to be kept confidential, this would be the right time to set limits.

During the conversation, it would be helpful for you to ask core questions, for example: What did you learn from this experience? Were you surprised by the feedback you got? How can I help you?

Further in the conversation, your trainee will need your supervision to chalk out the specific goals for their development. It is best to ask them what themes and skills relate best to their job now and in the future – accordingly, highlight what achievement or success in each of these areas really looks like. Do go the extra mile by sharing how your trainee’s goals are relevant to you as their manager, and how their achievement will benefit the larger organisational goals.

In putting together this action plan, direct reports should be encouraged to think creatively and try new behaviours, for which you may share your own innovations and ideas in an area of focus, just to open up the conversation to share a diverse range of experiences. Review the final plan with your direct report and make sure it is documented in an appropriate format.

Finally, take the time to ask your report if they need any resources, such as time, resources or access to stakeholders for any aspects of achieving the plan. Help them analyse the obstacles they may face, as part of this. Signing off from the conversation, describe the energy, commitment and discipline that change requires and give an example of how you have addressed this personally. Leave your direct report feeling charged and motivated about leveraging their strengths to make change happen!

As you engage your teams by being genuinely curious, paying attention and using open-ended questions, they will likely be delighted that you are interested in what they think, how they make decisions, and what motivates them. They will see you as a leader who has their best interests at heart.

TABLE 1: EXAMPLE OF AN INFORMAL COACHING CONVERSATION

Action: Use the opportunity to highlight the key questions you can ask in your context.

Brenda (manager): Hi Kenneth. How are you today?
Kenneth (direct report): Well, Brenda, not so well. I have been struggling to prioritise my tasks. It seems that I am running behind and I don’t feel that I can cope with everything on my plate.
B: Hmm . . . I know that can be frustrating and worrying. How have you faced similar situations in the past?
K: I have, what I did previously was list all the activities on my plate and compared them with the targets that my manager and I had set.
B: Would that work in this situation?
K: Yes, but by the time I do that, more work will have piled up on my desk.
B: How could you slow down or stop the flow of things that come to you?
R: Well, some colleagues seem to have an incorrect perception of my responsibilities. I get a lot of things that should not come to me in the first place, but should go directly to the subject matter experts.
K: How could you make that shift happen?
B: I suppose we need to communicate again about the roles.
K: I could organise a meeting with the head of the expert division and send him a docket on areas where we will need his team’s direct support. Anything else that you might need to do differently in the future?
K: The thing is, I have a strong desire to help, so when I get these requests, I am happy to attend to them myself. It makes me feel valued.
B: That is a gift to the organisation, but costly for you. Is there a lesson you’ve learnt from this pattern?
K: Well, I need to learn to say no to the trivial requests. At the same time, I need to continue responding my best to the requests that really play to my skill set.
B: That is great learning. How can I support you in this?
K: Maybe we could sit down and review our priorities together.
B: Definitely, let’s catch-up once again on Friday afternoon.

Reference / Becoming a leader-coach: A step-by-step guide to developing your people, by Johan Naudé and Florence Plessier. The Center for Creative Leadership.