

A menu of hopes for HR

By Dave Ulrich

I am consumed with “what’s next” and anticipating the future of HR. Let offer a menu of HR hopes for HR as we look forward.

- **HR outside in:** Most HR work still focuses inside the company on employees, leaders, or HR practices. When the work of HR starts outside with customers, investors, and communities, it focuses on the value HR can create over time. Strategic HR still often uses strategy as a mirror to which HR must respond, while outside in uses strategy as a window to external business conditions and key stakeholders to which HR must respond. HR responds to outside in pressures by making changes in talent, leadership, and capability.
- **Talent:** In the last 20 years, we have learned to help employees become more competent with innovations in training and learning, then we focused on behavioral engagement. Now, I hope we are focused on emotional engagement where employees find a sense of meaning and purpose from the work they do. Creating meaning from work comes when employees personal strengths and values are used to help and serve others. Building on your strengths so that they will strengthen others goes beyond a narcissistic view of personal growth.
- **Leadership:** Focusing on individual leaders should shift to collective leadership where leaders at all levels of an organization do the right things in the right way. This means that individual leaders will be more accountable for developing other leaders than merely getting their way or getting things right. Leaders want the next generation leadership to be better. And, to be better requires focusing more on external conditional than internal history. These external conditions might include general social, technical, economic, political, environmental, and demographic trends as well as expectations of specific stakeholders (e.g., customers, investors, and communities). When leaders turn external expectations of a firm into internal leadership actions and organization practices, they create a leadership brand.
- **Capability:** An organization’s capability represents what it is known for and good at inside and outside the company. A firm’s brand becomes its culture when external expectations turn into internal actions. I envision a few emerging capabilities that HR professionals should architect for their firms. **Simplicity** has become important as the world is becoming more complex. Sometimes HR practices like performance management are avoided because they are too complex or process driven. Terms like essence, minimalist, streamlined and focused are the themes of simplicity. **Information** captures a wide range of current fads: Cloud, big data, analytics, workforce planning, metrics, scorecard, and so forth. Behind each of these HR fads is the fundamental capability of information. As a capability, information is less about data and more about decision making; less about information and more about insight and impact. HR needs to be very clear about what choices can be made to help an organization win through talent, leadership, and culture, then define choices and collect data to make informed choices. **Collaboration** includes teamwork and working across boundaries inside and organization and forming partnerships outside the organization. HR professionals need to model, learn, and teach principles of simplicity, information and collaboration.

There it is ... a few ideas on a menu for HR’s future, which will build hope for what we deliver.

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