NAVIGATING THE FUTURE OF WORK

The role of the HRD continues to expand, encompassing strategic thinking, culture transformation and societal impact. Criticaleye's **Bridgette Hall** talks to the community about the challenges and opportunities for HRDs when it comes to navigating the future of work

In an ever-evolving business landscape, HR leaders find themselves at a pivotal juncture, facing unprecedented challenges and opportunities. In this era of technological disruption, the role of HR is taking centre stage, reshaping not only how organisations function but also the lived experiences of their employees.

CHROs will need to be innovative and forward-thinking, presenting ideas that challenge the status quo and drive the organisation forward, given that the latest technological advancements are reshaping job roles faster than ever before. HR's role is not just to adapt, but to lead the way in guiding organisations through the ongoing transition.

"I think for HR, there's two strands of force here, which need to work in parallel," explained **Audrey O'Mahony**, Managing Director, Talent & Organisation Consulting at Accenture in a keynote address at Criticaleye's recent HRD Forum. "One is the disruption that's going to happen to the jobs in your >

own organisation, and the extent to which you're going to have to lean into that and really help your business leader solve that.

"The other is the power of this technology to completely transform how you operate your service. There is a huge business case for that."

Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) has recently emerged as a transformative force that is already changing the way people work via increased automation of routine tasks. The technology also has the potential to enhance decision-making processes. However, this will require leaders to rethink the nature of work and the roles that employees play within organisations.

"We are going into a world where we are going to be existentially challenging people about what work is and what work they are doing," said **David Balls**, CPO of Newcross Healthcare Solutions. "Not only will this be about how technology impacts people in the workplace, but wrapped around this are cultural and societal changes, which will be equally critical."

Are Boards engaging enough with HRDs on the latest Talent agenda?

Yes **60%**
No **40%**
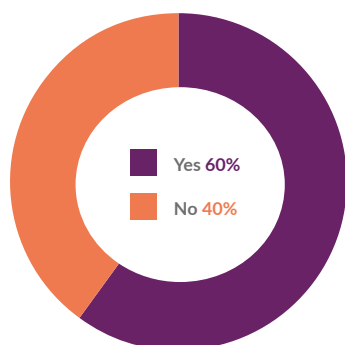
Source: Criticaleye HRD Forum 2023

> **" It's imperative for HR leaders to not only understand the business strategy but also communicate it effectively to the entire organisation "**
>
> **Jamie Wilson**

Leading with HR

No longer merely a support function, HR has emerged as a strategically critical element of organisational success. The HRD now plays a key role in shaping an organisation's strategy, driving commercial value and stewarding the organisation through complex challenges.

"The moment has come now for HR where there is a huge appreciation and recognition that the role that HR plays in the organisation is an incredibly strategically critical role," said **Audrey**.

"In order for HR to be more demanding and to have that compelling commercial right for funding and investment, it is around showing up at the heart of the transformation agenda as well

as advocating for and creating those demonstrable business cases where you can see that the investment in people really added commercial value," she continued.

Aligning HR strategy with the overall business strategy will be a continued area of focus for HRDs as they cement their identities as a core part of the leadership team. Instead of continually justifying their role, HR leaders must step into their roles with confidence, explained **Tracy Sheedy**, Non-executive Director at Tracsis, and who also recently left her role as CPO of FTSE 100 firm Croda International.

"We have to see ourselves as business leaders. We are part of the business; we are leaders in the business. We don't have to keep articulating that, we just need to take up the mantle and do it."

HR leaders are instrumental in aligning the workforce with the strategic vision of the organisation, ensuring that every employee understands their role in achieving those goals.

"It's imperative for HR leaders to not only understand the business strategy but also communicate it effectively to the entire organisation, ensuring alignment and commitment to the purpose and mission of the organisation," **Jamie Wilson**, Managing Director of Group Services at Criticaleye added.

Board Engagement

Boards of today recognise that the impact of HR extends far beyond managing personnel. People are at the heart of every organisation, influencing culture, performance and its ability to adapt to change. >

"I think it's fair to say that Boards everywhere are not just interested in discussions on HR but about people generally - because almost every aspect of the business affects people," said **Gary Kildare**, Non-executive Director at the UK Ministry of Defence and a Board Mentor at Criticaleye.

In the realm of governance, Boards take a much broader view than previously. They are asking more questions and probing deeper into issues impacting the workforce.

"There are more societal changes that impact businesses that need to be managed within the Boardroom and within businesses, and HR should put themselves at the centre of that," **Tracy** asserted.

Boards are increasingly invested in talent management and succession planning, and HR leaders play a pivotal role in guiding the Board's efforts to nurture and develop talent.

David said: "In terms of the Board getting more involved with talent, this is obviously a very natural place for them to be and it does permeate all the way through the organisation, because from the very point where they appoint the CEO, they set the tone for the organisation."

Adding value in HR means being attuned to change and proactively responding to it. HR leaders must foster strong relationships with their Boards guided by clear ethics and values.

"To gain the trust and attention of the Board, HR leaders must provide the data and insights that align with the organisation's strategic objectives.

> **"** *Leadership behaviour' is something that the CPO has to take the lead on* **"**
>
> Gary Kildare

Boards today are increasingly concerned with all stakeholders, including employees, making HR's role in governance more critical than ever," says **Jamie**

HR leaders must navigate these complexities of disruption, promote a culture of learning and innovation, be stewards of leadership capabilities and engage with Boards to drive the organisation's success.

It's a difficult time to be a CPO, according to **Gary**: "The list of challenges grows longer - there are cultural problems, behavioural problems and leadership problems and all of these are laid at the door of the CPO.

"'Leadership behaviour' is something that the CPO has to take the lead on, particularly when there are issues and clashes around personality or chemistry, and increasingly, you can see more examples where there is toxicity negatively impacting the team or the reputation of the business. That can be with any senior leader, a CEO, a member of a Board, a NED or Chair. The CPO has to deal with it."

The role of the HRD continues to expand, encompassing strategic thinking, culture transformation

and societal impact. It is imperative that business leaders recognise and embrace the profound changes in HR's role, harnessing its potential to drive organisational success, navigate challenges and foster a culture of continuous growth and development.

The time has come for HR to shine as a strategic powerhouse within organisations. ■

Featuring commentary from:

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