

Anchoring HR Impact in Disruptive Times: Grow Influence in Real-time

By **Amelia Chan**, CPHR

WITH WORLD ECONOMIC INFLUENCES AND LABOUR MARKET conditions moving so quickly, the speed of business has changed. The new world emerging has placed greater expectations on leaders than ever before as highly changeable global conditions are affecting industries and organizations. All of the above has disrupted traditional employment cycles, which in turn has created new challenges for the human resources profession.

In this new era of dynamic business, HR's responsibilities have grown considerably and aligned ever more closely to core business strategy, whether that is to hone operational excellence or to create more innovative ways of driving performance and engagement simultaneously. This is quite a juggling act and involves more than just HR. It requires buy-in from stakeholders at every level—from new job seekers to seasoned business executives.

Now that HR professionals are finding that proverbial seat at the table in increasing numbers, the need to balance real-time daily diligence with overarching big pictures creates new opportunities and challenges.

HR in the Here and Now

Case in point, the unreal pressures of the virtual world have created a greater need than ever for HR professionals to consider the impact of the 24/7 world on their teams and themselves. Hyper connectivity—where there is always an expectation to be available—puts pressure on individuals and organizations to always be on.

The most damaging costs of the digital age is the illusion of connection and overly idealistic perceptions. We think that if we can tweet, post, text or email, we've connected. After all, our digital visibility supports our relationships—saving us the time of meeting in person and giving us the perception that “all is good” since everyone has been informed.

This illusion of über productivity is unfortunately misleading and potentially harmful, leading usually to carelessness and autopilot behaviours that aren't sustainable. While individuals may be digitally action-oriented, they can often miss the details that make all the difference. It can also encourage reactivity (which is emotionally charged) instead of responsiveness (which is calm and deliberate).

As a result, HR professionals can take the lead and consciously model the “Be Here Now” behaviour that they want their organization to emulate. To be effective, this has to be in alignment with the executive team's actions and in tandem with their leadership decisions. This encourages the growth of organizational citizenship—as our actions (and related energy) get passed from one interaction to the next, causing a ripple effect. Assertive HR leadership/mindfulness provides the model and catalyst for a positive cycle.

Pockets of Opportunities

With different speeds and types of growth occurring everywhere both internally and externally, HR leaders have a lot of opportunities to make a difference. However, a curious mind and thorough understanding of the organization's “business” are both mandatory. And while extending that awareness and curiosity at the executive table is commendable, applying it to the employee base is what will garner the greatest impact, both for the employees and for HR.

Frequent touch points and being fully engaged in employee issues gives HR the ability to excel. These opportunities to bond are unpredictable, but it's the unexpected nature that gives our credibility. With relationships anchored by earned trust, our real-time effectiveness pops into clarity, revealing how HR can both resolve and shape the authentic employee experience.

In addition, all leaders—but especially HR professionals—must understand that history matters. It's not just about the current state, but how we got here. This respect (for both positive and negative things) earns credibility with the rank and file employees and shows a deeper level of HR effort, which helps build trust.

Three Keys to Growing Influence

Without a doubt, HR professionals are being called upon to rise well beyond administrative shackles to guide and lead with authority. Quite often, we are called upon to do so without any real titular power to back it. Here are three keys to unlocking HR's ability to influence regardless of scenario or title:

Be Visible: HR has to be present in order to influence. Instead of yearning to be asked for our opinion, HR leaders need to take a more assertive approach. This can be achieved by increasing visibility within the organization and taking impactful steps. Asking questions and offering to participate in key initiatives helps raise the HR profile and develop trust with other teams/departments. Physical attendance and making the effort to learn about critical issues that affect the organization is how the HR voice gets heard. We cannot influence if we are not present.

Be Courageous: The HR function wears many hats simultaneously. We have to be less apologetic and act with conviction to establish our authority. By speaking up and showing the courage to put things out there for discussion, we show how even uncomfortable conversations are constructive and add value. It is important to own our HR expertise, so that employees understand not only our role, but that we have something more to offer than just milk and cookies. We can nurture interpersonal connection through

volunteering ideas, encouraging different perspectives and putting forth innovative suggestions.

Be Real: The culture drives everything in a company as it governs how people interact with each other. Culture is learned behaviour based on the actions we take and, as a result, leaders have the power to change culture through their behaviours. HR needs to be bold enough to be heard, but still accessible to all; as such, our credibility hinges on trust and authenticity.

HR needs to facilitate communication that encourages honest feedback and courageous conversations; accepting weaknesses, learning from mistakes and moving forward is part of this process. As an active agent of organizational culture, people leaders must be willing to start conversations that drive change and instigate disruption when it's appropriate. Practising agility helps HR to better adapt to and even anticipate oncoming changes.

Accept Where We Are

While it can be difficult to bring everyone together, it is our actions around real-time issues that anchor the impact and influence of HR. While we should always be future focused, it is our work in the daily present that keeps leaders and employees from becoming disillusioned and/or confused.

This is a delicate balance for HR to straddle because we are the change management stewards and yet we must also remain

grounded. If we ignore workplace realities, we will continue in the same vicious cycles. If we don't address the things that really need attention, we won't be able to get to the root of the problems to resolve them. Progress requires confronting and accepting our current state of affairs whatever it may be and this is where the real work begins.

Keep Striving for Better

An employer's competitive advantage is in the genuine relationships it has with people. Transparency is something everyone seeks, but is challenging to practice—even hard to accept at times. Thus, HR must work with senior leaders to model real-time authenticity for their employees.

Moreover, while the means of communicating continue to multiply, this level of connection isn't sufficient and doesn't reach deep enough into the heart of our workplace issues. Employees require transparency and continuous engagement as life happens day-to-day, moment-to-moment. For HR, FOMO (fear of missing out) on key conversations is very real—unless we begin them in real-time today. 📣

Amelia Chan, CPHR, RCIC is founder and principal consultant of Higher Options Consulting Services (HR-options.com), providing a wide range of HR and immigration services for small to mid-sized businesses.

CPHR

British Columbia
& Yukon

The CPHR British Columbia & Yukon Employee Benefits Plan

Designed specifically for our members

Visit CPHRBenefitsPlan.com to learn more!

HUB

POINTBREAK