

HRBP Quarterly

A Magazine for HR Business Partners
and Strategic HR Professionals

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Second Quarter 2017

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Letter from the Editors

As an HRBP, you've probably seen plenty of advice about how to grow in your role. There are two leading strategies: the first is to focus on developing the personal capabilities and skills you bring to the job; the second is to discuss the work hurdles you face with your manager, and how you might overcome them.

But one area that typically gets less attention is the mind-set, or mental, approach of an HRBP. Evolving that mind-set can often be one of the most difficult challenges, given the ingrained mental models, communication styles, and work preferences you have established over time. Although it may often feel intractable, your mind-set represents a real (and often untouched) opportunity for you to differentiate yourself.

We begin this issue by discussing a key opportunity HRBPs have to stretch themselves—and their mind-sets—by flipping their customer support strategy on its head. Because we so often hear the HRBP role described as that of a service deliverer—providing responsive and business-aligned support—it influences our mind-set. Rather, HRBPs can benefit from approaching the role from a salesperson perspective, using takeaways from traditional product management and sales disciplines.

We look at how HRBPs can reflect and reshape their mind-sets using more specific strategies, such as diagnosing their dominant partnership styles, growing their business knowledge, or anticipating the impact of automation on HR and the workforce. Conversely, two of our features show how HRBPs benefit from getting inside the minds of others; we discuss the talent trends CEOs think HR should be ready to address and what heads of talent analytics wish their HRBPs knew about working with their teams.

Finally, we hear directly from HR leaders. Google's former SVP of People, Laszlo Bock, shares his keys to success for attracting, retaining, and developing high-performing talent. And we talk to Kristi Newton, HRBP Manager at PNC, who shares her insights on how to effectively balance a business and HR mind-set in your day-to-day role.

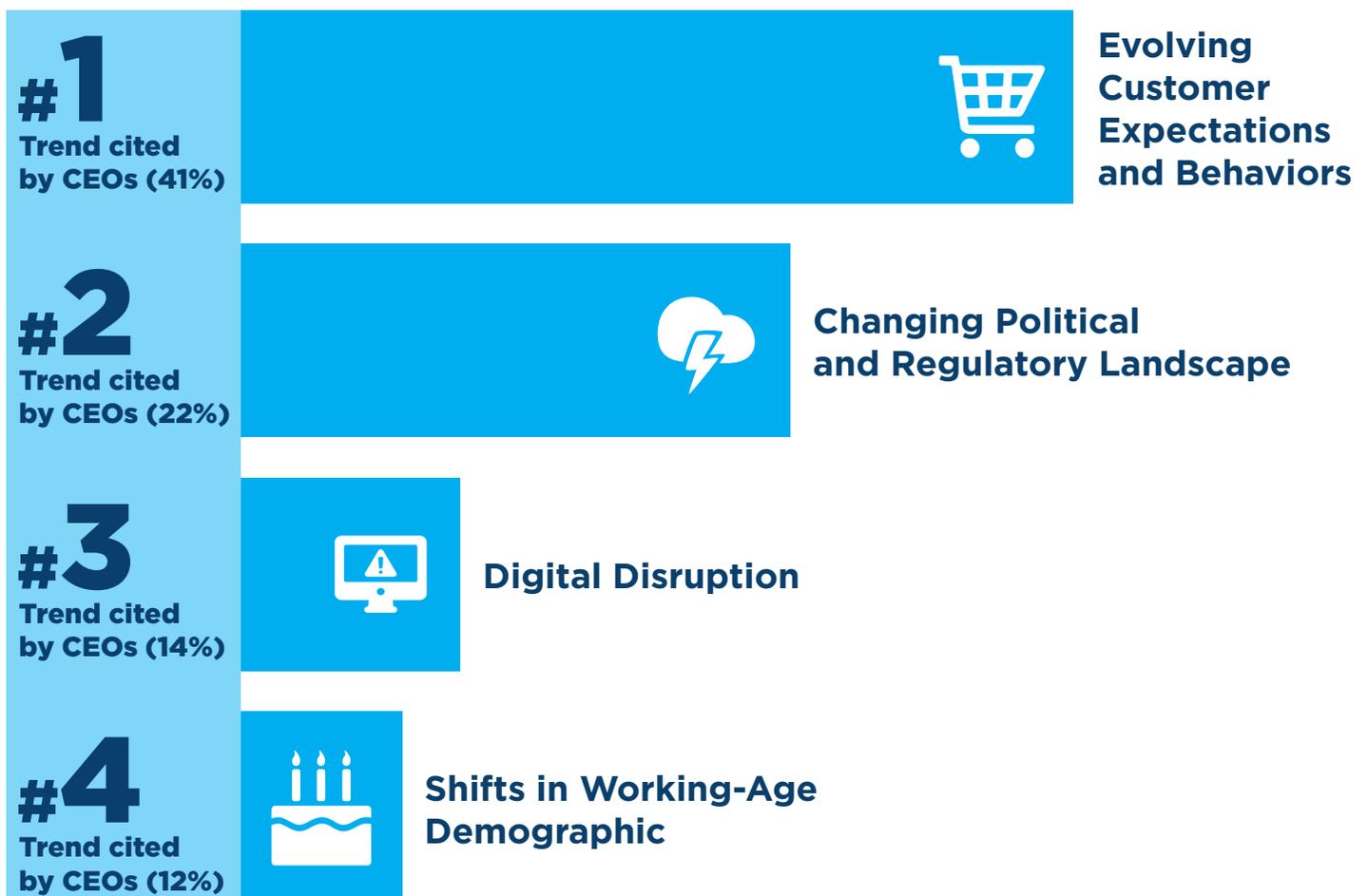
Don't forget that we welcome your feedback on *HRBP Quarterly*, including what you'd like to see in future issues. Send any comments, suggestions, or questions to meg.zolner@gartner.com.

Brian Kropp, Amanda Joseph-Little, Meg Zolner,
and Katy Connealy Weber

Getting in the Mind of Your CEO

CEOs are focusing on talent in their organizations, with 6 in 10 discussing talent-related priorities in earnings calls. While HRBPs may not be working directly with the CEO on a talent agenda, they can take steps to anticipate what their CEOs' priorities mean for them—and respond accordingly.

In our recent survey, **CEOs cited four trends that they believe will most strongly affect their organizations' HR functions in the next six months:**



These four trends are top of mind for your organizations' CEOs. Prioritize these specific strategies to play your part in helping your organization and HR function respond well:

#1 

On Evolving Customer Expectations and Behaviors

Your talent will need to adapt to this more automated, personalized, and data-rich environment. Work with your line clients to help employees anticipate how their behaviors should change in order to respond to the customers they're supporting.

#3 

On Digital Disruption

Digitalization continues to increase the rate of change in the business environment, and these changes will affect the talent needs of client groups that HRBPs support, even those HRBPs working in traditionally non-digital industries.

Did you know?

From 2008–2014, demand for digital skills multiplied:

- 3,440 times for data architects, and
- 50 times for data HR analysts.

#2 

On a Changing Political and Regulatory Landscape

Political and regulatory shifts are difficult to predict. To stay ahead of potential changes, work with your line clients to set triggers to monitor and prepare for changes that might affect access to the global talent market.

Did you know?

Last year at least 85,000 H1-B visas were issued in the United States. This policy is just one of many HR-relevant policies likely to change in coming years.

#4 

On Shifts in Working-Age Demographics

As baby boomers exit the workplace and millennials enter, HRBPs should equip themselves with knowledge to manage all age demographics of their workforce. Our research shows the workplace preferences of different generations do not actually differ as much as most think.

HRBP as Salesperson

Four Ways to “Sell” to Your Line Partners

By Amanda Joseph-Little

HRBPs do a lot to support their line partners, often with mixed results. One way to turn those results around is to borrow tricks of the trade from your organizations’ Product Management and Sales functions to help you produce and sell the right “products” to your line partner “consumers.”



HRBPs work hard to address the line's questions and challenges and to anticipate its needs. The line, however, continues to question the quality of HR support it receives. In 2013, for example, line leaders rated HR's overall business value score a 66 out of 100—which fell to 60 in 2016. This is partly because many line leaders are not well versed in talent management. Without the help of HR, especially you as their HRBP, they often don't know what they need, or they may turn to solutions that ultimately won't address their needs.

HRBPs (and the HR function overall) can diagnose and provide what the line *really* needs by drawing lessons from the product management and sales fields, in particular by borrowing techniques that product managers and sales managers use to develop the right products and sell them to consumers—even products that consumers don't yet know they need.

You can do four things right now to start down this path.

- 1. Think like a salesperson instead of an HR practitioner.** As an HRBP, you are an expert on talent management, and you deliver that expertise in a variety of ways: by advising on practices and policies, sharing talent data, and offering consulting, to name a few. But there is no guarantee the line will use that expertise or support. Sales executives know this all too well. Offering a product—even a superior product at a reasonable price—does not guarantee a sale. It's likely that in your personal life you have seen—and rejected—products you thought interesting, smart, and even cool because they just didn't answer your need. HRBPs need to think of their expertise as a product or service and their line leaders as consumers, because an HRBP's products and services are only valuable if line leaders are willing to “buy” them.¹

Rather than consider the expertise you have to offer as an HRBP, think about the “products” line leaders are willing to “buy” from you.

2. Ask your clients what they need, then ask them *why* they need it *five* times.² The line often doesn't know what talent management solutions it needs or has a specific solution in mind that won't address the root cause of its challenge. Consider, for example, how line leaders often see dismissal as the answer to an underperforming manager. Further

investigation may reveal that this manager has had little feedback and that a few honest conversations could have dramatically improved his or her performance.

The true challenge or goal the line leader is trying to meet is often buried beneath the surface. By asking "why" five times, you get to the heart of the issue:

Asking Your Client "Why" Five Times

 **Line Leader:** Manager X is underperforming and needs to be fired.

1 HRBP: Why is Manager X underperforming?

 **Line Leader:** Because he spends a lot of time researching industry trends and competitors when he should be traveling to visit clients.

2 HRBP: Why is he spending time researching industry trends and competitors when he should be visiting clients?

 **Line Leader:** Because he thinks the best way to support his sales team is to provide them with this information.

3 HRBP: Why does Manager X think that's the best way to support his sales team?

 **Line Leader:** Well, it probably is the best way. But his sales team is performing well, and he doesn't need to spend time on that.

4 HRBP: Why does Manager X spend so much time supporting his sales team in that way then?

 **Line Leader:** He's worried about his sales team hitting their goals, but doesn't seem to realize he's hurting his own goals.

5 HRBP: Why does Manager X worry about his team's goals so much, but not his own?

 **Line Leader:** Because I always want to talk about their numbers and how they're performing. I probably need to ease up on that and make it clear that, at this point, I'm worried about his personal sales goals and not his direct reports' sales goals.

Source: CEB analysis.

By asking “why” five times, the business partner and line leader arrive at a more effective, and much easier, solution.

Similarly, the best product managers and sales executives know not to take feedback from consumers at face value but to dig deeper to understand needs that the consumer may not be able to articulate. They know that what someone needs and what they say they need—or what they’re willing to pay for—are not necessarily the same.

3. Force your line clients to make trade-offs.

Presenting two solutions that force consumers to make trade-offs is another tactic product managers and sales managers use to narrow in on the product features that truly influence consumers’ purchasing decisions.

Consider a car manufacturer or salesperson. Market analysis clearly indicates that safety is a top concern for families with teenaged children. But car manufacturers know that price is also a concern for families. It’s too costly and inefficient for the company to produce multiple models of the car, so they collect consumer feedback on two potential car models that force consumers to make hard trade-offs. Will families with teenaged children buy a car that has the very best safety features but costs more, or will they ultimately buy a car that has good safety features and is more affordable?

HRBPs can force line leaders to make similar trade-offs to provide the right solution. Consider a line leader who asks for help securing talent for a new office. Once you and the line leader agree on the needed skill sets (using the five “whys” approach), help them evaluate the best way to source that talent. One option is to move current employees to the new location. That option is attractive because the talent already have the necessary skills and know the company well, but the downside is that few employees will be willing to move, leaving many open positions in the new office. The second option is to hire new employees at the new location. That option is attractive because most positions can be filled quickly, but onboarding the external hires is slow, and it may be many months before the office is operating at full productivity levels.

Line leaders who are forced to consider the trade-offs and choose a solution are also more committed to, and accepting of, the solution. They chose it, after all!

4. Speak the language of your consumers, not HR.

Finally, successful product managers and sales people are adept at using their customers’ language rather than the jargon of their function or organization. They listen closely to the words their consumers use to describe their needs and preferences, and they use that same language when discussing their products and services. Not only does that convince consumers that the product matches their needs and preferences, but it makes them feel heard.

Common HR terms are likely not part of line leaders’ vocabularies and therefore carry little meaning to them. When HRBPs use HR jargon, line leaders are unsure whether their HR partners understand their needs or are capable of addressing them. HRBPs, for example, might refer to “employee engagement,” whereas line leaders talk of “motivation,” “happiness,” or “satisfaction.” When discussing employee performance, use specific language that describes performance for that function or job role. In a Sales function, performance is based on hitting sales targets; in a manufacturing plant, performance is based on speed, quality, and output.

HRBPs can improve the talent outcomes of the business units and functions they support by borrowing these four strategies from their Product Management and Sales functions. The talent management solutions you provide will ultimately be more effective, and line leaders will be more likely to buy-in to your solutions. Then you’ll have hit your target as a salesperson.

¹ Clayton M. Christensen, Taddy Hall, Karen Dillon, and David S. Duncan, “Know Your Customers’ Jobs to Be Done,” *Harvard Business Review*, September 2016.

² Bob Moesta, “Competing Against Luck: The Jobs-To-Be-Done Theory and Method and CEB Jobs-To-Be-Done Overview” presented at CEB’s Master Our Moments conference, 31 January 2017.

Join Us Later This Year

The Cultural Evolution: Creating a Culture That Performs

Register today to join us in person and discuss how leading organizations are creating a business-aligned culture faster and more cost-effectively.

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9 November, Atlanta

14 November, London

16 November, Chicago

In this meeting, you will learn to:

- Accurately assess the performance of your client group's culture,
- Recognize where to over- and under-invest to embed the culture and drive behaviors within your client group based on your strategy and values, and
- Identify opportunities to reinvent senior leaders' role in creating and supporting the culture.



In the News

Each quarter, our “In the News” stories highlight trends impacting the HRBP role.

This quarter, we focus on the human element and mind-set of the HRBP role.

In a recent survey, HR professionals were found to be the group of professionals most likely to lose sleep over work. While this is a risk in HR roles, it doesn't have to be a reality if HRBPs are able to apply effective strategies for maintaining a balance at work.

There's also broad discussion about if and how the workforce could lose its human element altogether with the rise of automation and artificial intelligence. HRBPs can take proactive steps now on automation, like they would with any organizational change, to avoid being reactive later.





How to Stop Work from Keeping You Awake at Night

By Katy Connealy Weber

A good night's sleep eludes many of us. In what many scientists call a “sleep epidemic,” the average adult only sleeps 6.6 hours a night,¹ and only 20% say the quality of their sleep is good or excellent.² One major cause of sleep loss? Work—between long hours and stressful projects, our jobs are keeping us awake at night. And these high levels of sleep deprivation create a vicious cycle: a bad night's sleep makes us feel more stressed and less able to get our work done. Stress and heavy workloads keep us awake, and so the cycle continues. This challenge is particularly acute in HR. In a recent survey, 93% of HR professionals said that work keeps them up at night, making them the [most likely group of professionals to lose sleep over work](#).

The Link Between Work Stress and Sleep Deprivation

Approximately 70% of adults experience daily work-related stress or anxiety and, from that group, 7 in 10 have trouble sleeping—that's nearly half of all adults suffering from sleep loss as a result

of stress.³ Recent studies show our work schedules can have a number of harmful effects on our sleep. Although working late was the top reason people cited for losing sleep, longer work hours and commutes also have an impact:

- On average, adults who averaged fewer than seven hours of sleep per night had longer commutes than those who clocked seven or more hours of sleep.⁴
- Employees who used their work phones late at night slept less and experienced lower-quality sleep.⁵

HR Is Uniquely Affected by These Stressors

Of course, these links between work stress and sleep loss are not unique to HR, so why does work keep HR professionals up at night more than other employee groups? For HRBPs, at least, part of the answer lies in some of the unique aspects of the job: conflicting expectations and high emotional demands.

Your Role Pulls You in Many Different Directions

HRBPs have a unique opportunity to support business managers and influence those managers' understanding of talent priorities and challenges. This liaison role between HR and the business, however, often means HRBPs find themselves juggling conflicting obligations. This juggling act limits HRBPs' ability to fulfill their strategic responsibilities, which may harm line managers' perceptions of HRBPs—only one-third of managers agree that they've received clear messaging on the strategic objectives of their paired HRBP. In practice, this could mean that despite your efforts to provide more proactive, strategic support, your line clients only ask for more tactical, reactive help.

This conflict is only made worse by the design of the HRBP role—although most HRBPs want to spend more time on strategic business initiatives, they find themselves struggling to shift away from tactical “firefighting.” These conflicts could be a main reason HRBPs lose sleep, as a recent study found unclear work expectations were the top cause of stress.⁶

Your Role Often Requires You to Provide Emotional Support

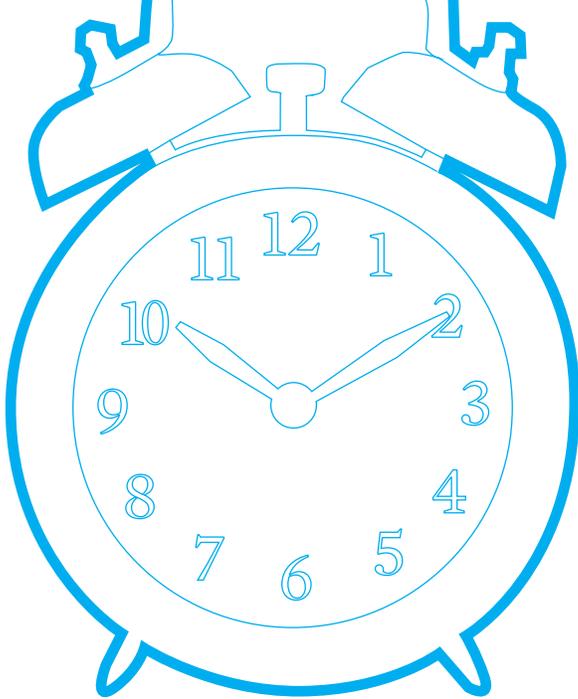
One of the many hats HRBPs are expected to wear is that of a mediator or pseudo-counselor. In addition to the more emotionally taxing responsibilities that are standard parts of the HRBP role (e.g., conducting separation meetings, addressing employee underperformance or misconduct), HRBPs are also often the first line of support when employees struggle with personal issues that impact work.

Does Gender Play a Role?

Research also shows that women are more likely than men to:

- Have trouble falling asleep,
- Struggle to stay asleep, and
- Wake up feeling unrested.

According to our analysis, approximately 78% of HRBPs are women, meaning that, on top of the unique work stressors keeping HRBPs awake, biology makes many HR professionals more prone to sleep deprivation.



When employees have family situations that interfere with work, when they experience discrimination, or when they struggle with medical leave applications, they often turn first to their HRBPs. Even in large organizations, where there are sub-functions within HR that provide this kind of support, many employees go to their HRBPs first, even if only to be pointed in the right direction. The counseling aspect of the role may be a major contributor to stress and burnout, as research places the rate of burnout among mental health professionals anywhere between 21%–67%.⁷

We also know that burnout is high among HRBPs. As we discussed in a [recent HRBP Quarterly article](#), 62% of HRBPs plan to leave their current role within two years, and HRBPs report that burnout is the second leading cause of turnover among their peers.

What You Should Do About It

In the short(est) term, commit to one good night (and then to stringing together a few good nights) of sleep. Often, our day-to-day routine or habits feel like inertia and prevent us from taking action.

However, while one or a few good nights of sleep are absolutely the right first step, sustainable changes to how you process stress won't come (literally) overnight. Wellness, especially emotional wellness, is challenging and takes time to cultivate.

To make sure that the steps you take are sustainable, you can also make longer-term commitments. The same influence that allows you to effect change as an HRBP can allow you to make the changes you need, and potentially benefit your whole client group in the process:

1. Set Clear Boundaries

Make note of the many ad hoc, tactical requests that come across your desk, and discuss them with your manager. Set boundaries about what strategic work you should do, as opposed to what tactical work you should be responsible for. [We discussed this practice](#) with many of you during a recent HRBP Masterclass virtual workshop—whether you have key questions you use to evaluate each project request you get, or simply practice saying “no” more often, you’ll be more effective at the work you do take on. And at home, make a rule about turning your phone off at a certain time each night and for part of the weekend. By allowing yourself these opportunities to recharge, you will likely find you’re actually more productive when you’re back online.

2. Make the Case for Flexibility

Employees with the flexibility to work hours that suit them and their employers get almost an hour’s more sleep, are more likely to seek medical help when sick, and report better overall emotional and physical health. Not only should you fight for these freedoms as your schedule allows, but as an HRBP you are in a position to influence this for the whole organization.

3. Treat Your Wellness as Much a Part of Your Job as Your Projects

Given the proven link between wellness (physical, emotional, and spiritual) and performance at work, your employer has a vested interest in making sure you’re sleeping well. Although your organization’s culture could make you feel like spending time on yourself is lower priority or even discouraged, maintaining performance is a priority shared by all. If, based on your workstyle, you know sleep and maintaining a good work–life balance will help you perform at work, raise it with your manager and have a discussion about what works for you and your team.

With these strategies as a guide, you’ll be well on your way to achieving a balance that will actually work—and catching more z’s in the process.

¹ ADAA, “Stress and Anxiety Interfere with Sleep,” accessed 25 April 2017, <https://www.adaa.org/understanding-anxiety/related-illnesses/other-related-conditions/stress/stress-and-anxiety-interfere>.

² APA, “Stress and Sleep,” <http://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/stress/2013/sleep.aspx?item=2>.

³ ADAA, “Stress and Anxiety Interfere with Sleep.”

⁴ M. Basner, A. M. Spaeth, and D. F. Dinges, “Sociodemographic Characteristics and Waking Activities and their Role in the Timing and Duration of Sleep,” *Sleep* (2014), accessed 25 April 2017, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4548514/>.

⁵ Klodiana Lanaj, “Beginning the Workday Already Depleted? Consequences of Late-Night Smartphone Use and Sleep Quantity,” *Academy of Management Proceedings*, <http://proceedings.aom.org/content/2012/1/1.182.abstract>.

⁶ Alexia Elejalde-Ruiz, “Unclear Expectations the Top Source of Stress Amid Workplace Change,” *Chicago Tribune*, 26 January 2016, <http://www.chicagotribune.com/business/ct-stress-at-work-survey-0127-biz-20160126-story.html>.

⁷ G. Morse, M. P. Salyers, L. A. Rollins, M. Monroe-Devita, and C. Pfahler, “Burnout in Mental Health Services: A Review of the Problem and Its Remediation,” *Administration and Policy in Mental Health and Mental Health Services Research*, 39(5) (2011): 341-352.



How to Navigate Automation as an HRBP

By Nina Moreno

The chatter around automation's anticipated effect on the workforce seems to grow more confusing every day. It's a complex topic, so it isn't surprising that so many unanswered questions arise: Will robots take our jobs? Will certain skills or functions become obsolete? If we do automate jobs, what will be left for HR to manage? What makes this even harder for the HR community is that even experts can't seem to agree on the implications. For example, a recent PwC report found that the United States, in particular, is more at risk than other countries of losing jobs to automation in the next 15 years.¹ In the same month, US Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin said he was unconcerned about automation and insisted that displacement would not be an issue for another 50 to 100 years.²

With all the conflicting information out there, it's difficult for HRBPs to understand what they should know about automation, what answers aren't yet available, and what automation means for them as they support the business.

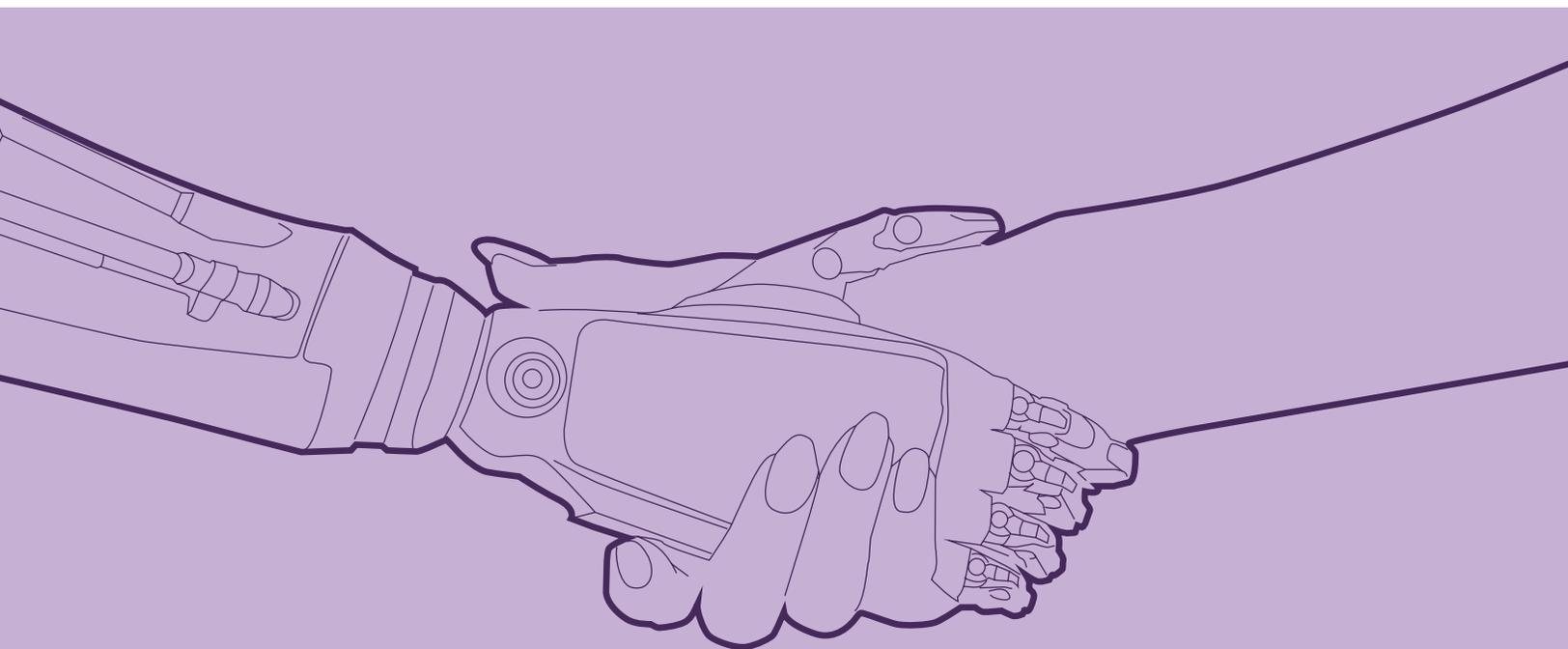
As HRBPs cut through the noise, three key questions emerge:

1. Will automation take the “human” out of Human Resources?
2. What does automation mean for HRBPs?
3. What can HRBPs do to support the business in an automated world?

Will Automation Take the “Human” Out of Human Resources?

The short answer is no. Technology will not be able to fully automate the HR function in the foreseeable future, but automation will influence in many places—and expedite in some places—the HR function's ongoing evolution.

Organizations already automate a number of HR tasks (e.g., employee messaging, benefit and payroll setup, background checks), but automation remains more pronounced with routinized tasks. More personal HR activities, such as recruiting,





new hire orientation, and overall human capital management, are being automated much more slowly. And many aspects of HR will most likely never be handled solely through technology.

What won't change? Organizations will continue to face sensitive employee issues and other topics that require nuanced judgment, such as conducting terminations, dealing with discrimination, managing employee performance, and overseeing change, all of which will be difficult to truly automate and will continue to require HRBP support.

This makes sense when you consider the complex nature of certain HR activities. For example, machines couldn't well replicate how a recruiter assesses a candidate's fit within an organization's culture, because machines aren't able to quantify and process such abstract concepts as culture. Similarly, candidates would struggle to gauge an organization's culture through an automated recruiting experience. Even if we reach a point where machines can accomplish such abstract tasks, organizations will still find that some uses of automation are unnecessary and, in the end, may be counterproductive.

Fundamentally, automation is a movement toward efficiency, productivity, and most importantly, simplicity; it isn't the automatic death knell that it's often depicted to be. Yes, certain HR processes and roles will become automated, but this only creates greater opportunity for HR professionals to gain more time back and achieve a greater impact in the process.

What Does Automation Mean for HRBPs?

The HRBP role will evolve, just as it always has, and automation should be considered an influencer of that evolution. At this point, fighting against automation isn't the best use of time. Instead, HRBPs should focus on working in conjunction with automation to create greater value for the organization.

If anything, automation will help HRBPs be more effective in their roles, rather than replace them altogether. As automation becomes more prevalent, HRBPs will be able to:

- Focus on more strategic work, and
- Build stronger relationships with more senior line clients.

Focus on More Strategic Work

HRBPs want to be, and should be, strategic partners who act as the gateway between HR leaders and the front line. However, they are often bogged down by administrative tasks that divert time and energy from more strategic work. With automation, you'll be more empowered (and able) to diagnose what work is worth your time—and what isn't—in your day-to-day responsibilities.

Build Stronger Relationships with More Senior Line Clients

The average HRBP supports just over 200 employees, and that support responsibility can vary significantly depending on particular client groups' needs. A significant majority of the employees HRBPs support are individual contributors or more junior staff. However, these are the positions most likely to be eliminated by automation. As the number of individual contributors declines, HRBPs will be able to dedicate more time to supporting senior line clients directly, increasing HRBPs' ability to influence change.

What Can HRBPs Do to Support the Business in an Automated World?

The shift toward automation is, in large part, a complex change management problem for HRBPs and their HR functions. As an HRBP, keep three principles in mind as you help your client group (and your HR colleagues) through their own transitions toward more automation:

1. Anticipate How Automation Will Affect Your Business Unit and the Entire Organization

Interdepartmental communication can be a major challenge in large organizations, and as a result, leaders sometimes recognize key barriers to automation and opportunities for automation too late or not at all. HRBPs, in conversations with both their line partners and peer HRBPs, are in a unique position to collect feedback on the impact automation may have on different internal processes and workforce segments.

2. Facilitate Employee Input into Decisions on What to Automate

Traditionally, leaders set change strategy and then solicit employee feedback after a decision to automate has been made, which is often too late. By helping leaders engage with employees early to cocreate change decisions, HRBPs can mitigate employee anger and anxiety about the impact automation may have on their roles. When employees are involved in identifying opportunities for automation, they also are more likely to perceive automation as a tool working with them, not against them.

3. Talk Openly About Automation

Automation invites a lot of assumptions from all employees, HRBPs included. Our research finds that authentic communication is the most productive way to increase employees' comfort with and support for a change. Changes brought on by automation are no different. As an HRBP, you can take key steps with certain internal groups to help foster productive communication:

- **Internal Communications**

Partner with your Internal Communications function to cut through, not add to, discussion about automation, and enable peer-to-peer communication on the topic. Instead of using central communication to continually highlight automation's positive potential, ensure your communications help reduce the frequency of change communications and refocus your employee sharing platform on how to succeed during change.

- **Line Leaders**

HRBPs must help leaders align their messages with how employees truly perceive recent and potential future change. Convince leaders to admit where employee uncertainty exists,

and achieve a balance between that realistic message and overly positive traditional messages about the potential of automation.

- **Line Managers**

HRBPs can increase manager confidence in dealing with employee reactions through authentic conversations. Continuously reinforcing a scripted response to employee concerns on automation is counterproductive. Managers should prioritize honest dialogue that tackles employee concerns head-on.

- **Employees**

Start conversations with employees about their fears and anxieties, rather than glossing over them. This will give employees a sense of ownership and autonomy over the implications of automation on their work processes. Give employees questions to help them identify small adjustments they can make to prepare for potential automation change.

Next Steps

Automation is here to stay, but the jury's still out on how automation will change our day-to-day work experiences. Without clarity on automation's impact, many HRBPs may feel limited in their ability to advise line partners on the topic. However, you can't afford to wait—and you already have more information on automation than you think. To get started, cut through the noise and rely on your existing change management expertise to guide you effectively through the very human reactions to automation.

¹ Richard Berriman and John Hawksworth, "Will Robots Steal Our Jobs? The Potential Impact of Automation on the UK and Other Major Economies," UK Economic Outlook, March 2017, <http://www.pwc.co.uk/economic-services/ukeo/pwcukeyo-section-4-automation-march-2017-v2.pdf>.

² Shannon Vavra, "Mnuchin: Losing Human Jobs to AI 'Not Even on Our Radar Screen,'" Axios, 24 March 2017, <https://www.axios.com/treasury-secretary-mnuchin-interviews-with-axios-live-updates-2327865447.html>.

How to Personalize the “Digital” Employee Experience

By Bethany Horstmann

Take even a cursory glance through the business press today, and you will inevitably stumble on reports of formerly great organizations that are struggling to keep up with changing customer demands. With trends, reports, and alarmist headlines about the upcoming (and ongoing) disruption caused by the digitalization of the marketplace, it can be challenging to know what it means for HR and what you can do to keep up.

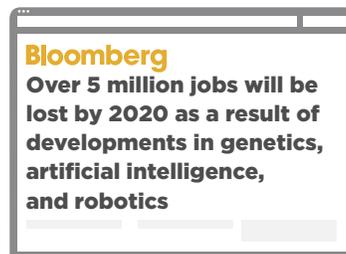
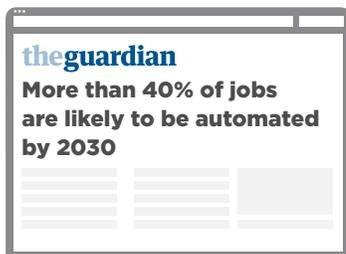


Image source: CEB analysis; Bloomberg, "Rise of the Robots Will Eliminate More Than 5 Million Jobs," January 2016, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2016-01-18/rise-of-the-robots-will-eliminate-more-than-5-million-jobs>; Andrew McAfee and Erik Brynjolfsson, "Human Work in the Robotic Future," *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2016, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2016-06-13/human-work-robotic-future>; Charlotte Seager, "After the Robot Revolution, What Will Be Left for Our Children To Do?" *The Guardian*, 11 May 2016; <https://www.theguardian.com/careers/2016/may/11/robot-jobs-automated-work>.

What Is Digitalization, and Why Is It Important?

Ask a room of 20 executives to define “digitalization,” and you are likely to get 20 different answers. This inconsistency reflects the volatility, speed, and unpredictability of the current global business climate. These uncertainties make it very challenging to strategize for digitalization; of the over 500 senior executives we surveyed, only 27% have a cohesive digitalization strategy across the enterprise.

However, don’t mistake a lack of strategy for a lack of concern. Nearly 9 in 10 business leaders report that digitalization is not only a long-term trend (rather than a fad), but it is also a priority for their company. Moreover, two-thirds of business leaders believe that their companies must pick up the pace of digitalization to remain competitive, and its impact is now a board-level conversation.

To understand the importance of digitalization, consider its sweeping implications on:

- The products organizations can and are expected to offer,
- The way organizations connect with customers and distribute products to them, and
- The way employees get work done within our organizations.

Understanding the Impact of Digitalization

Digitalization isn't out of your control as an HRBP. There are six critical digitalization shifts that HRBPs and their HR functions should be prepared to respond to.

To help HRBPs understand how these six critical shifts will affect the workforce and their role, we will examine the talent implications of each trend over the next several *HRBP Quarterly* editions. This quarter, we focus on the first trend: **Demand Grows More Personal.**

Demand Grows More Personal: How Can HR Create a More Personalized Employee Experience?

With the rise of digitalization, customers increasingly expect services that align with their personal preferences and values as individuals, rather than as a general segment. For organizations, this expectation applies not only to their external customers but also to employees. This means HRBPs should be asking themselves

Six Critical Digitalization Shifts



1. Demand Grows More Personal

- Customers seek services that align with their preferences and values as individuals (not segments).
- Customers demand lower-effort, non-intrusive service.



3. Data Reliance Deepens

- Customers rely on data, especially from peers, for purchase decisions.
- Managers and employees use data for virtually every business decision.
- Overabundance and uncertain veracity of data make it harder to reach decisions quickly.



5. Internal and External Boundaries Blur

- Companies collaborate through open models.
- Functional boundaries and hierarchies give way to fast-changing matrices.
- Employees pursue flexible roles, employment models, and career paths.



2. Products Become Information-Rich Services

- Value creation shifts toward information-rich services.
- Companies facilitate or broker services through an interface.



4. Work Adapts to Broader Role for Machines

- Automation and machine learning move into more complex, less structured activities.
- Employees must demonstrate greater judgment, creativity, flexibility, and collaboration.



6. Everything Accelerates (Except Large Companies)

- New capital-light competitors scale rapidly.
- Demand changes at a faster rate.
- Size, complexity, and regulation slow incumbent responses.

Source: CEB analysis.

different questions about what it means to serve employees in a digital world and how they are treating and identifying talent.

Five Key Talent Implications for HRBPs

- 1. Once employees' basic needs (e.g., fair compensation, satisfactory work-life balance) are met, further improvements to the employment experience yield smaller returns at much greater costs.** Organizations must balance this tension between the interest in personalization and the cost of delivering it while still delivering value to employees. Organizations should identify which points of the employee lifecycle will generate the greatest return from high-touch personalization (e.g., in the final stages of recruitment, career mapping) and those that won't (e.g., onboarding).
- 2. Retaining critical talent requires differentiated, customized employment branding and career coaching.** All employees demand a more effortless, personalized employment experience but still value human interaction and one-on-one feedback. HRBPs can be particularly instrumental in employee coaching. For example, [Metro](#) created in-role career progression opportunities for select high-potential employees (HIPOs) by delegating responsibilities from a manager to the HIPOs on the manager's team(s). This allowed HIPOs to increase their responsibility and impact without changing roles; their role was personalized to their own development needs.
- 3. To address the top global attrition driver of career dissatisfaction, organizations must capture, understand, and link employee career aspirations with business needs** through always-on resources, both digital (e.g., career portals, websites, and resource centers) and in-person (e.g., managers and coaches).
- 4. Personalization will require equipping employees with more guidance and control to make decisions that satisfy customer needs.** Work with your L&D teams to make sure training materials are up to date and equipped to address this development need, and work with line leaders and managers to ensure employees have the autonomy they need to offer adequately personalized service to their customers.

- 5. All employees will have to know their customer better.** Similarly, you have to know all your employees (and potential employees) better. If you understand what employees want from their roles and from an organization, even through something as simple as more personalized career conversations between an employee and manager, you can better advise them on career moves and promotion opportunities.

Key Questions HRBPs Should Ask Themselves

To determine where to personalize, consider the following:

- Is our total rewards strategy shaped by employee needs? Do we have an ability to understand their needs?
- Where and how do we invest in individualized talent processes or include more flexibility and choice in them?
- Should we start with personalization for leaders or for employees at large?
- What touchpoints in the employee life cycle benefit most from personalization?
- Are we offering learning and development opportunities employees can apply to their unique career paths?

Digitalization is already affecting the workforce, but most HRBPs hesitate to identify how and what it will mean for them and their organizations. HRBPs can become strategic partners to the business by helping understand when and how in the employee life cycle personalization makes sense, for both the employee and business. "Demand Grows More Personal" is just one of the six key shifts that we have identified. For most HRBPs, these shifts present the opportunity to upskill and improve their understanding of how their roles contribute to successfully navigating the transition to a more digital future.

Cultivate and Grow Exceptional Talent

A Conversation with former Google SVP of People Laszlo Bock

By Andrew Karr

In a recent edition of the [CEB Talent Angle podcast](#), we spoke with Laszlo Bock about what to look for in your search for the best talent and how to get the most out of your people once you have them.

Laszlo Bock suggests that organizations keep five principles in mind to find, retain, and develop the best talent.

1. Find capable, not just accomplished, people.

Bock explains that too many organizations focus on what people have done, instead of what they are capable of. [Our own research](#) on identifying high-potential employees shows that the key indicators of a future leader aren't just performance, or ability, but also aspiration and engagement. Although it is also important to consider and reward past accomplishments, focusing on what someone is going to accomplish and how to enable them to accomplish it will make for better hiring and advancement decisions.

Bock says:

As an HRBP, a recruiter, or hiring manager, ask questions like, “Give me an example of a hard problem you solved. Why did you do that? What happened then? How did you approach it? What if this thing were different?” It turns out that those kinds of questions are far more predictive of how someone will perform [than questions about past performance].

Laszlo Bock's advice on how to assess capability: Ask yourself—

- How good is he or she at leveraging the internal network?
- Is he or she willing to work with and for someone?
- How good is he or she at solving problems?
- Will he or she be conscientious?

2. People are their own best career advocates.

At the end of the day, an employee cares more about his or her career than anyone else does. Even when an organization makes every effort to invest in its employees, it is the employee that determines how much he or she benefits from development opportunities. Bock highlights that employees should be encouraged to make their own path, learning and growing by connecting with, learning from, and observing others in their work.

3. Organizations still have an obligation, however, to empower and enable employees' career growth and learning.

In addition to empowering employees to further their own career goals, employers have an obligation to invest smartly in those careers. Bock recommends that organizations create a place where people have more freedom, where there is a high degree of respect, where people are nurtured, and where they are armed with plentiful opportunities (and resources) to learn and grow. This does not need to be a costly endeavor. He suggests that simply giving people the freedom to generate their own opportunities leads to better outcomes, for both the individual and organization, than relying just on traditional learning and development (L&D) programs.

At Google, for example, 70% of all internal training was actually delivered by employees who volunteered to deliver that training. When employees volunteer to deliver a training session, they are given access to in-house instructional designers who help them design and execute that training, but the content is theirs.

Bock adds:

All of these [L&D] programs serve a critical secondary purpose: connecting people across the company. That's one of the ways you solve the problem of scaling (how to get bigger [as a company] and still feel small).

4. Engaging managers is key.

Bock believes the most effective managers follow the "Golden Rule": treat employees the way you would want to be treated by your manager. Most people want some coaching and help, some political support, and the freedom to get the job done. Employees can also ask themselves what they would want from their own direct reports, which could raise things like work quality, consistent on-time delivery, and a good work environment.

HRBP Guide: Deliver on Career Management Initiatives

HRBPs play a foundational role in designing and supporting career paths and experiences that allow employees to grow in their roles, horizontally, and vertically.

Train Your Line Partners: Prepare Managers and Employees to Have Productive Career Conversations

Use our collection of [Career Conversation Guides](#) to equip managers and employees to handle different types of career conversations.

This type of environment doesn't happen on its own, though. If organizations, employees, and managers want a high freedom environment where happy employees deliver high discretionary effort, they need to actively fight for it. HR should partner with managers in hiring, promotion, and pay decisions to ensure talent management decisions reward and support the values critical to engaging and developing employees.

5. Motivate by connecting work with a mission.

Bock believes that organizations should focus on what people want. Recent data suggests that people want to connect their work to a mission, feel like their organization is transparent, and know that they have a voice in how the organization is run. With this in mind, HR has an opportunity to tap into existing data, such as engagement surveys, employee social media activity, focus groups, and more, to identify the values that mean the most to their employees. Once they know, those organizations have a tremendous opportunity to tap into making day-to-day work better for each employee.

The CEB Talent Angle is hosted by Principal Executive Advisor Scott Engler and produced by Isaac Liu, Hannah Muldavin, and Andrew Karr. For more information on making work better for employees, [listen to the full podcast episode](#) on [CEB Talent Angle](#), also available on [gartner.com/ceb](#) and [iTunes](#).

What's Your HR Partnership Style?

By Meg Zolner

We all have different strengths or styles at work—and how we partner with line clients is no different. [Take our quiz](#) to learn about your own style, the strengths and weaknesses associated with it, and how to adapt so you are even more effective.

Did You Know?

HRBPs employ five partnership styles when working with line clients:



Leading with Data—Identifying problems, communicating ideas, building solutions, and evaluating progress using business-relevant data



Thought Partnering—Brainstorming solutions with line clients and developing strategies that influence their decisions



Connecting—Collaborating with others throughout the organization to collect information, address problems, and share ideas

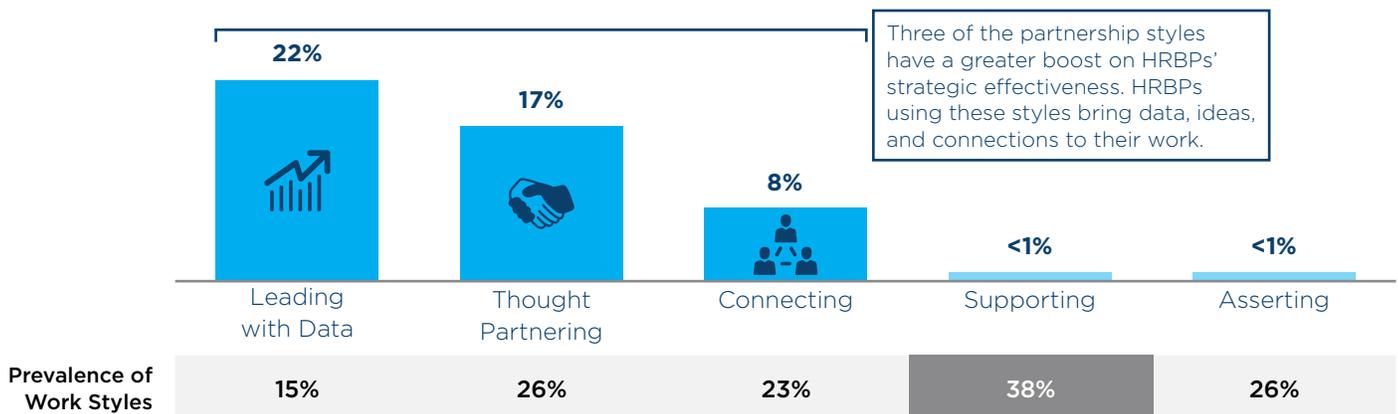


Supporting—Prioritizing responding immediately to leader and employee needs



Asserting—Questioning line assumptions and ideas, and pushing line leaders to independently solve talent issues

Maximum Impact of Partnership Styles on HRBP Strategic Effectiveness



Today, the most prevalent partnership style is “supporting,” used by almost 4 in 10 HRBPs as their dominant style. HRBPs rarely rely on one style—and often flex styles based on the line leaders with whom they work—but those relying primarily on the supporting style should identify development opportunities that build their confidence in the three most effective styles.

n = 1,536.

Source: CEB 2013 HR Business Partner Survey.

Note: HRBP strategic effectiveness represents the mean rating by line leaders of HRBPs across strategic activities.

Spotlight: Take Our HR Partnership Style Quiz

What's Your Primary Style? Take the full “What's Your HR Partnership Style?” Quiz online today.

Excerpted Quiz Questions

Q: Today's work environment looks a lot different than it did just three years ago. I'm focused most on responding to the following new trends:

- Proliferation of talent data
- Increasing interdependence of work
- Increasing workload and expectations
- Larger, more complex matrix of key stakeholders
- Differing perceptions of HR's role

Q: The annual report states that growth is key next year. To better understand the implications of growth for me, I:

- Consult several articles on how HR can support growth and rethink the existing strategic plan.
- Set a meeting with my line leader to rethink workforce planning and succession models, considering how growth will affect HR head count and budgeting.
- Set a meeting with my line leader to learn what growth means for the business unit.
- Write a brief report about the importance of talent to the success of growth initiatives, and share it with my line leader.
- Meet with my Total Rewards, Recruiting, and Learning counterparts—before meeting with my line leader—to think through how HR can support growth.

Q: If I weren't an HRBP, I'd be:

- An analyst
- A store manager
- A professor
- A columnist
- A local government leader

Make Your Style More Effective

- Learn more about common partnership styles, and gain strategies to flex how you approach your internal partnerships with our [Influencing Through Insight research brief](#).
- Spend 15 minutes completing the [HRBP Career Diagnostic](#), and identify the right on-the-job development opportunities for you, based on what's most important to your current role.
- Register for an [upcoming HRBP Masterclass virtual workshop](#) to get your peers' perspectives on refining your partnership style for key parts of your job.



Voice Within the HRBP Community



Kristi Newton
HRBP Manager in PNC's Real Estate Division

The PNC Financial Services Group, Inc. is a Pittsburgh-based financial services organization with \$366 billion in assets and \$257 billion in deposits as of 31 December, 2016. We spoke with Kristi Newton, HRBP Manager in PNC's real estate division.



Tell us a little bit about your career and your background in the HRBP role.

Similar to other HRBPs, I spent a number of years as an agency recruiter before accepting a position as an HR Generalist, specifically with PricewaterhouseCoopers. The transition from being an external recruiter consulting with a business to an internal HR resource was not easy for me. I struggled with how to balance the priorities of and my relationships with HR and the business. Ultimately, this challenge led me back to recruiting, this time as a corporate recruiter with PNC. Because of my HR generalist experience, however, my manager approached me after just ten months about an HRBP position. While I was initially hesitant to explore the opportunity, I decided to take a risk and am grateful that it has gotten me to where I am today.

At the beginning of my HRBP career at PNC, I supported a Consumer and Commercial Lending Operations unit, where I had the opportunity to be a thought leadership partner to the business as it underwent several large scale transformations. I then transitioned to supporting our Consumer Lending, Product and Pricing, and Analytics and Portfolio Management teams. This experience honed my skills for leveraging metrics and data to enable key business decisions. It also allowed me to see the full consumer loan life cycle, from inception to delivery to servicing.

Always eager to learn more, both as an HRBP and as a financial service professional, I recently accepted a position as an HRBP Manager supporting PNC's Commercial Real Estate business. In this new role, I, with support from two very talented colleagues, lead the HR priorities and direction for the business.

How do most people become HRBPs at PNC?

At PNC, a variety of different career paths can lead to the HRBP role. Most often, candidates come to the position from one of our HR centers of excellence (COEs), such as Talent Acquisition and Compensation. Typically, our recruiters have developed skills in influencing others, gaining business acumen, and change management, competencies that are highly valuable as an HR generalist. Compensation also provides experience with these competencies and offers a great foundation in compensation practices and philosophies, a highly leveraged skill set for most businesses. HRBPs also come from outside the HR function. While these HRBPs may have much to learn about the HR function, they are able to leverage their deep knowledge of the business to drive results.

I also want to say that there is a myth that the HRBP position is the "ultimate" HR destination. I think we need to debunk that myth, as our goal should be fluid talent movement between all HR roles, including the HRBP and COE functions. Often, COE partners move into the HRBP role but are reluctant to hire HRBPs because of a perceived lack of deep expertise in a given area. However, it is important to recognize the holistic knowledge and diversity of thought that HRBPs can bring to a position.

What do you think makes a good HRBP?

Regardless of how you get to the HRBP role, you quickly determine the need to see the work through both an HR and business perspective. It's important to understand the HR priorities but also have deep knowledge of the business. A good HRBP determines

how to translate the HR agenda to the business so that it fully aligns to the business priorities. Often, HRBPs will fall somewhere on the continuum, aligning more with the HR function or identifying more with the business. Successful HRBPs find themselves somewhere in the middle.

How have you seen the HRBP role evolve, and where do you see it going in the future?

Historically, the HRBP role has been very tactical in nature. Over the past several years, however, I have seen the position evolve into a more strategic business partner role. More and more companies are recognizing the value of HRBPs to help grow the business and are moving them into a more strategic role. This evolution is a positive one for both the HR organization and the business, but with it comes new challenges. As an example, the tactical work, doesn't go away. COEs have picked up a lot of the tactical work but often much of it remains with the HRBP. This continues to get better and is a great example of why strong partnerships with COEs are so important. The fact that companies are beginning to leverage the strategic capabilities of their HRBP talent is exciting, and I look forward to seeing where the position evolves in the next few years.

You're Invited!

HRBP Masterclass Series: Talent Analytics 101

Join our upcoming HRBP Masterclass series on talent analytics, and learn directly from your peers.

Session 1 >

Understanding an HRBP's Role in Talent Analytics

1 August, 11 a.m.-Noon ET

Session 2 >

Shaping Data: Asking the Right Questions About Talent

22 August, 11 a.m.-Noon ET

Session 3 >

Demystifying Data: Spotting Trends and Building Data Skills

12 September, 11 a.m.-Noon ET

Session 4 >

Telling a Story with Data

26 September, 11 a.m.-Noon ET

This interactive, virtual Masterclass series will help HRBPs identify their role in talent analytics and find practical opportunities to improve their skills and confidence using data at work.

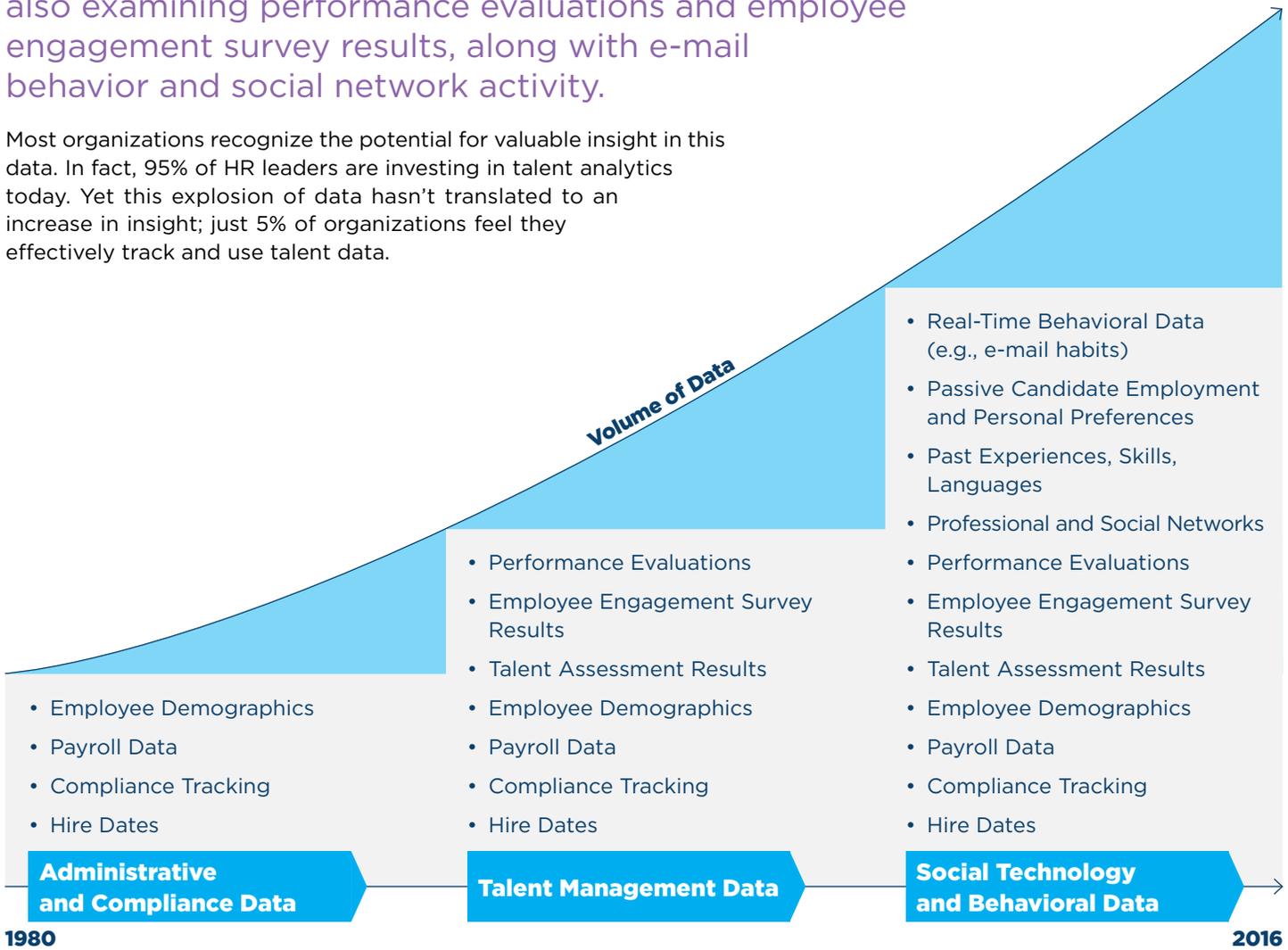
Four sessions will focus on building HRBP confidence and understanding of data, asking the right questions about talent, gathering and interpreting data, and telling a story with data.

Your Talent Analytics Team Needs HRBPs Too

By Caitlin Dutkiewicz

Over the past 20 years, talent data has exploded. No longer are HR staff simply considering payroll information and employee demographics in their day to day; they're now also examining performance evaluations and employee engagement survey results, along with e-mail behavior and social network activity.

Most organizations recognize the potential for valuable insight in this data. In fact, 95% of HR leaders are investing in talent analytics today. Yet this explosion of data hasn't translated to an increase in insight; just 5% of organizations feel they effectively track and use talent data.



Source: CEB analysis.



Source: CEB analysis.

HRBPs are the primary link between the talent analytics team and business leaders, and they are critical in closing this effectiveness gap. Their role goes far beyond just being an intermediary.

To drive effective and actionable talent analytics, HRBPs need to contribute their unique knowledge of and perspective on the business during each of the three stages of the talent analytics project life cycle: project scoping, data analysis, and communication of findings.

An HRBP's Role in Scoping

As an HRBP, you support line leaders on all things HR, liaising or sharing your own expertise when it comes to HR policy, performance management, and onboarding, to name a few. Talent analytics should be no exception. Understand where your line partner would benefit from additional information and work with the talent analytics team to see if they can provide meaningful, relevant analysis.

During the scoping process, line partners typically need support in three places.

1. Project Identification: Identify opportunities for your business leader to engage with talent analytics.

Clues You Should Be Using Talent Analytics

- Your business leader is making a talent decision based solely on experience or intuition.
- Your business leader is facing a talent challenge and needs more information.

2. Context and Hypothesis Generation: Provide the talent analytics team with as much context as possible about the talent challenge at hand, prompt your line partner to reflect on what they're really asking for, and go to the talent analytics team prepared to offer your hypotheses on the issue and its root causes.

Sample Questions to Discuss With Your Line Partner

- What is the question you are trying to answer? Why does it matter?
- What are your current business objectives, and how does answering this question tie to those?
- Who are the key stakeholders/actors for this analysis? How does it fit into their priorities?

Understand the Core Business Issue

Your line partner likely will not know what talent data and information are available to them. They may ask for a specific piece of information that is unattainable, given your organization's data systems. If you understand the core business issue driving the request, you'll be better positioned to work with the talent analytics team to satisfy the line's true need.

How might their work be affected by the results?

- What do you think the data will show? What does the talent analytics team need to show you to prove your assumptions wrong?

3. Change Management: Engage your line partner in conversations about applying the analysis from the get-go. By taking the time up front to consider the management implications of a request, you'll orient your leader towards action, decreasing any chance the analysis has of sitting on the shelf once complete.

Sample Questions to Discuss With Your Line Partner

- What will you do differently if the talent analytics team confirms or disproves your hypotheses?
- What changes might the analysis prompt, and how can you start planning for them?

An HRBP's Role in Analysis

While analysis may seem to sit squarely in the talent analytics team's domain, don't be a stranger during this phase. Analysis is iterative, and the talent analytics team needs your input to ensure their models include the right variables and that the business challenge stays central to the analysis. Plus, if you understand where the talent data comes from and how the talent analytics team has conducted the analysis, you'll be better equipped to interpret and communicate their work.

My Business Leader Is Primarily...	Presentation Tips	
Results-Oriented	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be efficient. • Answer what. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support their conclusions and actions. • Give options and probabilities for decisions.
Analytical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be accurate. • Answer how. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support their principles and thinking. • Give them evidence for decisions.
Relationship-Oriented	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be agreeable. • Answer why. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support their relationships and feelings. • Give guarantees and assurances for decisions.
Expressive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be stimulating. • Answer who. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support their dreams and ambitions. • Give them incentives for decisions.

Source: CEB analysis.

Things You Can Do During Analysis

- Schedule Ongoing Pulse Checks: Stay in conversation with the analytics team as they build their models and begin uncovering findings.
- Develop Recommendations: Don't let the analysis become only about numbers. Partner with the talent analytics team to land on key recommendations. Be sure to consider HR procedure, management, and policy implications.

- What's our plan for tracking the success of this change?

Conclusion

The talent analytics team can't do its work alone. Get involved in the talent analytics work that's happening at your organization. Your perspective is needed and invaluable—not to mention, talent analytics expertise is sure to boost your strategic profile as an HRBP.

An HRBP's Role in Communication

You know your leader best—how they communicate, how they get work done, and what's on their plate. Use that unique perspective to discuss the results with your line partner; frame your recommendations in the way that will resonate most and lead to change.

Things You Can Do to Better Communicate

Analysis Delivery: Use your knowledge of your business leader's preferred communication style to tailor your results presentation to your audience.

Action Planning Discussion: Ensure follow-through on the recommendations. Create a clear plan for action. Sustain the momentum of the project and start implementing changes as soon as you can.

Questions to Discuss with Your Business Leader

- What should our timeline be for these changes?
- Who do we need to involve to successfully action this change?
- How will we pitch this change to relevant stakeholders?

Focused on Building Your Talent Analytics Capabilities and Confidence?

Join our upcoming HRBP Masterclass, [Talent Analytics 101](#), to discuss talent analytics with thousands of your peers and clarify your own development plan. The sessions will cover:

- [Session 1: Understanding an HRBP's Role in Talent Analytics](#)
August 1, 11:00 a.m.–Noon ET
- [Session 2: Shaping Data: Asking the Right Questions About Talent](#)
August 22, 11:00 a.m.–Noon ET
- [Session 3: Demystifying Data: Spotting Trends and Building Data Skills](#)
September 12, 11:00 a.m.–Noon ET
- [Session 4: Telling a Story with Data](#)
September 26, 11:00 a.m.–Noon ET

CEB HR Analytics Leadership Academy



Develop your skills to move from talent reporting to talent analytics.

7 in 10 executives believe that data will be critical to making workforce-related business decisions.

Learn how CEB HR Analytics Leadership Academy can build your ability as an HRBP to provide actionable insights based on data that improve business decisions.

Learn More

ceburl.com/1sxx

 **CEB**
is now Gartner.

Striking the Balance Between HR and the Business: Boost Your Business Knowledge

By Susannah Schools

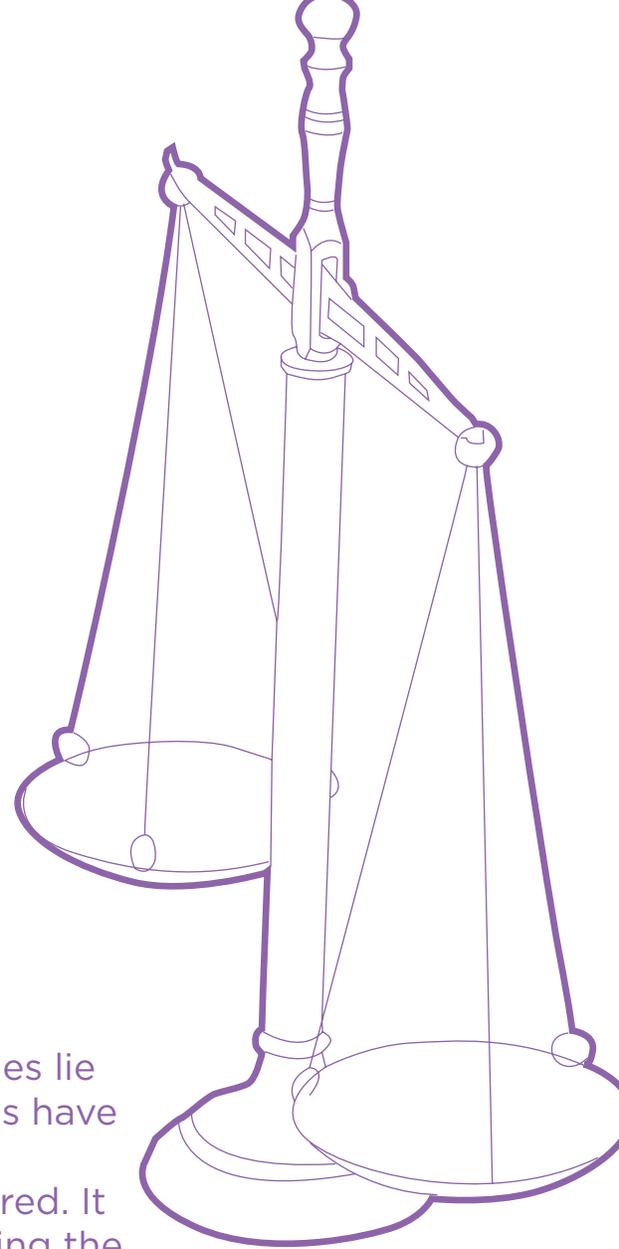
As the HRBP job title suggests, your responsibilities lie in knowing both HR and the business. Most HRBPs have grown up within HR functions, so you have the HR portion of the HR Business Partner role mastered. It can be daunting, though, to build a plan for growing the business portion of your role, as it's where HR historically spends less time.

Business Acumen

Insight into the organization's business model, operations, competitive position, and strategy

However, our research shows it's worth balancing your role across the two spheres. Many HRBPs say improving their business knowledge boosts their credibility and influence with line partners. It helps them deliver more business-aligned (and ultimately more effective) talent solutions to the line, and with more effective solutions comes greater access to their line partners. In fact, our research finds that strong business acumen is key to HRBP effectiveness, and HRBPs themselves cite business acumen as the top skill they're focused on developing in 2017.

Whether you're new to your role or the most tenured, experienced member of your team, gaining business knowledge should be at the top of your to-do list.



Business Knowledge Has Three Components

As you look to grow your business knowledge, be sure you're improving your understanding in three areas:

- Business Unit Priorities—Strategic goals that are crucial to the overall success of a particular segment of the organization

Key questions you should be able to answer:

- What is the business unit's competitive advantage (or disadvantage) compared with its competitors?
- What are its key goals for the next two to five years, and what are the major obstacles to achieving them?
- What critical skills does this business unit need to succeed?

- Organizational Priorities—Strategic goals that are crucial to the overall company success

Key questions you should be able to answer:

- How can I as the HRBP contribute to advancing the key strategies of the organization or meeting the key challenges this business faces?
- Who are our organization's primary customer segments, and what benefits does our organization provide to each of them?

- Environmental Pressures—Conditions of the external business environment that could influence the organization's development or success

Key questions you should be able to answer:

- What are the financial implications if the industry and marketplace trends continue, or if the situation changes?
- What geopolitical events affect our organization?

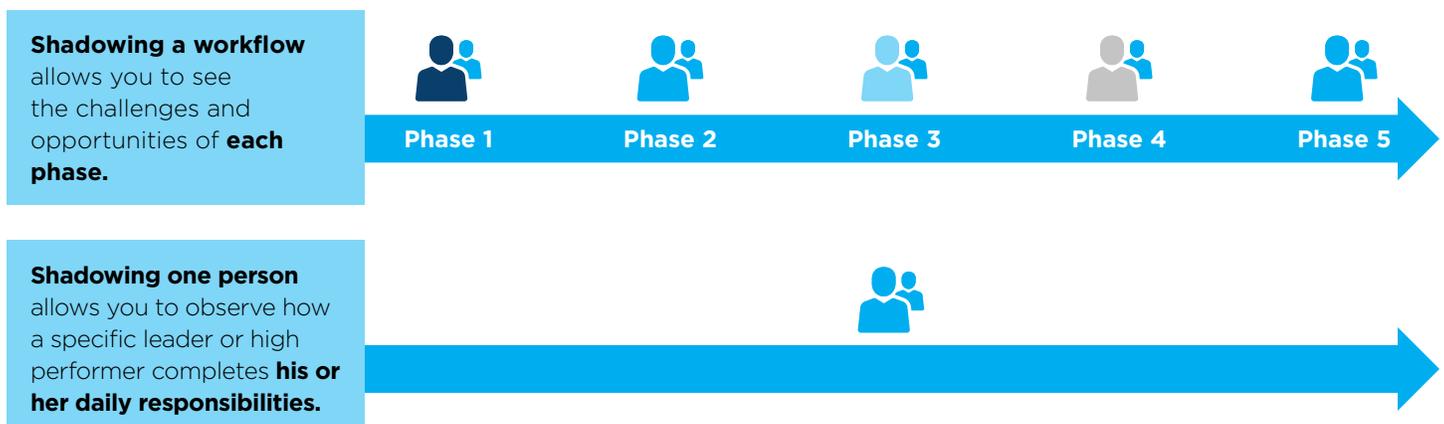
Start with These Four Strategies

Prioritize four strategies as you grow your business knowledge:

1. Shadow a key business leader or workflow, and analyze your experience.

Shadowing experiences—both of individuals and of challenging or complex workflows—give HRBPs perspective on how business processes and challenges develop. To get the most out of these experiences, shadow an individual whose work you find difficult to understand, or follow a workflow that is essential to a key business goal. Establish specific objectives for your shadowing experience to maximize its benefits, such as using the experience to collaborate more on an upcoming project.

Main Types of Shadowing Experiences



Source: CEB analysis.

Sample Internal and External Sources of Business Information

Internal Sources

- Organization's Annual Report
- Business Unit's Budget
- Press Releases
- Employee Survey Results
- Focus Group Recommendations
- Management
- Fellow HR Colleagues
- HR Information System (HRIS) Reports

External Sources

- Local Government
- State Government
- Employer Federations
- Labor Bureaus
- Professional Organizations
- HR Benchmarking Institutes

Source: CEB analysis.

2. Review internal and external literature, and present trends back to your HR peers.

Productive sources of information that will help you build your business knowledge already surround you. When you review each of these sources of information, keep key questions or hypotheses in mind about what you could learn from that source about business priorities. For example:

- When consulting your business unit's budget, consider—
 - What are the line items that are receiving the most and least investment?
 - What does that suggest about where I should prioritize my support?

- When consulting senior and mid-level managers, consider—
 - What are business leaders frustrated about or excited by?
 - What's the general outlook senior leaders have about business goals?
- When consulting local and state governments, consider—
 - Where could proposed changes to immigration laws strain my business unit's ability to attract and retain diverse talent?

Presenting your findings back to your fellow HRBPs or your manager is always recommended. Your colleagues will benefit from this new information, and teaching will help your retention of new discoveries.

3. Review financial statements and earnings calls, and debrief after with your line stakeholders.

Financial statements and earnings calls are excellent windows into your organization's priorities and potential external pressures. Try to listen to the live calls when possible, and pay special attention to investors' questions. Do the investors sound optimistic? Were they critical or supportive of any recent business decisions? Reach out to your line leader to see if he or she would be willing to spend 30 minutes helping you identify key changes quarter-over-quarter or year-over-year, or pinpoint the successes and failures of a past strategic plan. Spend time beforehand thinking about exactly what you do and don't understand. Complete financial and business acumen won't develop overnight, and that's okay; by engaging your line client and asking smart questions, you will send a signal that you want to be a full partner on true business priorities.

4. Analyze a past strategic plan, and identify successes, misses, and opportunities.

Reviewing previous business planning documents can help you understand some of the business outcomes from those plans. You can use that knowledge to inform your analysis of the plan. Then, with practice, you'll be more prepared to do the same with current, forward-looking strategic plans. Those strategic plans or other business planning documents come in different formats and include different information, but they typically include the following:

- A statement of the strategy—What one sentence summarizes the key objectives of your business unit's three- to five-year strategic plan?

- Key metrics—What five to seven metrics for your business unit demonstrate progress on your strategic plan?
- Key initiatives—What five to seven key initiatives are required to achieve the main objective(s) of the strategic plan?
- Top beliefs, assumptions, and triggers—Are there any external events that, if they occurred, would warrant a change to the strategy? Are we making any assumptions about how the organization will help us achieve our objectives?
- **They Occur Frequently**—These should not be “one-off” activities. Join multiple meetings or shadow multiple stages of an ongoing process. Seeking out opportunities that are frequent and recurring can help sustain your learning and ensure your knowledge is up-to-date.

Conclusion

Whether you pursue these four strategies, others, or a combination, it’s important that growing your business knowledge is on your to-do list. HR professionals once may have pursued an “HR first, business second” mind-set, but the recent evolution of the HRBP role has flipped that on its head. If you approach your role thinking of the business first, and the HR and talent implications second—or, put another way, the business as your “major” and HR as your “minor”—you’ll find yourself ahead of the curve.

With these questions in mind, you’ll know what to look for as you analyze whatever business planning document your client group uses. As a final step, present your analysis to a senior line leader and check how well your analysis matches their perspective on the same plan.

Know What “Good” Strategies Look Like

Prioritize these four strategies at first as you grow your business knowledge. You’ll find ample opportunities to improve your knowledge further as you conduct your day-to-day responsibilities, sometimes just through a single meeting or conversation.

And as you evaluate new opportunities, keep in mind these three key characteristics of the best strategies:

- **They Align with Current Business Priorities**—Look for strategies that get you involved with real business deadlines or events and from which you will gain valuable lessons. By keeping business priorities in mind, you can ensure maximum personal benefit (by growing your business knowledge) as well as maximum benefit to your line partners (by helping solve a real business challenge).
- **They Involve Senior Business Leaders and Other Stakeholders**—You don’t need to work with your most senior line partner on every strategy. The important thing to keep in mind is balance; working with your line leader on some strategies, or parts of a strategy, will ensure that he or she sees you as a key business partner, but working with mid-level managers and other influential stakeholders helps keep your knowledge relevant to your client group’s real day-to-day business experience.
- **There’s Work to Do, But You’re Not Alone**
The most effective HRBPs see growing their business knowledge as an ongoing priority. But you don’t have to do that alone. Use our support, designed for you:
 - Learn more about these four strategies—and what distinguishes effective strategies—with our new resource: [Growing Your Business Knowledge: A Guide for HRBPs](#).
 - Complete the always-on [HRBP Career Diagnostic](#) to identify what on-the-job learning activities will help you, personally, grow your business knowledge.
 - Use our [collection of competency-based individual development plans \(IDPs\)](#), especially the business acumen IDP, to create a plan for building your business knowledge and acumen.

By Adrian Samson



The HR Heart Line

Dear HR Heart Line:

These days every project I lead requires input from several different, new people—often from parts of the business that aren't used to working closely with HR. Once I finally track down who to work with, getting the information I need from them usually feels like pulling teeth. How can I make sure I'm involving the right people and getting the input I need?

Sincerely,
Going in Circles



Dear Going in Circles,

You are certainly not alone there. I'd be hard pressed to think of a colleague of mine who isn't working with more people on more projects. In fact we've found that more than half of HRBPs collect information from other functions.¹ So the value you deliver today as an HRBP is no longer determined by your skills alone, but by the strength of your network, and how well you use it.

Your network can be one of your greatest assets—you just have to figure out how to tap into it. Because everyone around us knows something that we don't, they may all have something valuable to contribute. But effective networking is easier said than done. HRBPs often tell us that they don't know who they don't know and that they hesitate to go beyond basic relationship building and actually use their networks to get work done. So let's start by putting some common misconceptions about networking to rest.

This Is Not about:

- Schmoozing with people, attending awkward networking events, or broadening your LinkedIn connections;
- General relationship building; or
- Using someone in a one-sided exchange of information.

This Is about:

- Using your critical networks more purposefully to increase your impact on the business, and

- Positioning yourself in others' networks so they can more effectively use your skills and expertise.

So we have to build a network, do so in a purposeful way, and then ensure it's a two-way street. Wondering where to start? Thinking first about who you need in your network and then how to best leverage them will help you deliver strategic solutions more efficiently. If they are to be effective, network relationships shouldn't feel transactional; they should be mutually beneficial to both parties.

Who Should You Include in Your Network?

Most of us do need to extend our networks, but focusing solely on quantity won't get you the greatest benefit.² Instead, think about the connections that are most likely to help you deliver more value as an HRBP. There are some obvious connections you likely want to make, but there are others that may not even be on your radar.

Take a minute to map out your network, and figure out how to strengthen it. Keep in mind that your immediate team and your existing, formal, designated relationships aren't what we're focusing on here, nor are people that you just happen to be connected with on LinkedIn. Instead, you should be focusing on the informal network across your organization—the go-to people whose collaboration and input make you more strategically effective—whether you know those people yet or not. When you are faced with an

Three groups are particularly important for HRBPs, and each represents a potential gap in your network:

Who?	HR Peers	Business Partner Peers in Other Functions	Diverse Connections Across the Broader Business
Why?	Only 30% of HRBPs understand HR peers' roles.	Only 31% of HRBPs partner on strategic activities with peers in other functions.	A diverse network improves your ability to innovate and solve problems.
What can go wrong without these connections?	The complex, siloed environments of many HR functions today may mean you miss opportunities to borrow ideas, share best practices, and collaborate.	Work can become uncoordinated, with line partners receiving support from different channels at different times. You also miss opportunities to leverage critical complementary skills.	Similarity and proximity in your network can create "echo chambers" that reinforce existing ways of thinking.

Source: CEB analysis.



interesting question or a challenging project, ask yourself who are the one or two people you call for feedback. You may already, unknowingly, have started establishing those informal connections.

Having a diverse network makes it more likely that you—and your contacts—will stumble upon interesting or creative ideas.

How Do You Best Use Your Network?

Again, the strength of your network is not just about the number of relationships, but how you leverage them. To be truly effective, you need to think beyond the obvious as you consider the value others can contribute. Consider common goals, shared needs, and new uses for the information and resources you gather.

Once you've identified people whose experience, perspective, or resources are of value to you, think carefully about how to approach them. If not done correctly, the person you reach out to may respond with, "How did you get to me and why me?" "Are you trying to dump work on me?" or "Is this worth my time?"

To avoid sounding like you are making a cold call, answer these kinds of questions right away, without being asked, and be clear and specific about what you are asking for. Take the time to explain the reason behind the request, including why you are asking them and not someone else. Your network should be developed enough and you'll have reflected enough to have a clear reason for approaching that specific person.

If you take time to plan a thoughtful approach, people will be more willing to help than you may think.

Nor should we forget that this is a two-way street. What value can you, as an HRBP, offer to others? How can members of your network use your skills and expertise? Remember, the more people see you as a potential resource, the more willing they will be to help when you need something from them.

One quick tip: By making a specific offer of how you could help, you can change the way others think about your unique value as an HRBP. A vague offer as an afterthought is less likely to be followed up, which means you potentially miss

an opportunity to demonstrate your value. You may have greater influence over your network's perception of you as a thought and support partner than you realize.

For example, note the difference between saying:

Oh, by the way, let me know if you ever need any help with HR issues.

and using more detail:

I know you're about to launch a new collaboration tool for remote teams, and that it's been a big project for you. We're actually training managers to help them engage their remote teams. We'd be happy to integrate this new tool in our training sessions, which could increase how much it's being used. I know your rollout schedule is tight, so we could plan our sessions to coincide with your launch in each region.

Ultimately, remember that how strategic you are as an HRBP is increasingly influenced by how good your network is and how well you use it. The shape and composition of your network will change over time, but you should be able to identify gaps, approach others, and make offers that drive more value for your organization. Your offers can shape how people see you, and how and when they seek your perspective. This can also help build your credibility and reputation as a go-to person whom people turn to, regardless of functional silo.

That way, you're running an effective HR strategy, not running in circles.

Have a question to submit to HR Heart Line?

E-mail your question to meg.zolner@gartner.com, and we'll share our perspective and your peers' perspectives with you soon, maybe even in the next edition of *HRBP Quarterly*. And in the meantime, don't forget to visit the [CEB Corporate Leadership Council™ website](#) to find research and insight, proven best practices, and decision and diagnostic tools to help you tackle your next project.

¹ CEB 2013 HR Business Partner Survey.

² Brian Uzzi and Shannon Dunlap, "How to Build Your Network," *Harvard Business Review*, December 2005, <https://hbr.org/2005/12/how-to-build-your-network.n7>.

HRBPs' Top 5 CEB Resources from Last Quarter

Here you'll find the most shared, favorited, and viewed resources by you and your HRBP peers last quarter.

Don't miss our spotlight on hot topics below. Check them out to see how they can help you in your role in the coming months!

By Katy Connealy Weber



Spotlight Event

HRBP Masterclass Series: Talent Analytics 101

This virtual Masterclass Series will help you better use data to make an impact at work.

Registration for all four sessions is open on our website:

- [Session 1: Understanding an HRBP's Role in Talent Analytics](#)
1 August, 11:00 a.m.–Noon ET
- [Session 2: Shaping Data: Asking the Right Questions About Talent](#)
22 August 11:00 a.m.–Noon ET
- [Session 3: Demystifying Data: Spotting Trends and Building Data Skills](#)
12 September 11:00 a.m.–Noon ET
- [Session 4: Telling a Story with Data](#)
26 September, 11:00 a.m.–Noon ET



Spotlight Topic Center

HR Metrics and Analytics

HRBPs spend one-third of their time working with data. To empower both HRBPs and their broader organizations, HR functions globally are increasing investments in collecting, managing, and analyzing data assets. Our [HR Metrics and Analytics Topic Center](#) can help you improve the analytic impact of the data you work with and get the most out of your analytics investments.

Our HIPO management resources can help you:

- [Select and track key metrics for your business,](#)
- [Build HR capability for translating data into insights,](#)
and
- [Apply talent insights for business impact.](#)



Spotlight CEB Ignition™ Guide

CEB Ignition™ Guide to Improving Corporate Culture

Use this guide to finalize, prioritize, plan, and communicate cultural improvement initiatives. In particular, this guide will walk you through:

- Identifying and prioritizing cultural improvement initiatives,
- Creating the implementation plan,
- Selecting metrics to measure success, and
- Launching the improvement initiatives.



What HR Executives Need to Know About US President Trump's Immigration Policies (So Far)

US President Donald Trump has already taken steps to change the agenda of the federal government in numerous policy areas, with many implications for employers and the workforce.

Access our continuously updated [Talent Daily](#) stream on the topic to:

- Read a full explanation of the talent implications to date, or
- Skip throughout the article to a specific topic, using our navigation menu.



Best of CEB Talent Angle: The Future of Talent Part 1

In this special edition of the [CEB Talent Angle](#) podcast, we ask 11 thought leaders about the future of talent. Each guest tells us what and how we need to adapt from a talent perspective to be successful in the future.

Participants include psychologist Adam Grant, popular author Dan Pink, US military General Stanley McChrystal, and more.



Career Conversation Guides

Use this set of guides to help employees and managers understand their responsibilities as part of effective career conversations. These guides will:

- Teach managers to conduct career conversations in a way that helps them understand their employees' future career aspirations, and
- Help employees articulate their interests and learn if and how the organization's talent needs align with those interests.



Maximize Your On-the-Job Learning: A Guide for HRBPs

Use this guide to determine what on-the-job opportunities to pursue in your HRBP role and how to get the most out of these development experiences. This tool can help you:

- Identify which strategic activities to pursue,
- Identify valuable learning opportunities, and
- Apply lessons learned to your own work.

Whether to further your own individual development or support the development of your HRBP team or colleagues, these train-the-trainer resources can make it easy to learn the foundations critical to the HRBP role. And look out for more train-the-trainer materials coming soon!



CEB Ignition™ Guide to Strategic Planning for Human Resources

Use this guide to adapt your organization's HR strategic plan in order to create an effective plan for your own client group. In particular, this guide will walk you through:

- Determining the implications of business unit strategy for HR,
- Diagnosing where HR may face challenges and capability gaps,
- Determining actions to meet HR's objectives, and
- Communicating the strategic plan to all stakeholders.



What's Next?

When you apply our content to your organization, the following questions may help you strategize:

- Are these resources new to me?
- What opportunities can I expect from sharing these resources with my colleagues?
- To what extent do my current projects and priorities compare to those of my peers, based on these resources?
- Might any of these resources represent an opportunity for me to enrich or grow my role?
- What will my bigger projects be in the coming two to three months, and to what extent do I feel I've used CEB's resources to prepare to execute them?

About *HRBP Quarterly*

Supporting and enabling HR Business Partners and strategic HR professionals is a continued priority for us. As a result, we are excited to introduce *HRBP Quarterly*, a new quarterly publication featuring trends, research insights, and peer support for the global HRBP community, designed to help you develop your capabilities and get your jobs done.

Feedback on what you see?

Which articles in this publication did you find most helpful? Is there a topic or type of content you would like to see in future editions? Send your feedback on *HRBP Quarterly* to meg.zolner@gartner.com today.

