

Research from Leading HR Transformation Consultancy Highlights just what makes the most Successful HR Leaders

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64% have Relevant Business Experience Outside of HR

Orion Partners, the leading HR transformation consultancy, has launched the results of its ground-breaking research into what are the skills, knowledge and attributes of today's highly successful HR leaders. What is 'the difference that makes the difference' between the best and the rest?

Orion Partners conducted the global - and still ongoing - study by looking at an initial group of 30 HR leaders from a range of industries across the public and private sectors in Europe, America and South Africa. All participants held senior HR leadership positions at HR director level either for the whole enterprise or for a distinct part of a high profile company with a reputation for success as a business. Most companies were upper quartile in their sector in terms of return on investment and many of the HR directors had been hired to transform HR. 56% of the population were male and 44% female.

Participants were interviewed in depth using Orion Partners' Success Profile methodology which drills deeply into their most and least successful experiences in their role. Although similar to the process by which competency frameworks are developed, the process goes beyond the actions and behaviour exhibited. It discovers the capabilities people drew on in deciding which actions to take, the underlying beliefs and values that drove those decisions and what their sense of identity or purpose was at the time. This produces a rich, multi-dimensional picture of all the conditions that generate success.

Analysis

The data was analysed by searching for the consistent patterns within each individual's experience and, subsequently, between participants across the population. Orion Partners looked for what was consistently present or absent in multiple descriptions of both successful and unsuccessful incidents.

It should be noted that no attempt was made to codify the leadership style of HR leaders or compare HR leaders to leaders of other functions or businesses. In common with all other leaders, HR leaders work with a variety of management styles, however, it was noted that as a group, the participants in this study tended to be more towards the facilitative than the authoritarian end of the spectrum.

Key Findings

Some biographical statistics that emerged suggest a number of similarities within the population. For instance, great HR leaders do not get to the top in one organisation and stop there. 73% had held a senior HR leadership position elsewhere prior to their current role.

Diverse experience is the norm with 64% having had relevant business experience outside of HR, 50% having had experience of working outside their country of origin around the world and 50% had worked in multiple sectors. And, an HR qualification is shown not to be an absolute requirement with 46% holding no formal

HR qualification.

Orion Partners found that HR leaders establish their credibility and build the foundation for future influence from three different perspectives. For some the primary focus is being a businessperson, for others it is building relationships and for the rest it is as a facilitator and coach. In spite of having preferred starting points, participants recognised the need to be able to use all three approaches flexibly to earn respect with a wide range of people in a variety of organisations.

Mindset Matters

A key finding was that the 'mindset' among great HR leaders - how they define their role and purpose in the organisation and what they believe about themselves, the HR function and its contribution to the success of the business - is more important than the many technical skills and knowledge they have amassed over their careers.

Finally, it was identified that the best HR leaders share four defining characteristics and that these, in common with all of the other findings, were consistent across all sectors and industries:

- A sense of purpose. A clarity of vision about what they are there to do and a willingness to go out to the edge in order to achieve it.
- Business focus. Defining themselves as business people first and holding themselves accountable for creating business success.
- Function Construction. A focus on crafting a fit-for-purpose HR function and leading it to deliver success for the business through the people agenda.
- Self-knowledge. Authenticity and integrity, awareness of their own values, self-belief, continuous learning and an ability to manage their own energy and motivation.

Commenting on the significance of the findings, Jan Hills, a partner at Orion Partners, said: "since 2004 we've been working successfully with the results of a study we conducted into what it takes to be an exceptional, high performing HR Business Partner. The findings from that study have proved so useful in helping our clients recruit and develop talented HR Business Partners that we decided to use the same methodology to gain an equal understanding of what it takes to be a great HR leader.

"Armed with an understanding of what the very best HR leaders do and how they see themselves in their roles, we believe organisations will be in a much stronger position to identify and recruit real talent into the crucial HR director position. As importantly, it would enable them to groom their most talented HR Business Partners for transition to the top."

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The full report is available online at <http://www.orionpartners.co.uk/download/downloadfile.php?code=lead>

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