



MARLIN HAWK

Marlin Hawk Function Pulse

Transforming Human Resources:

Mastering the Pace of Change

Introduction

For decades, Human Resources leaders have fought to secure a “seat at the table,” ensuring HR is recognized as a strategic partner alongside CEOs and executive leadership. Today, the strategic importance of human capital is well established, but with that recognition comes higher stakes. HR leaders must now navigate an era of rapid change, complex challenges, increased employee expectations, and the rise of AI and Generative AI (GenAI) technologies. While talent attraction, development, and retention remain at the heart of HR’s mission, achieving these goals now demands new strategies, new skills, and deeper cross-functional collaboration.

Talent shortages and skills gaps continue to plague companies, stifling their ability to pursue growth and innovation while ensuring they remain agile enough to meet future business demands. In the past, this was largely viewed as a recruiting problem. Today, ensuring businesses have top-tier human capital with the necessary skills—and the ability to evolve with changing business dynamics—requires a holistic, cross-functional HR strategy. At the same time, in a business environment where CFOs are driving for greater efficiencies, HR must deliver this new strategy in a scalable, efficient manner.

Through conversations with HR leaders, we have identified five key areas companies should focus on to drive efficiencies, meet talent demands, and retain and develop their workforce effectively.

Expanding HR Leadership's Skill Sets

To meet today's challenges and address talent shortages, HR must first tackle the technical skills gaps within its own organization. Speaking with CHROs, we have identified three critical skill areas necessary for building high-performing HR teams. If these skills are lacking, organizations must either hire for them or invest in internal development.

01 High Business Acumen

Business acumen has long been a differentiating skill for HR leaders. Traditionally, a broad understanding of business operations was sufficient, but today, CHROs and their teams must develop deep knowledge of their company's core products, delivery mechanisms, and customer value propositions. This expertise is critical to building trust with business leaders and ensuring human capital strategies align with overarching business objectives. Hiring for business acumen is challenging; it requires finding talent with high intellectual curiosity and a commitment to continuous learning. Some CHROs are supplementing their teams by recruiting talent from outside traditional HR roles, pulling in high performers from line businesses.

02 Project Management & Planning

Fortune 500 companies recognized the importance of project management and planning years ago, often establishing "Strategy" or "Transformation" offices within their C-Suite or business units. As companies strive to be more agile and efficient, many of these groups are being phased out, but the skill remains essential. HR organizations are integrating project management capabilities by hiring professionals with this expertise or training their existing teams through external programs and certifications. This skill set enables HR to operate more efficiently and fosters cross-functional collaboration.

03 Analytics & Data-Driven Judgement

Analytics and data are central to HR's success. Previously, HR Business Partners or leaders could rely on data specialists in meetings, but today, they are expected to lead data-driven discussions and apply analytical frameworks to decision-making and strategy development. While data should inform decisions, HR leaders must also exercise judgment in interpreting findings. However, analytically minded talent is in short supply. To address this, companies are investing in internal training programs to upskill their existing workforce.

Investing in People Managers

For the past decade, companies have prioritized executive leadership development, but training for new managers has often followed a “one and done” model. Now, organizations are shifting toward continuous development for managers, incorporating technology solutions to enhance employee experience and support managers at scale.



Developing People Managers

Why it Matters

Two-thirds of employees cite poor management as one of the top two reasons for leaving their jobs. Meanwhile, only 53% of managers feel prepared to lead in today’s hybrid work environment. There is no relationship more impactful to the employee experience than the one between an employee and their manager. Yet, managers are often promoted based on subject matter expertise rather than leadership skills.

Key Areas for Training

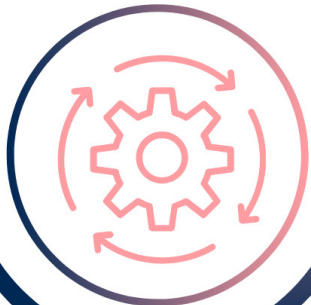
HR must deploy targeted training—either by developing in-house programs or partnering with third-party providers—to address essential managerial skills. These programs should focus on communication, emotional intelligence, and adaptability—skills that managers often overestimate in themselves but that their teams perceive as needing improvement.

Embracing AI & Gen AI

The adoption of AI and Generative AI has become not just a priority, but an imperative for HR leaders. According to Forbes, 76% of CHROs believe that failing to implement these technologies within the next twelve to twenty-four months will put their organizations at a competitive disadvantage. The challenge lies in striking the balance between leveraging AI to streamline and automate specific tasks while maintaining the human-centric core of HR. HR leaders will need to step outside their comfort zone and not be afraid to fail hard but fail fast when adopting AI and Generative AI technology.

Adopting a Tech-Centric Mindset

Automation & Efficiency



Capital and budget constraints are limiting business investment. It is even more critical today that chatbots and agents take on the tasks that can be automated. Allowing more experienced professionals to focus on strategic initiatives.

Improved Employee Experience



AI technology will enable HR teams to provide a more personalized, accessible and user-friendly experience for employees. Digital onboarding, self-service agents, LMS and performance feedback tools are creating a more effective employee experience.

Scalability



As organizations grow, managing HR processes manually is not sustainable. AI will enable faster and more efficient scaling of HR services to keep pace with organization growth.

Attraction & Retention



Organizations who use cutting edge technology, will attract and retain top talent. High performers value innovation. Technology allows them to focus on more strategic and higher level of work.

Leading Generation Z

Today's workforce comprises four generations: Baby Boomers, Gen X, Millennials, and Gen Z. By the end of 2024, Gen Z accounted for one-third of the global workforce, surpassing Baby Boomers. The oldest Gen Z employees will turn 27 in 2025, meaning they are still early in their careers. Unsurprisingly, their attitudes toward work differ markedly from prior generations, shaped by their upbringing and societal shifts.

Key Characteristics of Gen Z in the Workforce:



Digital-First

Grew up with the internet and expect seamless digital experiences.



Socially Conscious

Prioritize climate change, equality, and social justice.



Financially Cautious

Value financial security and debt management, having witnessed economic uncertainty in 2008 and 2020.



Pragmatic

Prioritize job security, benefits, and career growth over idealism.



Mental Health Awareness

Openly discuss mental health and prioritize well-being over work.

Even without today's rapid technological disruptions and talent shortages, Gen Z's expectations would still be driving change in organizations. They demand career development programs that align with their values, impacting how companies attract, develop, and retain talent.

Our Approach

HR's core mission remains unchanged: to attract and retain top talent that drives organizational success. However, securing a seat at the leadership table has heightened accountability for CHROs and their teams, requiring them to deliver at pace and with scale. Traditional approaches alone are no longer sufficient to meet the evolving needs of the business. To stay ahead, HR leaders must embrace change as the new normal. By expanding their skill sets within their teams, adopting a skills-based approach to talent acquisition, leveraging AI, investing in the development of managers, and understanding Gen Z's workplace expectations, organizations can build a resilient, future-ready workforce.

Our business philosophy is to appoint candidates who can help deliver the business agenda for both today and tomorrow. We do this by using creative sourcing methodologies, coupled with an assessment methodology supported by Hogan and focusing on five key criteria: **Strategic Mindset, Purpose-Led Leadership, Results Orientation, Building Teams and Technology Evangelism**. These five key elements, coupled with a track record of delivery, can provide hiring managers with the necessary comfort to hire talent that can lead a consistently changing environment.

About Marlin Hawk

Marlin Hawk is a global leadership advisory firm specializing in executive search, strategic intelligence, and interim management. For over 20 years, we've empowered our clients with data and insights to make diverse, inclusive and impactful leadership decisions. One globally connected team, we are headquartered in London with offices in New York, Denver, Toronto, Chicago, Amsterdam, Dubai, Singapore and Hong Kong. Unconstrained by a one-size-fits-all approach to both clients and candidates, we build relationships with care and attention to detail, while delivering at pace.



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