

# HREdge

THE MAGAZINE OF LEADING EDGE IDEAS IN HUMAN

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Fall 2009

## MANAGING CHANGE & MOVING FORWARD



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## HREdge

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Please send all enquires to:  
MHRM Program  
York University  
4700 Keele St.  
Toronto, ON M3J 1P3  
Canada

www.yorku.ca

**Editor**  
Len Karakowsky

**Associate Editor**  
Ken McBey

**Assistant Editor**  
Jelena Zikic

**Design**  
Naomi Shacter



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## Transforming ourselves

**'In times of profound change, the learners inherit the earth, while the learned find themselves beautifully equipped to deal with a world that no longer exists.'**

That insight by American social writer and philosopher, Eric Hoffer (1902-1983) needs to be taken to heart by every business leader. Sadly, many of our "learned" companies have fallen victim to their own success, seemingly oblivious to the changing global landscape. The North American auto industry is but one among many recent casualties.

**So how does your company avoid becoming trapped in a corporate time warp? We hope this edition of *HR Edge* offers some ideas and insights and sparks discussion on this critically important strategic issue.**

Probably the leading thinker on organizational change today is Professor John Kotter of Harvard Business School. In his interview with *HR Edge* (**Uncovering A Sense of Urgency**), Dr. Kotter discusses why many companies just can't seem to get it together when it comes to moving forward. Among the ideas touched upon are the nature of the change process itself and how to ignite this process.

We all know that change is a complex and elusive creature. What are the tools and approaches that leaders can tap into to drive successful change efforts? Carroll Hern's article, **Lessons in Transforming Culture**, describes a company that managed the impossible—it transformed its culture and kept everyone happy at the same time! Culture change is further explored by Belinda Tang who details how IBM managed their own successful merger & acquisition with PriceWaterhouse Coopers Consulting (**Merging Cultures: IBM's Tangible Approach**). Among the tools available, Amber Cooper examines the key role that technology can play in assisting change efforts, in her insightful article **Blogging Your Way to Change**.

We know that the HR profession is rapidly evolving. We know it is becoming increasingly strategic. Consequently, we need to get on board with the most pervasive and profound of all business phenomena—globalization. The business world has been "going global" for years. But what about HR? What strategic issues do HR leaders need to

think about in the international context? Dr. Steve McKenna answers that question in his article, **Globality**.

Companies need to be change-ready and so do teams. What does it take to lead teams in a new direction? Dr. Todd Pittinsky, Associate Professor of Public Policy at Harvard University takes team building to a whole new level. In his interview with *HR Edge* (**Leading Teams in a New Direction**), Dr. Pittinsky explains why team leaders need to revisit their assumptions about team performance and the role of competition. He shares some fascinating insights from his truly ground breaking research.

Changing gender dynamics within the workplace and within society present a host of challenges as well as opportunities for women. In her article, **The New Balancing Act**, Dr. Souha Ezzedeen informs us of the factors that can assist women in combining personal and professional success.

Do we need to change ourselves? In their article, **Advancing HR: The Need for Multiple Paradigms**, Drs. Steve McKenna, Parbudyal Singh and Julia Richardson consider why and how the study of HR itself must change. This is an important issue for both academics and practitioners to address.

As always, *HR Edge* also celebrates our alumni, faculty, and staff whose achievements you can read more about in this edition.

My warm thanks to all those who contributed to this issue. Special thanks to Dr. Ken McBey, Director of the Graduate HRM program. Ken has been a major force in helping to drive this publication forward, and I know he will continue to play a central role now as Associate Editor of *HR Edge*.

Finally, *HR Edge* is trying to take the issue of change to heart. You will notice that this edition has "evolved" significantly from our first edition. We will endeavour to develop this publication in ways that we hope will best serve our HR community. We welcome your feedback.

Len Karakowsky  
Editor, *HR Edge*



## Change, growth and a bright future

*The theme of this year's HR Edge is change, and change has certainly been the central feature of our Graduate HRM program over the past few years.*

*With the addition of several new full-time faculty members, our MHRM (Master of Human Resource Management) program has continued its pattern of slow but steady growth, commensurate with the need to ensure program quality through the maintenance of rigorous academic standards. We have added additional course sections so that each core and elective course is now offered twice per year. A new course on 'HR Issues' has been established to explore in more detail leading-edge HR concepts and new developments in the field. Furthermore, with recent changes in the administrative structure at York, the planned geographic expansion of our MHRM program to various satellite locations in Canada, possibly even to international locales, may yet become a reality! We're ready to go, and awaiting support and approval from the York administration.*

*As you probably know, we have established a formal academic relationship and scholarly exchange program with the BI School of Management in Oslo, Norway. I'm delighted to announce that the first two Norwegian Masters' students will be joining us in the MHRM for the fall 2009 cohort, and we will be reciprocating with an exchange of our MHRM students to study in beautiful Oslo! At the time of writing, several other international academic relationships/exchange programs are in process, with a view to ensuring that these student & faculty exchanges, and research collaborations, will lead to mutually beneficial collaborations with other leading university HRM Graduate programs around the world.*

*With the Graduate HRM Alumni association up and running, our annual Continuing Professional Development sessions for alumni continue each fall, and plans are underway to market other HRM continuing education modules/courses as well.*

*Our new PhD program is moving from strength to strength. This fall, as we head into our second year, we have 6 full-time PhD students, including our first MHRM graduate Nadia deGama (MHRM 2007 & 'Academic Achievement' Award winner) who has made the step up to Doctoral studies. All best wishes to our Doctoral students for success in their progression toward PhD completion in the near future. My grateful thanks to Professor Parbudyal Singh for his very capable assistance as PhD Coordinator.*

*Congratulations to all our recent MHRM graduates! I wish you all very best wishes as you go forward and commence the next step in your HR careers. Special congratulations are extended to our 2008 MHRM Graduate Award Winners: 'Academic Achievement' Award to Tracey Rickaby; 'Ambassador' Award to Kimberly Sharman, and 'Research' Award to Nancy Camilli.*

*Our Graduate HRM program's excellent reputation and profile are attracting considerable attention from students, scholars, and employers all around the world, and this reputation is a testament to our success in working together as a team. Congratulations and thanks to all of our faculty, staff and alumni for your efforts!*

*My term as Director will be complete as of summer 2009, and Professors Steve McKenna and Parbudyal Singh will be assuming the shared Directorship as my replacements. I would like to take this opportunity to give a special thanks to Deb Jamieson (Graduate Program Assistant) for all her hard work and dedication in support of our Program. Also, my grateful thanks to Professor Len Karakowsky for his leadership role in HR Edge.*

*It has been an honour and a privilege to have served as your Graduate Program Director.*

*All best wishes to you and yours,*

*Ken*

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Kenneth J. McBey PhD, Director, Graduate Program in Human Resources Management, York University, Toronto, Canada

# Lessons in



# transforming culture

**ONE** of the key buzzwords in today's fast-paced business environment is change. The ability of a company to rapidly transform itself has become the new competitive advantage. I am proud to say that it is also a skill that my company has developed in spades.

The proof is in the pudding, so to speak. We recently tackled one of the most challenging kinds of change—corporate culture change. It wasn't easy; it took time and effort. And, like all change, it wasn't readily embraced at the outset, but in the end we were successful in transforming our culture to the benefit of our employees, customers and other stakeholders.

Let me tell you a little about our experience. In 2006, our existing CEO retired. With the appointment of a new president and CEO, we felt it was time to explore and re-define our core purpose as a company to ensure we would continue to be relevant and successful in our marketplace. Ironically, there was no burning platform for change. The company was financially strong; there was no crisis, no immediate cause for concern whatsoever. While this would be an enviable state for any organization, it made our job tougher since it is always more difficult to convince people that change is beneficial when things seem perfectly fine the way they are!

So how did we embark on a path toward cultural transformation? And why? The process involved zeroing in on what made our company different from our competitors. Our company's distinguishing feature is

that we focus on servicing the unique needs of Canadian credit unions and in doing so help them to grow. We needed to revisit this fundamental mission in order to understand how to dramatically improve our operations.

We are lucky in that our new president and CEO is a proactive change leader. He knows that our customers need us to be a great insurance company. And, while our customers' loyalty measures indicated that we were successfully meeting and exceeding their needs, we knew we could not become complacent. Given that our core customer base is changing continually, we needed to anticipate our customers' changing needs by staying ahead of the rapidly evolving business environment.

I took on the role of change facilitator with regard to redefining our organizational purpose and values. Our president and CEO had begun his own assessment of what our organization needed to do to achieve higher performance shortly after arriving at the company. With that work in hand, and working side by side with the change sponsor, our president and CEO, my job was to develop a change plan that would work within our culture.

## Re-engineering culture

Two features of our old culture that inhibited our organizational potential were a lack of open communication, and an insufficient focus on outcome delivery. Let me explain these cultural characteristics.

**The Quiet Culture.** Our culture suffered from a certain reticence which manifested itself in different ways. Behavior in our organization was very deferential. It was an organization where most if not all decision-making power was held at the senior management level, which resulted in a level of comfort or complacency within the culture.

Any potentially contentious issues were most likely driven “underground” rather than surfacing as constructive conflict. When issues did arise they were more likely to be addressed over lunch or at the water cooler, rather than at the business table or in a team meeting. The problem this type of behaviour creates is that you cannot learn the real issues that employees are struggling with if the issues never explicitly surface.

**The Process vs. Output Driven Culture.** A second characteristic of our old culture was lack of discipline in business processes. Accountability requires disciplined processes. During the initial assessment of the organization, it was clear that processes, such as business case development, project management methodology, customer reporting, sales and sales management, etc., were either not in place or not sufficiently mature to support a well run and adaptive organization. Much work was done in the early days to introduce these disciplines into the organization as part of our standard operating environment.

The lack of disciplined processes was reflected in our approach to customer satisfaction. There was a corporate mentality that we needed to serve the customers at all costs. Sounds good, right? Well, not entirely.

This approach to focusing purely on satisfying customers can result in a very high cost business model. Our culture compelled us to “rally ‘round” our customers and we served them exceedingly well. However, there was no corresponding sense of cost sustainability. There was a lot of “customization” done in the spirit of customer satisfaction. So, for example if our billing process did not work for a customer, we would develop another billing process to accommodate that request. If you do this over and over, you end up with a satisfied customer but you have a very high cost infrastructure that the customers are not willing to pay for. We needed to combine great customer service with a greater sense of fiscal accountability.

In addition, our old culture was less concerned with outputs than it was with process. This manifested itself in a significant amount of activity without any of the necessary, corresponding, tangible outputs. Part of our culture change efforts required a shift toward becoming more results/output oriented.

## Merging the best of both worlds

We always knew that our change approach would be like a merger of cultures. We would take the strengths

of the past and merge them with the desired changes to create a new culture. And, of course, our core strength was in our unwavering commitment to the customer. We used this as context for all of our rationale for change. We would only need to change something if it benefited the customer. An example? We reminded everyone that our fundamental aim was to increase productivity. The link we established was that if we increase our productivity, we will increase our profits. If we increase our profits we increase the amount of money we can give back to our customer base via profit sharing, preserving jobs and ultimately creating sustainability for the entire organization.



When issues did arise they were more likely to be addressed over lunch or at the water cooler, rather than at the business table or in a team meeting. The problem this type of behaviour creates is that you cannot learn the real issues that employees are struggling with if the issues never explicitly surface.



Given the lack of a burning platform for change, we recognized a few important issues to keep in mind during our change efforts. Maintaining trust and fairness throughout the transition was critical. If things appeared as a “done deal” then it would be viewed as unjust and people would quietly resist. We needed to model the temperament of the culture rather than force it to do something. Consequently, the change methodology that seemed to work best for us was a pull strategy versus a push strategy where we created “invited opportunities” to draw people out and engage in new ways and beliefs. Our methodology then became a “transformation in incremental steps”. We set out on a path of change using a number of different tactics. Here are some of the key approaches we kept in mind.

**Staying on message.** We needed to help people understand why we were changing. When entering into territory that is unfamiliar, people find it threatening and drift almost naturally to a state of resistance. We demonstrated genuine commitment to the value of employee input through instituting open employee forums to

Culture ► P. 8



encourage questions and address concerns, breakfast meetings with executives, CEO blogs, and active action planning to employee engagement surveys.

**Employing change ambassadors.** Culture change could not be achieved by the efforts of a handful of executives alone. This was a big job and required many more people to be on board at the initial stages. It is necessary to draw strength from many people who carry influence with lower level employees. I would say that 15 to 20 per cent of employees from all levels of the organization wanted to get onboard with the changes very quickly. We knew who the influencers were and we asked them to participate in the change effort so they could be role models for the rest of the organization. Some were executive assistants, some were managers. Many individuals in this group were longer service employees who were trusted by the rest of the organization. We also employed these “early adopters” to help drive the change—we used this group to be the ambassadors of the change to their peer groups and colleagues.

**Rewarding change.** Rewards encourage the desired behaviours of a performance driven culture. We were able to transform the culture and improve accountability significantly and have become much more disciplined in our processes. This was achieved in part via changes to our reward system. We changed our reward systems so that the criteria we used to reward were directly aligned to our strategy. We started rewarding individuals for such things as focusing on results, taking accountability, achieving excellence in customer service, driving operational excellence and showing personal leadership. People soon started to see in very tangible ways which behaviours were being rewarded and which were not.

**Leading by example.** We knew it was important for staff to see senior leadership model the kind of behaviors we expected so that they could clearly understand what the change in behaviour should look like. In the past, much of our senior leaders’ interaction with customers focused on the social aspects of the relationship. One way our senior leadership demonstrated the cultural change to employees was by launching a series of meetings with key customers to provide a forum for sharing our value proposition with customers and engaging in meaningful business discussions. This approach was showing new ways of providing customer value and building relationships.

**Implementing a cultural scorecard.** Our new president and CEO made it understood that the organization should know in very clear terms who was accountable for what. The organizational structure had to change to facilitate clearer lines of accountability. Each person’s

role and responsibilities were clearly documented and understood. This culture of accountability needed to be measured or assessed somehow to see if our change efforts were taking hold. We implemented an *Enterprise Scorecard* to help us focus on results, not just activities. This scorecard employed metrics to drive higher levels of performance. By establishing a balanced scorecard for the organization, we were reinforcing the importance of measuring our success against our stated business objectives. We did have a balanced scorecard in the past, however the focus was on what we were “doing” not what we were achieving. Now, our financial metrics are posted on our employee intranet site so when employees log on each day, they can see clearly where we stand.

### Post-culture change

All of this brings us to today. When we look at our 2008 Employee Engagement results, the benefits of this cultural change initiative are clear. We have received the highest response rate and overall satisfaction levels that have been recorded by the company in the past six years, far exceeding management’s expectations, especially given the strength of the 2007 baseline. 99 per cent of our employees understand why the company must change to meet competitive challenges and 90 per cent feel that the changes that have been introduced make sense for the company. The vast majority also feel that we have become a more customer focused organization over the last year. In addition to the strong results, the verbatim comments reflect a sense of energy, purpose and accountability throughout the organization.

We have moved from a somewhat reticent culture to a culture of openness, where employees express the view that upward communication is healthy and downward communication is also well regarded. These strong results offer evidence that we are achieving our intended transformation. Our employee-management relationship has a solid foundation built on confidence and trust.

Our culture is still evolving. The amount of change that the organization can handle (its capacity and absorption rate) remains a central and ongoing discussion point for management. The DNA of any organization does not change quickly, so there is a natural tendency for cultural drift to the past unless change leaders stay vigilant. We are committed to continuing to deliver consistent messaging, staying focused, and to delivering on what we promised—all of which we believe are critical to the success of our cultural transformation efforts. We will continue to develop a highly engaged workforce committed to the best in customer service as this is one of the primary factors that sets our company apart from our competitors and positions us for future success.

Carroll Hern (MHRM 2005) is Senior Vice-President, Human Resources & Organizational Effectiveness for The CUMIS Group Limited. CUMIS has been included among Canada’s Best Companies to Work For in the Globe and Mail rankings.







# GLOBALITY

## and global human resource management

▶ These are exciting times for global human resource management. The intensity of global competition is increasing dramatically as companies from developing nations compete with companies from developed economies. As a consequence there is competitive intensity in many sectors of the global economy as companies from Brazil, Russia, India, China and other parts of Asia, Latin America and the Middle East (*Challengers*) challenge the positions of companies from developed economies (*Incumbents*).

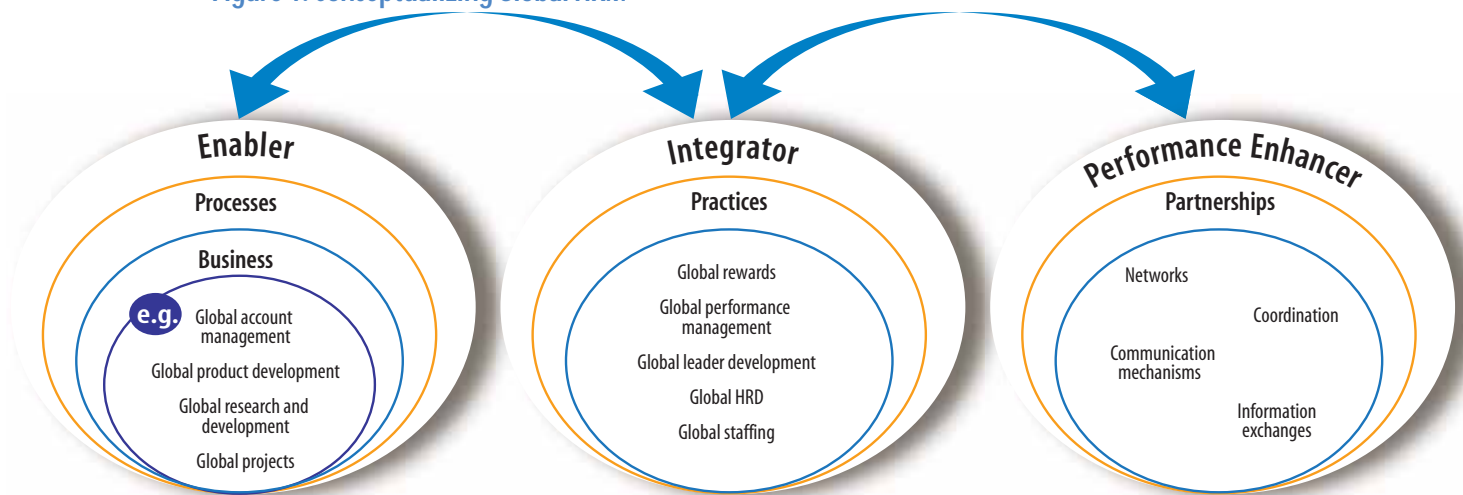
Challenger companies are also introducing new business models and processes into the conduct of global business. A report by the Boston Consulting Group<sup>1</sup> identifies where these business models offer competitive advantage. For example, their lower cost

advantage leverages the ability to 'go global'. Second, they often have a more geocentric mentality and a willingness to be more flexible as to how the incorporate and integrate different business models and processes. Third, they focus clearly on opportunities that are likely to succeed. Fourth, they move with great speed to develop partnerships and joint ventures. Fifth, they have a willingness to try new things and ditch old ways of doing things.

Competitive developments in the global economy are of particular significance for global HRM. Global HRM has often been sadly neglected by some Incumbent organizations as a resource to add value to the global operations of a business. They tend to view

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Figure 1: Conceptualizing Global HRM



global HRM as an extension of their domestic HRM operation with a focus on practices and policies. They often fail to see the unique contribution that can be made through sophisticated conceptualization and intelligent application of ideas about the role of HRM in global business. Figure 1 outlines the three elements of a global HRM framework. Not only is this conceptualization of global HRM an important guide to global HRM practice, it also helps identify ways in which global HRM can assess its actions and initiatives against value added to the business. It can help companies re-think their approach to global business through intelligent application of ideas about the role of global HRM in the global business.

#### Global HRM as an enabler

It is well established in the HRM literature that ideas about human resources and human relations can be used to *enable* a business to achieve its goals and objectives. In practice, however, the manner in which these ideas can be used is often restricted because human resource practitioners are either unable or unwilling, through organizational structural or personal competence reasons, to find ways in which HR can engage with the business.

By definition global businesses will have global business processes. Global business processes include; global account management, global customer relationship management, global research and development, global product development. All of these processes will include global teams and a range of global projects. Global business processes also have to be managed, monitored and controlled in order to meet business objectives across the globe. Consequently the effective and successful operation of global business processes requires the insightful input of intelligent and astute global HR professionals at many stages. As global business processes are established global HR should play a role in selecting and developing global business leaders. They should be deeply engaged in the formation and sustenance of global process teams. And, they

should be critically involved in the effective establishment of performance systems and reward structures relevant to the global processes as well as helping the global business managers to manage socio-cultural issues.

As an enabler, global HRM professionals should be embedded within the global processes of the business and be intimately knowledgeable about how the processes function in order to recommend and advise as to things that can be done to enhance their operation. In order to achieve this, global HRM professionals must know the global business and must be able to speak the language of global business. *Challenger* companies from developing economies appear to have been successful in integrating the people management aspects of their global business operation seamlessly into their global businesses. As a consequence they often move with great speed to leverage global networks and operations.

There are critical roles for global HRM in enabling global business processes. For example, global research and development (R&D) requires that companies absorb global innovation, transfer knowledge through collaboration and communication and, learn to work in multi-country, multi-site teams. HR professionals should have the ability to facilitate these processes and add-value directly to their operation. Similarly global HRM practitioners should embed themselves in global customer relationship management processes, global product development and global account management processes to discover ways in which they can add-value through enabling these processes to function more effectively.

#### Global HRM as an integrator

Global HRM has also a key role in integrating the global business. The most obvious example is in international joint ventures, alliances and other partnerships. The speed with which *Challenger* companies from rapidly developing economies engage in joint ventures and partnerships poses significant competi-

tion to *Incumbent* companies from developed economies. In particular *Challenger* companies after an acquisition, often allow local business processes to operate initially without seeking to enforce their own processes. This approach allows gradual integration of business processes and the development of new hybrid forms. Global HRM is important in the development of hybrid business and HR processes.

Global businesses need some degree of integration in order to coordinate global business activity. More specifically this means the management of 'global knowledge' and the management and development of 'global capability'. Global HRM has an important role to play in this context. Developing global knowledge involves ways of sharing and diffusing knowledge throughout the global business. Mechanisms to achieve this are critical to a global business and global HRM is key to this role. Such mechanisms include effective global teams, creating a global focus among senior executives, creating a global leadership cadre, and finding ways of pulling the global business together without compromising the leverage gained from local operations and sensitivity. There is no 'best' way to do these things. What is required is proactive, dynamic and business savvy HR professionals who have credibility in the global business.

### Global HRM as a performance enhancer

The third role for global HRM in the global business is as a performance enhancer. While the roles of *enabler* and *integrator* imply that global HRM professionals must be embedded in the global business to add-value, the role of *performance enhancer* concerns the strategic use of HRM techniques to facilitate performance enhancement.

Much is said of the need for global organizations to create a 'global mindset', particularly among global professionals, managers and executives who have key global responsibilities. Emphasis is often placed on training and development as the way to create the global mindset. However, companies operating globally, and particularly *Challengers* from rapidly developing economies, build a global mindset through incentivizing a global perspective. Executives, managers and professionals who need to develop a global business perspective are driven to think and act globally through the HRM processes that drive their contributions to the business.

There are a number of very specific ways in which global HRM professionals can drive a focus on global business. One key area is the development of *global leaders and managers*. Unlike international assignees (expatriates), global leaders and managers have responsibility for global business processes. As a consequence they require specific forms of development

that are concerned with the operation of aspects of the business across the world. Developing such *cosmopolitans* is a crucial role for global HRM. A second critical area for the enhancement of the performance of the global business is the development of *global rewards systems*. It is important to develop appropriate and relevant *global performance management and reward structures and systems* that facilitate a focus on the performance of the global business and its parts. Increasingly the staffing of the global business will require the movement of highly skilled and mobile professionals around the world. Companies that implement intelligent ways of leveraging global talent will gain an advantage over their competition.

To make a contribution to the global business HRM professionals need to think bigger and broader; a focus on the minutiae of micro-level HRM practice is irrelevant in a time of fierce global competition...

### Globality—lessons for global HRM

The increasingly competitive global business environment, made much more intense by the presence of *Challenger* companies from the rapidly developing economies such as Brazil, Russia, India, China and others, has implications for the practice of global HRM.

More than ever global HRM professionals must embed themselves in the global business and be truly global in their outlook. This will require a better understanding of the global business and how it operates. To make a contribution to the global business HRM professionals need to think bigger and broader; a focus on the minutiae of micro-level HRM practice is irrelevant in a time of fierce global competition where competitive advantage depends, not on the validity of our HRM techniques, but on the capability of HRM professionals to be global business people.

To be an effective enabler, integrator and enhancer of business performance, global HRM professionals need to rethink their roles in line with the increasing intensity of competition brought about by the success of companies from rapidly developing economies. If they do not, they will continue to be peripheralized and marginalized in organizational structures, rather than central to the global success of their business.

Dr. Steve McKenna is Associate professor, School of HRM, York University





# Uncovering a sense of **urgency**

Harvard Business School professor and world-renowned leadership scholar John Kotter discusses what it takes to confront complacency and generate change

**HR EDGE:** *In an age where the environment of business is changing at a phenomenal rate, it is striking that organizations nevertheless continue to fall victim to complacency. Why is that the case?*

**JK:** We have to recognize that change doesn't happen naturally. Any organization that has been successful over time turns inward and complacency grows. GM—they were phenomenally successful between 1925 to 1965. During those 40 years they were so successful they developed all the horrible habits that come with success. Unbelievable internal focus with all the bureaucracy etc. When things started going badly for them—i.e., when the world changed you'd think that at least after a few years they would figure it out and put themselves back on the trajectory of success. Years later they are a mess.

Change does not come automatically to organizations. Complacency is a natural state, change is not. Real urgency is an abnormal condition that must be created and sustained. What's amazing, with the current economic environment is that it should be impossible for complacency.

**HR EDGE:** *You mentioned GM. Doesn't crisis usually prompt action? Why didn't the crisis in the North American car industry generate a sense of urgency and prompt change among these businesses?*

**JK:** It is a mistake to assume that crises inevitably will create the sense of urgency needed to perform better. There are countless examples of failures to respond to a business crisis. The CEO waits for a great wind to start pushing his/her organization off its complacent platform and into a good direction. But it doesn't happen. Instead of mobilizing people into action, crisis can lead many managers into making fewer decisions because they don't want to be accused of making mistakes while the press and the public are watching. Many other managers are genuinely afraid that if they rushed into actions their decisions might accidentally create harm. So they hold back just at a time when the CEO most needs their help to get the organization moving swiftly into a better future. Without needed planning and action to leverage the crisis, the situation grows worse, not better.

**HR EDGE:** *Where does complacency come from—institutions or people?*

**JK:** Good question. Certainly complacency is about your eyes turning inwards. People remain complacent when they think they have conquered the world. It is a natural institutional pattern that you must break out of.

From a people perspective, it is more complicated. People are shifting. Some are shifting in light of the economic condition. If we could film people 24 hours a day for two weeks—this year and last year and analyzed the data—how much behaviour change would we see? Not a whole lot. Why not? All human systems tend toward natural equilibrium. The biological and social forces point us toward a certain equilibrium which we need to break out of.

**HR EDGE:** *Aren't people becoming more change ready?*

*After all, we talk about the "new" psychological contract whereby people accept instability and uncertainty in the workplace.*



Instead of mobilizing people into action, crisis can lead many managers into making fewer decisions because they don't want to be accused of making mistakes while the press and the public are watching.



**JK:** There has been a generational shift but not an individual shift. Perhaps compared to say the baby boomers, the newer generations are more change ready but only on certain dimensions. For example technological savvy. Because technology changes every generation is becoming more technologically sophisticated. So some generations become more adept at some issues. The context surrounding each generation changes incrementally like the psychological contract. The difference is that some things in the external world are moving faster—youth can move faster on some dimensions like technology—but that has always been the case. Does that make them more change ready in a genuine sense? Maybe more flexible, but not necessarily more change ready.

**HR EDGE:** *We know that leaders have the potential to bring about radical change—and we have witnessed many examples of effective change leaders over the years. Yet, if you consider any major corporate turn-around, it is typically brought about by a NEW leader (often an outsider). Why can't "change leaders" change?*

Urgency ► P. 14

JK: I don't entirely agree. There are internal promotions—cases of leaders who continue with the organization and endeavor to move it in a different direction. However, it is astonishingly rare for a long-tenured CEO to take the company in a new direction.

I have seen examples over the years. One that comes to mind is the company *Sealed Air Corp.* The CEO had been in his job for many years. Senior management decided they were losing their leadership in the industry. They collectively came up with a strategic imperative. They tried and failed for a year. They kick started it again. This time they succeeded. It was the same leader at the top. Here was a case of trial and error, of a leader who remained at the helm but helped to dramatically shift the direction of the company. I agree that this is the exception.

The people at the top might think there's an abundant sense of urgency, yet if you dig down into the organization, you discover it's not nearly what it needs to be to sustain change through the whole process.

This may be, in part due to the leader's belief that their obligation is to maintain the current system. There is a dilemma—too many corporations with good people that know more about managing than leadership.

Nelson Mandela is one example of an exception in the political realm. He changed his focus and led his followers in a different direction.

**HR EDGE:** *Your book, Leading Change (Harvard Business School Press, 1996) presents an eight stage process which has become almost the universal guide for organizational change efforts. In your experience, which stage(s) seems to present the biggest challenges for companies?*

JK: Leaders need to get better at all of the eight steps that I've identified for successful change—they must create a sense of urgency; build guiding teams; get the vision right; communicate for buy-in; empower action; produce short-term wins; never let up; and make change stick. However, I would also say that it is the first 2 stages that people mess up the most.

And if there is one place to focus, for most organizations, it's getting better at persuading people that they are facing a critical problem and must do something about it. People often say "No, no, lack of urgency is not an issue—our people understand how important it is to solve this problem. We're beyond that." So instead of working on the sense of urgency, they want

to talk about the team or about communicating the vision for the future. They want to skip to step four of the model.

The trouble is, when I talk to people two levels down in the organization, I discover that the sense of urgency is just not there. While some people recognize the immediacy of the problem, not everybody does. Some people go deeply into denial. But when you ask the ones who do see the problem clearly to elaborate, they point to somebody else. Therefore, their personal sense of urgency is often zero.

The people at the top might think there's an abundant sense of urgency, yet if you dig down into the organization, you discover it's not nearly what it needs to be to sustain change through the whole process. If there is no organization-wide sense of urgency, then you are going to try to build a pyramid on a foundation of empty shoeboxes.

**HR EDGE:** *Your model also draws attention to the importance of getting buy-in for the change. Who is it that must buy-in, and how many people do we need to buy-in to our change effort?*

JK: Ideally start small and grow. Remember at the urgency stage there is no solution at that point but just a sense of urgency—no buy-in yet.

As an example of the potential: My wife is working with a former Microsoft executive on building a company from scratch. Their aim was to get the first major group re-directed. They are establishing urgency to the point where they can make substantive changes while people don't feel pushed. In fact people are volunteering to get involved with change initiatives. Some say that getting urgency from two levels down in management is an accomplishment. Of course harnessing the power of people from the top all the way to the bottom is amazing though not often accomplished.

**HR EDGE:** *You have asserted that the final stage of the change process requires getting the change to "stick". That involves anchoring the new approaches in the corporate culture. Why is culture relegated to the last stage of your model?*

JK: I first learned from Dr. Ed Schein (one of the first writers on organizational culture) about the nature of culture. Ed derived his views from social anthropology. A group is formed, it finds a way of operating that works, after that, culture forms. It just happens. Under the surface shared values naturally form.

Culture follows from a successful case of big change—it comes at the end. In 1980 we started with a popular book about culture. We began from the premise that a good culture can help a company. And so we went about on the assumption that we can manipulate culture. We initiated things like a "culture change committee" which made sense at the time. Of course



all of this failed. Culture is like smoke—we know its there but it is elusive and it's not something you can manipulate a priori.

**HR EDGE:** *If culture is elusive then how should we treat it?*

**JK:** It may be elusive, but that is not to say culture is unimportant. On the contrary, it's the ultimate aim of almost any change effort. The most an organization can do is inculcate organizational change as a fundamental capability. This means generating a change ready corporate culture. This is about making the change stick. We need to go beyond simply giving people a basic understanding of change. We need to ground it in the culture.

**HR EDGE:** *You developed the 8 stage model in the 1990's. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century does this model still hold in its entirety?*

**JK:** I think the model has successfully held over time—from way back in 1995 when I developed it until today. Having studied organizational change over many years the fundamental notion and the pattern remains the same. The context may differ but the pattern of what works remains. If anything, I would say that the single biggest distinction between 1995 and the present is the rate of change in the external environment. The volatility we experience now demands that we move from episodic to continuous change patterns.

**HR EDGE:** *The management press typically examines only successful change efforts. We don't read articles about CEO's discussing why their latest change efforts failed miserably. How can we ever fully understand change if we are unable to examine, dissect and discuss real corporate failure in a scholarly public context?*

**JK:** Of course the best research looks at both successes and failures. Just looking at success could lead you to false-positive conclusions. When the data is limited it is easy to make bad inferences. However, there is a challenge at hand. People don't typically want to hear about someone else's problems. Rather, they want answers for their organization's problems. This drive for the solution might bias writers to focus purely on benchmarking success stories. However positive stories are useful—they tell us about what just might work.

## John Kotter Facts



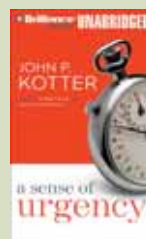
John Kotter is the Konosuke Matsushita Professor of Leadership, Emeritus, at Harvard Business School.

Harvard Business School Professor John Kotter is widely regarded as the world's foremost authority on leadership and change. In 2001, *Business Week* magazine rated Dr. Kotter as the #1 "leadership guru" in America. Kotter is the author of seventeen books, many of which have been noted on the *New York Times Best Sellers List*.

Professor Kotter's honors include an Exxon Award for Innovation in Graduate Business School Curriculum Design, and a Johnson, Smith & Knisely Award

for New Perspectives in Business Leadership. In 1996, Professor Kotter's *Leading Change* was named the #1 management book of the year by *Management General*. In 1998, his *Matsushita Leadership* won first place in the *Financial Times*, Booz-Allen Global Business Book Competition for biography/autobiography. In 2006, Kotter received the prestigious McFeeley Award for "outstanding contributions to leadership and management development." In 2007, his video "Succeeding in a Changing World" was named best video training product of the year by *Training Media Review* and also won a Telly Award.

## A Sense of Urgency by John Kotter (Harvard Business Press, 2008)



Urgency can be a positive force in companies, according to leadership expert and HBS professor emeritus **John Kotter**. His newest book, *A Sense of Urgency* (Harvard Business Press), makes that idea crystal clear. And it describes how leaders can skillfully transform a crisis into an organizational motivator for the better.

## Other Kotter Books

*A Sense of Urgency* (2008)  
*Our Iceberg Is Melting* (2006)  
*The Heart of Change* (2002)  
*What Leaders Really Do* (1999)  
*Matsushita Leadership* (1997)  
*Leading Change* (1996)  
*The New Rules* (1995)  
*Corporate Culture and Performance* (1992)

A close-up photograph of two hands holding interlocking puzzle pieces. The hand on the left holds a yellow piece, and the hand on the right holds a blue piece. The pieces are made of a textured material, possibly cardboard or paper. The background is plain white.

by Belinda Tang

# Merging cultures

## IBM's tangible approach

**In countless organizational mergers and acquisitions, culture clash inevitably rears its ugly head. People talk about it, managers fear it, newly merged companies fall victim to it, and yet more often than not we do very little to address it.**

**On** July 30, 2002, IBM announced its intention to acquire Pricewaterhouse Coopers Consulting (PwCC) for \$3.5 billion. The acquisition was considered to be a catalyst for IBM in growing its services business. The acquisition made complete sense, though it was not without risk. In fact, the highest risk in almost any acquisition is the human capital issue. In an A.T. Kearny study of 115 mergers, 58% destroyed business value, and culture was cited as a top barrier to integration. Fundamentally the major challenge for us was to merge the independent partnership culture of Pricewaterhouse Coopers with IBM's culture of operating as a public company.<sup>1</sup>

Fast forward to 2009, IDC (Interactive Data Corp) rates IBM as the #1 services revenue company in the world,<sup>2</sup> more than double the size of its second largest competitors, EDS and Accenture. In the same year, IBM was named in the leaders' quadrant of Gartner Group's Magic Quadrants in Services Oriented Architecture or SOA leadership, in comprehensive HR Business Process Outsourcing and in its business intelligence and performance management businesses.<sup>3</sup>

So...how did IBM and PwCC manage to surpass all expectations and achieve market leadership? There are likely many reasons, but at least one is the successful merger of two different corporate cultures.

At the time IBM acquired PwCC, it had a consulting unit known as Business Innovation Services (BIS), with 30,000 consultants globally. PwCC on the other hand also had approximately 30,000 consultants. Until the time of the acquisition in July 2002, PwCC had announced its intention to go public under an IPO and operate under the company name of MONDAY. The acquisition, therefore, brought about the formation of the world's largest consulting company, operating in over 160 countries. It brought together business consulting, IT consulting, systems integration, and Application Management Services (AMS), including AMS outsourcing.

By and large, the acquisition received very positive market reactions mainly driven by the opportunity that existed in both organizations. Their coming together helped to create a catalyst for market leadership. At the time, there was significant skepticism that existed in audit firms that also have a consulting division. On the other hand, IBM needed something much more to grow the services business than to grow

it organically. The market was ready for the consulting arm (PwCC) of the world's largest accounting firm (PwCC) to team up with another top Fortune 500 player that had the best potential to grow in services.

### **Inside IBM: A values-based culture**

In the professional services business, three words describe the work: Clients, clients, and clients. Equally important is the capability of having the right talent, at the right time, at the right cost, to deliver on clients' needs. Both are vital to the success of a professional services firm, such as PwCC.

Clients and people are also core to the IBM Values: *Dedicated to Every Client's Success, Trust and Personal Responsibility in all our Relationships, and Innovation that Matters—for the company and for the World.* In an interview conducted by the Harvard Business Review, Sam Palmisano, IBM's Chairman and CEO stated, "For one thing, people, rather than products, become your brand. Just as our products have had to be consistent with the IBM brand promise, now more than ever, so do our people."<sup>4</sup>

The IBM Chairman went on to state that contrary to IBM's long tradition of hiring and promoting from within, IBM today has more than half of its employees who have been with the company for less than five years, due to acquisitions (such as the Pricewaterhouse Coopers Consulting, as an example), as well as the of hiring experienced professionals, spawned by the growth of the services business. While the culture, such as that of the former PwCC was described as a risk to IBM in 2002, this transition provided a tremendous opportunity to demonstrate the values-based culture.

### **The integration of two cultures: what was different?**

IBM first established the consulting business in the early 90s, in a business unit named IBM Consulting Group. Nirmal Pal, author of 'The Agile Enterprise' and former executive of IBM Consulting Group, recalls the cultural differences that he noted back then when an external executive was hired to lead IBM Consulting. "He wore a color shirt with loud stripes to meet the IBM Chairman, despite IBM's strict 'blue suit and white shirt' environment."<sup>5</sup> Even at ten years before the acquisition, the cultural differences were already apparent.



Tangible culture is a way to make what is not visible about culture more visible.<sup>7</sup> Tangible Culture is a point of view intended for business people, not for consultants or experts in the topic of culture, but to help enable members to tackle cultural change.<sup>8</sup>

One of the reasons cited by management scholar John Kotter as to why culture is powerful is that it “exerts itself through the actions of hundreds and thousands of people.”<sup>6</sup> In this case, at least 60,000 people, not to mention the other 300,000 employees inside IBM, can be a major factor in organization culture. Communicating expectations to so many people is indeed a daunting undertaking.

In 2002, primary differences in the two organizations can be described as follows:

IBM	PwCC
Corporate organization	Partnership organization
Product orientation	Knowledge / ‘profession’ orientation
Strong sales culture	Strong relationship culture
Highly values teams	Must be free to exercise independent judgment
Job or position based work	Project based work
Operational / process driven	Empowerment through Partners’ decisions
Strong focus on quarterly execution	Longer term and more strategic focus
Technology excellence	Professional Services excellence
Innovation driven by technology	Functional leadership driven by client issues
Globally integrated enterprise	Client centric processes

### Integrating cultures: making it tangible

There were several significant actions taken in the transition period of PwCC acquisition that led to the successful integration of the two cultures. The transition team, made up of senior management and consultants from both companies, worked intensively over the five months prior to the beginning of 2003.

The work to lay the foundation started right from the beginning, with the Culture and Change team. This team took a very practical approach to understanding the culture differences. Knowing that the existing integration toolkit was inadequate, IBM’s team of consultants and researchers developed something new. Their novel approach and methodology to integrating cultures has now become known as IBM’s “tangible culture” methodology, and has even been popularized in an insightful book, *Can Two Rights Make a Wrong? Insights from IBM’s Tangible Culture Approach*, by Sara J. Moulton Reger.

Tangible culture is a way to make what is not visible about culture more visible.<sup>7</sup> Tangible Culture is a point of view intended for business people, not for consultants or experts in the topic of culture, but to help enable members to tackle cultural change.<sup>8</sup> It is aimed at demystifying the topic of business culture—making it more workable.<sup>9</sup> To understand our “tangible culture” methodology, it is useful to define its three main concepts—“business practices”, “right vs right”, and “outcome narratives”. Together, the application of these concepts provided an end-to-end approach to overcome the culture clash issues.<sup>10</sup>

**Business practices.** Business practices, from hiring to performance duties to leadership, represent the invisible hand that drives organizational action. They are the informal rules that tell people how to perform their work. Business practices are a sufficient proxy for the abstract concept of culture since they are easier to see and describe than other culture definitions, and can be acted on directly.

**Right vs. right.** Reger views this notion as “the good thing that can cause big trouble”. In situations like a merger, there can often be a clash of “right vs. right”—actions that are correct for fulfilling the objective yet which are in conflict with each other. Acknowledging “Right vs. right” permits a candid discussion of areas which can impede results. This approach of confronting “right versus right” issues helps to overcome culture clash.

**Outcome narratives.** This is an element of the Tangible Culture approach which teaches us “how to get to the right place the right way”. Outcome narratives is a practical scenario based approach using story telling



to identify likely problems that people would face regularly and where IBM and PwCC had handled them differently.<sup>11</sup> Outcome narratives were developed by the Change and Culture team as a way to clarify expectations. This included writing a series of situations, and documenting the desired outcome for the new organization. This serves as an effective communication tool by identifying the changes that need to be made and by providing a foundation to evaluate progress. By understanding the outcome of the situation in each organization separately, the team can concretely identify the gaps to the desired outcome and the changes needed to be made.<sup>12</sup>

Since culture refers to and shared values among people, using this approach of outcome narratives can be a very telling way to examine the differences in the two cultures. The reason why this had to be addressed in such a real way is that right off the bat, the organization could encounter overlapping responsibilities. For example, two leaders have responsibilities for one client account. If they cannot agree on how to handle a

client business issue, what happens? Outcome narratives address this directly.

From the integration of these two very different cultures to achieving market leadership today, the work to lay the foundation started right from the beginning—and was based on an approach which transformed the intangible concept of culture into a tangible, observable and ultimately measurable goal. Beginning with the desired outcome brings focus to the discussion. The use of such approaches in addressing this often ‘unspoken’ aspect of organization change is critical to ensuring that this is at the top of the integration agenda, after the acquisition. Organizational scholars often remind us that ‘the primary task of management is to get people to work together in a systematic way. Like orchestra conductors, managers direct the talents and actions of various players to produce a desired result ... and the first step in any change initiative must be to assess the level of agreement in the organization’<sup>15</sup>

#### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Gartner Group, Conference Call to clients on the IBM acquisition of PwCC, recorded on August 7, 2002

<sup>2</sup> IDC 2006 Services Business Rankings

<sup>3</sup> Gartner Group 2007 SOA rankings

<sup>4</sup> Kemp, Paul, and Stewart, Thomas A., ‘Leading Change when Business is Good’, and Interview with Sam Palmisano, Harvard Business Review, December 2004, page 4

<sup>5</sup> Reger, Sara J., Moulton, ‘Can Two Rights Make a Wrong?’, page 53

<sup>6</sup> Kotter, ‘Leading Change’, Boston: Harvard Business School Press 2003, page 150-151

<sup>7</sup> Reger, Sara J., Moulton, ‘Can Two Rights Make a Wrong?’, page 8

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, page 4

<sup>9</sup> Reger, Sara J., Moulton, ‘Can Two Rights Make a Wrong?’, page xxiii

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, page 104

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, page 53

<sup>12</sup> Reger, Sara J., Moulton, ‘Can Two Rights Make a Wrong?’, page 54

<sup>13</sup> Christensen, Clayton, Marx, Matt, and Stevenson, Howard H., ‘The Tools of Cooperation and Change’, page 73-74

Belinda Tang (MHRM 2009) is Vice President, Human Resources for IBM Global Services North America



# Blogging your way to change

## Technology's role in strategic change initiatives



➤ The “ultimate” tool to manage change effectively in an organization is the holy grail of Human Resources. HR theorists have conducted extensive research and philosophized on the “best” process for change. Despite all this energy and effort, theorists don’t agree on what the “best practice” is to drive change; though extensive literature exists, there is no one central unifying principle. What theorists do agree on is that communication forms the cornerstone of many of these processes. With increasing pressure of external influences on businesses, “the accelerating pace of change demands more flexible and adaptive organizations”.<sup>1</sup>

With such demands, what new and innovative forms of communication can help the change process unfold in an organization? Exploring new “tools” for

facilitating change in the workplace becomes more important for an HR practitioner; to be effective in the process of change, they must be well aware of new technology trends in communication, in addition to how, and where, they increase the effectiveness of the message.

One only need look as far as the recent “change movement” in the US Presidential election to see the power of technology in facilitating influence. Many commentaries have noted that perhaps the reason the Obama campaign was so successful was because of his ability to use technology to his advantage. Employing media such as blogs, podcasts, and even iPhone applications to sign up voters, he ran one of the most successful “change” campaigns the world has ever seen.

### The Context for the Question

In my own career, technology has impacted the way HR professionals do business substantially. Some of the advances I have seen include televised or web-broadcasted “town halls” where employers can engage in two-way communication with thousands of employees in multiple locations. Social forums such as Facebook and Twitter have become a means to organize employees and spread opinions about the workplace. It only makes sense then, that HR professionals be cognizant of technology not only to remain competitive, but also to keep in touch with what employees are participating in.

IBM has a long history of using online brainstorming sessions to mine for new business opportunities and to exchange ideas about good management. IBM initiated their famous Values Jam a number of years ago—a clear demonstration of the power of technology in facilitating change. Their 2003 Values Jam took place over 72 hours and asked over 300,000 employees to brainstorm their ideas about what IBM does, how they act and what they stand for. CEO Samuel Palmisano spearheaded the jam which yielded an extensive supply of ideas and criticisms about the gap between IBM’s image and their actual behaviour. This powerful



information not only provided the impetus for change but primed employees for change—inspiring them to contribute to the development of a new strategic direction.

Having recently moved to a new organization, I find myself part of a mature company in the process of a large change movement. Re-creating a new “brand”, and with this, developing an employee value proposition, they have used new technology to help spread their messages. One of these tools includes a topical blog that invites feedback on issues surrounding some of the proposed changes. Seeing this tool in action sparked my questions surrounding what HR professionals were doing to communicate change and the effectiveness of those media.

Recently, I asked a number of HR professionals, in different industries, what types of technological tools their organizations use to facilitate change. A common response—blogs.

It seems that blogs are quite common employee communication tools in today’s computer-focused world. Blogs allow for two-way dialog on topics, and prove a great tool to bring together people across time and geography; it is a great alternative to “brainstorming” or feedback meetings. Some organizations that take advantage of the Internet go even farther and dedicate entire intranet sites to the subject of Managing Change. Other common practices include webinars and podcasts to disseminate information or generate discussions on topics. Participants to these sessions can actually “speak” to the change drivers themselves over the Internet—either by typing or asking questions via a chat interface. Alternatively, these forums are used as a training medium for large or dispersed groups.

To help change workflow habits, some organizations utilized an automated attendance-tracking program of sorts. For instance, in the call center industry, associates can let a supervisor know when they are busy with a customer, when they are on break, when then are on lunch—all through the associates computer terminal, where they can “sign-on” or “sign-off” as needed. Through associates managing their own behaviour, the employees can assist in managing efficiency and, on a greater scale, increase competitiveness, customer service levels, and productivity. I have seen this technology in action in my own workplace. Though you might expect resentment to this structured system, when asked, associates have described to me how important it was to serve the customers in a timely fashion and how it actually helped them manage their own workload. By signaling to their managers when they need “time” for breaks or to work on files, they are enabled to manage the flow of customers efficiently, rather than be overwhelmed. Among our associates, it also increased the perception of fairness and equity in workloads, as the system not only held them accountable, but also their peers.

Perhaps not as innovative as it once was, larger organizations continue to operate their own TV channels to broadcast information. This venue allows messages to be delivered from the “horse’s mouth” so to speak, and can offer associates the opportunity to watch their CEO speak on an issue. Finally, and perhaps the most interesting (and potentially annoying) medium I heard about was the use of computer “pop-ups” which would appear on the user’s screen as a notice or reminder of something impacting the employee.

These methods clearly only touch the surface of the capabilities and choices organizations can access from the realm of technology. All seem to come with a variety of benefits and opportunities. For instance, blogs can be viewed as a “low touch” way of communicating, meaning there is little to maintain day-to-day. The organization simply needs to enter their message and then request commentary. Though the “front-end” of this messaging appears simple, to manage the flow and conversation, as well as respond, requires a significant amount of monitoring and maintenance to keep the message relevant. Tools like webinars and podcasts can bring together large groups that may never have the opportunity to “see” or hear senior leaders speak. In the past, I know I have been inspired by watching a passionate, charismatic leader speak to issues going on in my organization.



One only needs to look as far as the recent “change movement” in the US Presidential election to see the power of technology in facilitating influence.



Using these forms of media, as one of my peers noted, organizations might be seen as losing some of its “human touch”. With this in mind, does the research in the area of change management support the use of technology as a tool for communication?

Many management scholars still endorse face-to-face communication as a core method in spreading messages. However, they also note that the “best response involves multiple communications devices” in as many forms as possible. Specifically, “the best practices emphasize technology as well as “touch”. The most effective employee communication programs couple a liberal and imaginative use of high technology (television and email for instance) with high touch strategy that involves face-to-face and personalized communications”.<sup>2</sup>

The power of technology is illustrated in the example of FedEx and its acquisition of a rival freight



business. In order to reach all their employees, FedEx used daily company news broadcasts over their internal television station to help reach the 35,000 people involved, in 800 locations.<sup>3</sup> Leaders in the organization noted that such forums “made the company what [they] were”; through this means to “reach” their employees with direct messages, they were able to maintain profitability and relationships with their employees despite their size.

We know that mature organizations renew themselves by increasing their capacity for change.<sup>4</sup> Specifically, they need to reduce the time in which they make decisions. One advantage many of these technologically advanced media provide is increased efficiency in dissemination of a message. Using different media as tools will aid in the increased capacity for change through allowing people to come together in a way that will aid in making decisions at a faster pace.

It is clear there is support for the use of technologically advanced media to communicate change, but there are also some caveats. Through examining this dual perspective some general recommendations, or “best practices” can be proposed.

## Best Practices

**Use a Mix of media.** It is only reasonable that an organization would take advantage of every medium available to make change work. Tapping into new technologies will result in a broader scope of influence and in “touching” more of your employees than ever possible. Using new technology in addition to some traditional

means of communication, such as face-to-face meetings, will also help organizations retain that personal touch.

**Select the media based on the message.** It is important to examine what the message will be, and who makes up your audience. There may be times that certain media are inappropriate to the content or fail to convey the message properly i.e. no one wants to be downsized via webcast!

**Encourage participation.** Though posts or pop-ups may get the attention of associates, for larger or more “important” change issues, employees need to give feedback, ask questions and have them answered openly and honestly. Thus selecting media that allow for two-way communication is often preferable.

**Ensure follow up.** It is not just what information you get from the feedback that is important, it is what you do with it that is also key. As with any forum where feedback or concerns are received, using that information, and communicating how you have used it, is equally important.

Rather than shy away from technology in favor of a more “personalized” or traditional approach, HR professionals need to harness the capabilities of these tools and integrate them into their current change management processes in this technologically savvy world.

Amber Cooper (MHRM 2008) is a Senior HR Advisor in Talent Acquisition and Consulting with the Insurance Corporation of British Columbia.



## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Malhotra, Yogesh. (1993). Role of Information Technology in Managing Organizational Change and Organizational Interdependence. From <http://www.brint.com/papers/change/>

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<sup>3</sup> Young, Mary and Post, James E. (1993) Manage to Communicate, Communicate to Manage. *Organizational Dynamics*. Summer. P 353.

<sup>4</sup> Beatty, Richard W and Ulrich, David O. (1991) “Re-energizing the Mature Organization.” From *Managing Change*. 44-58

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# Leading teams in a new direction

For situations ranging from corporate turf wars to conflicts between nations, Harvard professor Todd Pittinsky discusses why leaders need to get teams to think differently about each other



**HR EDGE:** *You have asserted that team leaders often spend too much time on “leading by dividing.” What do you mean by that?*

**TP:** Leaders often try to solidify their standing within their own groups by stirring up hostility or rivalry with other groups. That’s called the *ingroup/outgroup leadership trade-off* and it’s pretty common because it can work. An atmosphere of “us versus them” really can give a leader a boost in status and power. You can see it in sports, business, and international relations. How much team spirit has been stoked up by getting everyone to hate the Yankees or Microsoft?

**HR EDGE:** *Is the notion of a “common enemy” (“us versus them”) necessarily a bad thing for leaders to emphasize? Can’t it create greater cohesiveness among team members?*

together. It’s tough because the leader has to consider the well-being of people outside his or her formal group and formal responsibility. They may even be mortal enemies.

**HR EDGE:** *What is involved in adopting the intergroup leadership style?*

**TP:** Bringing groups together involves two quite different tasks that can easily be mistaken for flips sides of the same task. One is the reduction of prejudice, discrimination, and hostility. The other is the promotion of just the opposite—positive feelings toward the “other.” Not “tolerance,” mind you, but *positive* feelings, which I call *allophilia*. If one group vilifies the members of another group, that’s prejudice. If they couldn’t care less about the other group, that’s tolerance. Better than prejudice, for sure, but still not that great. If they are glad to engage the members of that group, that’s *allophilia*.

**HR EDGE:** *Based on your research, what are some of the specific techniques of intergroup leadership?*

**TP:** I’ve found at least five recurring tactics used by leaders who aim to bring differing groups together. Each is well studied in the scholarly literature, too. Probably the most fundamental one is promoting personal contact. Often the members of groups in conflict have little to no direct contact with each other. It seems common sense that personal contact between members of different groups could help give each group a better feeling about the other. An example would be to pair the members of two rival high school gangs and have them sit together in a classroom with shared desks. One of my students did research on how universities can encourage multidisciplinary studies and overcome the isolation of various departments from each other. One good way was to move two departments into the same building.

**HR EDGE:** *Does simply ensuring more contact bring groups closer together?*

**TP:** Not necessarily. Research by social scientists confirms that this is helpful, but with important caveats that are not so obvious. Leaders need to take into account the classic research done by Gordon Allport—and the many researchers who have followed in his footsteps—who have argued that fulfilling certain conditions increased the positive effects of contact. For example, the members of the groups who have contact with each other need to be of equal status. They need to have common goals. They should be cooperating on something. They need the support of some acknowledged authority. The Peace Corps, for example, may have had a greater effect due to John F. Kennedy’s stirring public endorsement than it would have had

The point of promoting a common identity among the groups is to turn “us” and “them” into “we.” And these categories are very important because we humans, like it or not, are natural categorizers.

**TP:** Sure it can. The problem is what else it might do, which the leader may not have intended. The ingroup/outgroup leadership trade-off isn’t always intended to cause conflict. In fact, it isn’t always intended at all. The goal may just be strong leadership. But strong leadership is naturally associated with feelings of group connectedness. That’s fine, but the more intensely a group feels its own solidarity, the more “other” everyone else may seem and the easier it can be to end up in conflict with them. It’s no accident that revving up a team effort is often called “rallying the troops”—in the end, what are troops for but to fight?

**HR EDGE:** *What is the alternative to leading by dividing?*

**TP:** There are plenty of alternatives. Leaders aren’t always stirring up trouble. Most of the time they have better things to do. But when there is an “other” and that “other” really does have a lot to do with your own group’s future, how do you lead? In situations ranging from ethnic gang rivalries to corporate turf battles to conflicts between nations, leaders face the challenge of changing how different groups think and feel about each other. So, to answer your question, the alternative to leading by dividing that most interests me is what I call *intergroup leadership*—leading by bringing groups

as a private project. Leaders also need to remember that there are always multiple factors at work. For instance, a famous study took place at a boys' summer camp where two cabins of boys, the "Rattlers" and the "Eagles," had to compete. Even though both groups were in daily contact, the hostility between them actually *increased* rather than decreased. Whatever good was being done by the contact was being undone by the intense competition.

**HR EDGE:** *So how does a leader diffuse the conflict that can arise through competition?*

**TP:** Again, research offers at least two options for leaders—promoting a common goal and promoting a common identity. Introducing a common goal to members of different groups can be an incredibly powerful tool for bringing them together. At the boy's camp, the researchers mitigated the competition between the two groups by giving both teams goals they had to work on together. This tactic led to a complete change in the boys' attitudes toward each other. A real-life international example can be found in the former Yugoslavia. During the Cold War, Yugoslavia's multiple ethnic groups, who were certainly competitive and even hostile toward each other, held together to achieve a common goal—to remain as free as possible from the influence of both superpowers.

Common goals are particularly effective when groups must negotiate with each other over a limited resource, such as funding from corporate headquarters. Or, as is increasingly the case for nations, water! In such cases, cooperating with members of another group helps people revise their prejudices and—if the cooperation is managed carefully—gives people in different groups a chance to develop trust in each other. When it comes to common goals, more may be better. While one common goal can help reduce negative attitudes and relations, a more permanent reduction can result from a *series of goals* that require cooperation.

**HR EDGE:** *And how does promoting a common identity further mitigate conflict?*

**TP:** The point of promoting a common identity among the groups is to turn "us" and "them" into "we." And these categories are very important because we humans, like it or not, are natural categorizers. There are good survival reasons for that and there are some rotten consequences of it, but it's there and it has to be dealt with. There's plenty of research showing that people apply somewhat different rules of fairness and judgment to "us" and "them." We are even more likely to trust someone in our own group and to ascribe good motives to his or her actions. That makes it easier to settle differences. So, to the extent that we can categorize some other group as "us," there is a better

chance for settling differences without conflict.

But sometimes that's just impossible—the membership in different groups is clear and salient. Or it may be possible for a while, but very often in the real world feelings of "us" and "them" come back. Differences are just too real and too important to be "recategorized" away. And this is where I focus my work, and where I believe the *allophilia* model of intergroup leadership offers an alternative. If we have positive feelings about another group, we can get some of the benefits of thinking of them as "us" even without thinking of them as "us." Allophilia, in other words, refers to those cases in which a group is categorized as "other"—definitely not "us"—and yet is treated with some of the same trust we accord to our own category. It sounds abstract, but in fact, people do this all the time and we just need to learn much more about it and make more use of it. Researchers have to often assumed "us and them" must be defined by the presence or absence of antipathy, rather than by comfort, kinships, enthusiasm and the whole host of positive attitudes of which humans are capable.



When it comes to common goals, more may be better. While one common goal can help reduce negative attitudes and relations, a more permanent reduction can result from a *series of goals* that require cooperation.



**HR EDGE:** *You've spoken elsewhere of "focusing on dual identities" as another important tactic. Can you explain that a bit?*

**TD:** Sure. This is one of those human characteristics that seems to make life extra difficult for social science researchers but, in fact, could make life a lot better for people all over the world if we just knew more about it and how to make the best use of it.

Now let me back up a second. While encouraging groups to focus on a common identity can have many positive effects, researchers have found it can sometimes *increase* their mutual hostility. What goes wrong is that promoting the common identity comes at the cost of challenging or even threatening the group identities people already cherish. This has happened in Turkey, where the creation of a new common identity known as "Turks" was accomplished early in the 20th century by suppressing various group identities—Moslem, Armenian, Jewish, Kurdish, and so on. Almost a century later, some

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of those identities are once again demanding to be acknowledged. My own country—the United States—is full of people who feel very strongly that they are American but just as strongly that they are Puerto Rican or Greek or Navajo or any host of ethnic groups. There’s nothing wrong with this, it’s just part of the richness of real human experience. So a more successful approach to intergroup leadership might be to promote both identities. Perhaps the most commonly discussed example of this is the European Union: Citizens of the member counties are encouraged to think of themselves both as “European” (a shared identity) and as British, French, Spanish, and so on. Now these two identities do often clash because a lot is at stake, but on the whole it seems to be working.

**HR EDGE:** *The final tactic you advocate, promoting allophilia, seems to go beyond the traditional notion of just breaking down group stereotypes and prejudices. How does allophilia change the game?*

**TP:** It has long been obvious that leaders need to reduce prejudices and negative attitudes toward those who are different in order to improve relations between different groups—ethnic, religious, national, organizational, professional, generational, and so on. Negative attitudes toward others can lead to discrimination, hostility, and even violence. But recent research has shown that reducing negative attitudes is only half the challenge. So, as I said earlier, leaders also have to create or beef up the positive feelings that members of one group have toward another group, the feelings I call *allophilia*. These feelings include appreciation, affection, kinship, comfort, and interest. The point is

that we can feel these things about others in all their otherness, without having to think of them as being just like us.

The reason this is so important—the reason that tolerance is not good enough—is that allophilia will motivate acts of good will toward members of other groups, such as standing up against a bully or supporting a piece of legislation which will help that group. Mere tolerance doesn’t provide such motivation. In fact, tolerance isn’t really a motivating force at all; it’s just the absence of a negative force. To transform an overgrown lot into a garden, you need to pull the weeds, but you also need to plant flowers. Reducing negative attitudes is picking weeds; promoting allophilia is planting flower seeds, too.

**HR EDGE:** *What advice do you give to leaders who want to pursue intergroup leadership?*

**TP:** First, I say: Don’t get caught up in the idea of needing to be an “inspired” leader. This is slow, careful work that requires research, planning, consistency, follow-through, and course correction. Intergroup leaders need tactics. They need enough self-discipline to steer away from easy tactics for consolidating power that also tend to incite conflict between groups. And they need enough skill and persistence to push people beyond their habitual or traditional attitudes and behaviors. Followers do not always take kindly to intergroup leadership; it’s more fun to have a leader who favors “us.” Having said all that, I say: This is one of the finest things you can choose to do. Go for it.



## PROFESSOR TODD PITTINSKY

Todd L. Pittinsky is an Associate Professor of Public Policy and a core faculty member of Harvard's Center for Public Leadership at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. He also serves as Research Director of the Kennedy School's Center for Public Leadership. Dr. Pittinsky earned his B.A. in psychology from Yale University, his M.A. in psychology from Harvard, and his Ph.D. in organizational behavior from the Harvard Graduate School of Arts and Sciences. Recently profiled in *The Economist* magazine, his research explores positive intergroup attitudes (*allophilia*) and how leaders can use them to bring groups together.

## ***CROSSING THE DIVIDE* (MCGRAW HILL 2009), EDITED BY TODD PITTINSKY**

Bringing groups together is a central and unrelenting task of leadership. CEOs must nudge their executives to rise above divisional turf battles, mayors try to cope with gangs in conflict, and leaders of many countries face the realities of sectarian violence. *Crossing the Divide* introduces cutting-edge research and insight into these age-old problems. This collection of essays brings together two powerful scholarly disciplines: intergroup relations and leadership. What emerges is a new mandate for leaders to reassess what have been regarded as some very successful tactics for building group cohesion. In this multidisciplinary volume, highly regarded business scholars, social psychologists, policy experts, and interfaith activists provide not only theoretical frameworks around these ideas, but also practical tools and specific case studies. Examples from around the world and from every sector—corporate, political, and social—bring to life the art and practice of intergroup leadership in the twenty-first century.



by Ken McBey



# Partnering with the BI Norwegian School of Management

**I'M** delighted to provide a few details about our distinguished international academic partner, the BI Norwegian School of Management.

Housed in the Department of Leadership and Organizational Psychology, BI's Graduate Human Resources Management program offers a wide variety of HRM Masters' courses, including interesting electives such as Stress and Productivity; Leadership; Creativity & Organizations; Organizations & Learning; and Persuasion & Influence. The curriculum is taught entirely in the English language.

Established in 1943, the BI Norwegian School of Management is Norway's third largest university, and the largest Business School in Europe with 329 faculty members, 692 staff personnel, and 18,700 students, half of whom are women. As befits an institution with its international reputation, 788 of these students are international students, emanating from 63 different countries.

Professor Astrid Richardsen, BI's Associate Dean and an expert in the field of work stress and burnout, encourages York MHRM students to take advantage of an invaluable opportunity to get exposure to European HRM trends and practices, and to develop broader international HRM experience and a network of contacts for the future.

BI Norwegian School of Management is located in Oslo, 'Scandinavia's Sunniest Capital', a modern city of 570,000 surrounded by forest and fjords, amply blessed with cafes, bars, discos, restaurants, theatres, cinemas, art galleries, and museums. Student nirvana! Norway, a peaceful, clean and safe country with a population of almost 5 million people, is indisputably one of the most beautiful countries on earth, blessed with an abundance of forests, fjords, mountains and breathtaking scenery. It is also renowned for its high standard of living and is consistently ranked with Canada at the very top of United Nations' Quality of Life Indicators, acknowledging the best countries in which to live.

York MHRM students who have successfully completed a minimum of two 'core/required' courses are encouraged to apply early to Deb Jamieson (GPA) for consideration for this international exchange program as spaces are limited!



# the new balancing act



**With** more women reaching positions of power and influence, there has been much debate in recent years on whether executive women can “have it all,” meaning a high-powered career and a family. A generally pessimistic stance has hovered over this debate, however, whereby career ambitions and close family relationships are viewed as irreconcilable for women. One particularly loud message in the popular press has been the “opting out”

of professional women who are presumably choosing motherhood over career. Putting aside the real reasons behind these trends, if they are trends at all, the prevailing message remains that a choice must be made.

Certainly, ambitious women must be educated about the challenges ahead. Empirical findings have been consistent in finding that men and women follow different paths to senior management in that women experience barriers to advancement known as the “glass ceiling.” As recently as 2000, almost 50% of firms in the *Fortune* 1000 had no women among senior management, and perhaps only 6% of CEOs in these firms will be women by 2016 if current trends continue (see the study of Helfat, Harris, and Wolfson in *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 2006).

In terms of combining executive career with a family, social norms and workplace cultures converge to create very different pictures for men and women. Women generally do not have access to full-time help from husbands comparable to what stay-at-home wives provide men, which lessens their ability to devote themselves to the requirements of career advancement, and executives or not, we know that they still assume the bulk of domestic work. Single executive women, on the other hand, are said to have a hard time finding eligible mates given that accomplished men are not always interested in an equally accomplished woman as partner. There is evidence to suggest that the more “vulnerable” the woman, the more attractive. Thus, executive success can mean trouble in the marriage department. Women also have a biological clock to live with and find that their ambitions are overrunning their emotional and physical time to nurture relationships and their biological timing to parent.

But with that said, research also shows that succeeding at a single endeavor seldom amounts to feelings of genuine success and fulfillment and that the benefits of combining career and family far outweigh the stresses. This is especially true for women. Studies show that working outside the home is actually good for women’s parenting and not a cause of child delinquency and poor school performance as some conservative pundits would suggest.

My study with Kristen Ritchey hoped to elucidate how some women perceived to “have it all” balanced executive work with family. Through referral, we identified 25 executive women who were in an intimate relationship, whether or not it involved an official marriage or children. Their titles included CEO, President, and Vice President and they ran organizations ranging from private businesses, publicly traded companies, government agencies, to nonprofits across various industries. Together we discussed their career progression, challenges encountered along the way, and coping strategies. Their case histories illustrate the dynamic nature of career/family balance, the changing importance of roles over time, and that tradeoffs do not necessarily come with unhappiness. The findings offer a measure of hope that choices between career and family can be avoided and that the discourse of ambition and choice can be redirected. I present here a few of the strategies espoused by our subjects to combine career and family.

### Character matters

It seems that the very act of dealing with career and family challenges requires a certain character and outlook on life. One of our subjects spoke of personal responsibility and a service orientation and another of tenacity and self-confidence. Liz, a corporate executive turned entrepreneur, emphasized measured risk-taking, while Beatrice, university president, stressed the importance of optimism. Despite being passed over for promotion numerous times, she “knew it would all work out in the end.” Blending executive work with family also requires education, organization, and self-management as well as the need to periodically engage in self-scrutiny and reflection. Finally, the women entertained a belief system contrary to that of the public discourse in that they rejected notions of choice and felt entitled to “have it all.”

### It matters where you work

We also found that women had to carefully consider the cultures and norms of their employing industries and organization. Some of our women had a clear vision of the path ahead of them while others had reached their leadership aspirations rather serendipitously. Others later found that their choices were not the right ones and switched gears. Regardless, they had attained senior ranks, had access to supportive work relationships, and enjoyed collegial esteem. Ambitious women must remember that despite the wide availability of family policies, organizations vary in their normative assumptions about commitment and performance and the extent that they acknowledge the pull of family exercised on people which will shape women’s advancement and their ability to combine career and family. Women must be conscious of their choices, but this does not necessarily mean that they must shy away from male-dominated environments.

One of our subjects stated that she was “allowed to fly” in a very masculine engineering environment, however, she had nearly full-time support at home from her entrepreneur spouse. Thus, women must evaluate their support structure against the norms of their professional domains.

### It takes a village

We also found that it truly takes a village for ambitious women to combine career and family. Our subjects broke glass ceilings and raised families in part because they created complex support systems at work, home, and in the community. This finding is in line with what we know about women’s coping and their reliance on social exchange for both wellbeing and career success. We also found that women can compensate for the lack of support in one area by developing support networks elsewhere.

*Research also shows that succeeding at a single endeavor seldom amounts to feelings of genuine success and fulfillment and that the benefits of combining career and family far outweigh the stresses.*

### It matters whom you marry

Our subjects’ experiences illustrate a wide range of supportive stances from partners, ranging from difficult marriages ending in separation to relationships where the husband “sublimated himself” for his wife, in the words of one subject. Many indicated that ambitious women should carefully choose their life partner. The partner’s lifestyle and career outlook are important as is a common background to foster his support for both the woman’s career and family. Some referred to their mother-in-law in shaping their husband’s support for her career. Michelle, vice president of a record label, mentioned that husband Derek was raised by a mother who stayed at home, describing this as a “powerful model” that will likely influence Derek’s expectations towards her.

### Life strategies

In addition to holding a certain belief system and drawing on social support at home and at work, the women negotiated the partner’s support, outsourced much of the domestic work, and “sequenced” career and family. Though most of the marriages were supportive, our subjects still had to negotiate matters such as house-

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work division and whose career takes precedence. Nancy, vice president of a global outplacement firm, indicated that her career advancement was subject to her husband's moves. Some justified their accommodative stance as a "gender thing" whereby women are simply more sensitive than men to the realities of their context. Nevertheless, even the most traditional men can evolve. One military husband who had spent a lifetime enacting the traditional role of breadwinner evolved into a stay-at-home husband upon retirement and as his wife's career soared. Another strategy was outsourcing. The women agreed that they had to be choosy with the roles they played and that outsourcing housework was simply necessary and made accessible by their income. At times, it is a way of navigating the partner's support and avoiding domestic disputes. Finally, our subjects either "sequenced" career and family or pursued both in tandem. When career and family took turns, some women chose to devote themselves to family and childrearing before they seriously pursued their leadership ambitions. For others, delaying marriage, delaying childbearing, or deciding not to have children were necessary for their career advancement. There was recognition that the arrival of children can "traditionalize" the most egalitarian of marriages. The strategy of living life in a chapter-like fashion suggests that work-life "balance" is not a daily state of affairs but a continuously reexamined goal that unfolds over a lifetime. There may be periods in people's lives where one or a few roles assume prominence to the necessary detriment of others. Thus, instead of asking, "Am I in a state of balance today?", one should ask whether one's actions are conducive to balance over time.

Our findings have indirectly lead us to revisit the expressions that we use in describing people's at-

tempts to lead rich and multifaceted lives, namely the vague and sometimes anxiety-provoking expressions of "having it all" and "family balance." We believe the expression "having it all" is misleading in all of its three words. Enjoyment of social roles such as that of leader or parent are evidently not things to be had but roles to be experienced. The words "it" and "all" are vague and denote "everything" when no one really can or wants to have everything or do everything. In fact, many of our subjects had deliberately "sacrificed" other interests to focus on being executives and parents. But they were still fulfilled in their lives even if that feeling was not felt every day or if it took a lifetime to experience.

The widely used expression "work-life balance" also has its limitations, beginning with the lack of an agreed-upon definition. The literature is replete with a variety of definitions including the simple assuming of multiple roles to equity and fairness in how time and resources are distributed between roles. Some have argued that the word "balance" makes people focus on parity between the various aspects of their existence instead of leading one integrated and meaningful life. Balance also implies a distinction between work and everything else when there are no such distinctions when people love what they do. The word "life" in "work-life balance" can also mean different things to different people and sometimes include cultural and religious components that we do not usually address. Perhaps rethinking our language will encourage us to revisit the assumption of an either-or choice between career and family for women.

Dr. Souha Ezzedeen is Assistant Professor, School of HRM, York University



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by Steve McKenna, Parbudyal Singh & Julia Richardson

# Advancing HRM for the need multiple paradigms



Understandably, as the discipline grows and evolves, HRM scholars continue to revisit its parameters and objectives: **What is its core focus? What are its unique characteristics? Is it a science? . . .** To effectively address these questions we need to think critically about our entire approach to the study of HRM.

● The human resource management (HRM) field has experienced significant growth since its inception about a century ago. Commencing as a minor area of specialization and oftentimes regarded as a ‘sub theme’ of other fields such as industrial relations, it is now very much a field in its own right. Its status in the academic community, for example, is reflected in dedicated journals, associations and undergraduate and postgraduate study. Understandably, as the discipline grows and evolves, HRM scholars continue to revisit its parameters and objectives: What is its core focus? What are its unique characteristics? Is it a science? If so, how is it different from, or similar to, other sciences? What are the assumptions necessary for a science of HRM? Is there a grand theory of HRM? Is a grand theory needed? Clearly, these are broad ranging questions which merit serious attention. To effectively address these questions we need to think critically about our entire approach to the study of HRM. This requires a careful examination of the assumptions or paradigms that currently guide our approach to its study.

In North America the study of HRM is dominated by a one-dimensional scholarly approach or paradigm, a paradigm that can offer insights in many ways, but can also exclude other equally important ways of understanding HRM. This approach we refer to as a “positivist paradigm” which is characterized by a focus on discovering ‘truths’ and cause-effect relationships that point towards ‘best’ ways of doing HRM.

There is, for example, a tendency among some North American-based scholars to view HRM as a relatively narrow field that can be located at a specific point on a continuum between ‘macro’ and ‘micro’ approaches to the study of organizations that includes organizational behaviour, industrial/organizational psychology, organizational theory, and strategic management. By comparison HRM scholarship outside of North America embraces more “holistic” concerns that take into account the organizational context in which HRM is practiced; the political and non-rational dimensions of organizational life as they influence HRM practice and; the socio-cultural dimension of HR.

These broader approaches are less concerned with discovering ‘truths’ about how HRM should be done, and more concerned with understanding how HRM is *actually* done. These approaches also move beyond an attempt to identify better ‘techniques’ to manage work-

forces and are concerned with the deeper meaning of these techniques. For example, is psychological testing more about classifying and measuring employees for control and compliance, than for performance?

It is also important to note that the definition of what HRM is (or isn’t) will influence the kind of studies carried out by scholars. For example, European views of HRM include a multidisciplinary dimension that is influenced by and encompasses economics, industrial relations, the sociology of work and organizations, organizational behaviour, social and organizational psychology, political science and anthropology. In contrast, in North America, HRM began as a field of inquiry around the time of World War I, with the merging of “scientific management,” the welfare work movement, and industrial psychology. Labelling the work of Frederick Taylor and associates as *scientific* management is, in itself, a telling indicator of the nature of scholarly thought in North America at that time.

It was believed that the study of people within organizations could be a ‘science’. In relation to HRM it was felt that ‘scientific’ discoveries could be made that showed how best individual and organizational performance could be enhanced through the use of HRM techniques. It was also assumed that theories and “laws” of HRM could be developed and universally applied across similar work settings as prescriptions for action. These assumptions, cornerstones of the positivist paradigm or perspective, continue to dominate HRM scholarship. Frederick Taylor utilized time and motion studies to improve work efficiency in ways that could be generalized across multiple organizational settings. This methodology marked the beginning of HRM as a ‘science’, characterized by a quantitatively oriented research practice which could in turn be used to develop ‘best’ work practices. While those in the welfare work movement tried to mitigate the negative effects of the early industrialized work environment with paternalistic benefits, scholars in industrial psychology have, to a large extent, cemented the field firmly in the domain of positivism. In fact, the contemporary focus on industrial/organizational (I/O) psychology in North America is a distinguishing feature of HRM scholarship, emphasizing ‘good science’ by replicating the study of the natural and physical world.



## Assumptions of the conventional approach to the study of HRM

While the field of HRM has evolved through the human relations movement and more recently into the era of strategic HRM, the overall approach to conducting empirical study has remained relatively consistent. In fact, the field of industrial and organizational psychology, a field of importance in the micro-level study of HRM in North America, remains largely embedded in the conventional positivist paradigm.

Implicit in positivist paradigms is the idea that if certain prescriptions are followed, because they derive from systematically conducted research activity, precise desirable outcomes can be expected and, indeed, predicted. Thus, it is argued, that individual human actions can be predicted, at least to some extent, because of the 'scientific' method that underpins it, yet, as long ago as 1955, the psychologist Gordon Allport, noted that "concepts derived from method can tell us only about method and nothing about the nature of man's being or becoming".

Positivist research in HRM is driven with a concern for the better management of the 'human resource', seeking to provide HR managers with better 'tools' with which to manage employment relations. While this approach is important and might offer much in the way of prescriptive tools for HRM practitioners, it is not the only approach to guide scholarly thinking and professional practice in HRM. We can add much wealth to the study and practice of HRM by looking at the organizational world through different perspectives based in disciplines other than industrial and organizational psychology.

So what other paradigms help move HR thinking forward?

Some scholars talk and write about *relativist* or *interpretivist* paradigms, which reflect an alternative set of assumptions to positivism about the social world and which provide a conceptual framework for its study. These assumptions include, the idea that there are many possible truths, not just 'one best way', and that the actual lived experiences of people are much more important than abstractions about how they *should* live. Thus interpretivism is partly concerned with knowing about experience and context. A corollary of this assumption is that individual action can only be understood and interpreted by investigating the experiences and thinking of actors in the social world and contexts in which they operate. In relation to HRM the implication is that what HRM is will depend on the context in which it operates. There are no 'laws' that govern the way to 'do' HRM. Rather, it is negotiated into practice by managers and employees interpreting policies, programmes and practices. How HRM practices operate has little to do with how 'scientific' they are but how people actually use and abuse them.

Through a range of qualitative methods such as

single and multiple case-studies, interviewing and non-participant observation in a variety of organizations, a more detailed and nuanced picture emerges of how HRM initiatives and practices actually work. Managers may want the latest HRM fad and fashion, but such fads more often constitute interesting rhetoric and discourse than a useful technique. What becomes important is not whether the latest fad is useful in any meaningful way but whether an HR manager knows about it!

There are a number of important benefits in broadening our view of HRM. First, it suggests that those on the 'receiving-end' of HRM initiatives (employees) are not passive recipients but construct and negotiate HRM in practice. Managers do not simply impose HRM they construct and negotiate how it operates with employees even in non-union environments. Second, research on those impacted by HRM initiatives helps to develop new ways of assessing the value of HRM, such as sense of justice and perceptions of gain and loss of employees through such initiatives.

Alternative ways of understanding HRM in practice suggest that HRM practices emerge and evolve from interactions between people within specific organizational circumstances. Here the emphasis is on analyzing and understanding what *actually happens* rather than what should happen. The link between analysis and practice is facilitated in that we have a better understanding of what people *actually* do rather than what 'science' says they *should* do. This allows practitioners to reflect on the extent to which their own actions, judgements, biases and attitudes produce what they end up managing as HRM.

## Towards a dynamic approach to HRM theory and practice: multiple paradigms

There is a critical need to utilize alternative research processes and techniques as part of a composite, and ultimately richer and more valuable, body of HRM scholarship. Given that HRM is fundamentally an applied discipline, knowing what employees make of HRM initiatives is of obvious importance.

Alternative approaches can bring attention to the underlying political, emotional and negotiated processes that influence the creation and operation of HRM practices. Knowledge of these processes enables researchers and practitioners to engage with them more effectively. HRM should be viewed from many perspectives. Such multiple approaches can also facilitate the development of more equitable systems of managing the employment relationship. HRM scholarship and practice should not be about the production and failed implementation of the latest fad and fashionable idea based on 'good science', but about understanding the 'real' nature of the employment relationship and acting in the interests of developing more humane organizational systems rather than better management techniques of control.



Dr. Steve McKenna is Associate Professor, School of HRM, York University



Dr. Parbudyal Singh is Associate Professor, School of HRM, York University



Dr. Julia Richardson is Associate Professor, School of HRM, York University

## HR Scholarship & Leadership

# Professor Monica Belcourt

Earlier this year, Professor Monica Belcourt of York University's School of Human Resource Management received the inaugural Right Management HR Academic of the Year Award at the 2009 Human Resources Summit Awards gala in Toronto by the Human Resources Professionals Association (HRPA) and *Canadian HR Reporter*.

This prestigious award is given to those Canadian HR scholars who have made outstanding contributions to the human resources profession and business community through the creation of innovative human resources programs and practices as well as through demonstrated leadership.

The award is well-deserved. Monica has demonstrated a huge commitment to HR education, including her participation in creat-

ing university programs in HRM in Canada, housed in the School of HRM, which she helped launch.

Among her exhaustive list of achievements, Dr. Belcourt is the academic editor of a popular series of Canadian textbooks in human resources management, including *Managing Performance Through Training & Development*; *Recruitment and Selection in Canada*; *Strategic Compensation in Canada*; *The Canadian Labour Market*; *Industrial Relations in Canada*; and *International Human Resources: A Canadian Perspective*. She is also the co-author of *Strategic Human Resources Planning* along with York University colleague, Dr. Ken McBey, and the best selling book, *Managing Human Resources*, published by ITP Nelson.

In addition to her scholarly portfolio, she possesses a wealth of applied HR experience. Monica has worked as director of personnel for Canadian Pacific Rail, director of employee development for the National Film Board and as an HR specialist for the federal government. Dr. Belcourt was part of a national team that established the competencies and the standards for the certification process for human resources professionals.

Active in many professional associations and not-for-profit organizations, Monica is Director of the



### PROFESSOR BELCOURT TALKS CHANGE

**HR Edge:** What do you see as the biggest changes occurring in the field of HR?

**MB:** The biggest change over the last decade is the solidly grounded belief that HR is a primary source of any business's competitive advantage. Executives, particularly those in the service sectors, know that the attitudes of employees have measurable effects on customer satisfaction and retention, and ultimately revenues and profits. Smart CEOs are paying very close attention to any HR programs, unlike the past.

**HR Edge:** Will the outsourcing of HR continue? And will this undermine the evolution of HR?

**MB:** Organizations will continue to outsource repetitious, clerical and standardized routine transactions such as payroll. Anything that touches the culture of the organization (any activity that affects the attitudes of employees) such as cultural fit in selection or leadership development will remain within the organization. Never outsource anything that provides competitive advantage.

**HR Edge:** What role do you see York's School of HRM playing in the development of HR practitioners and the profession in general?

## alumni awards

Congratulations to last year's graduating class, along with these award-winning students.

International Alliance for HR Research (IAHRR) which is a catalyst for the discovery, dissemination and application of new knowledge about HRM. She has served as President of the Human Resources Professionals Association of Ontario, and is a past board member of CIBC Insurance and the Toronto French School. Monica is also a frequent commentator on HRM issues for CTV, Canada AM, CBC, The Globe and Mail, The Canadian HR Reporter and other media.

Professor Belcourt is dedicated to establishing York University's School of HRM as a global leader in HR education. Currently, she is endeavoring to enhance the profile of the newly approved School of Human Resource Management at York along with raising funds to name it and to support research chairs and centers. "The goal is that whenever anyone in the world wants HR research and education, they will think first of the School of Human Resource Management at York University," says Dr. Belcourt.

**MB:** Education consists not only of providing knowledge of best practices in HR but it is also a socializing mechanism. I hope that our School will be able to produce ethical HR professionals, with strong beliefs in their ability to influence organizational cultures. Our Masters students will assume leadership positions in HR throughout the world, and so will seed organizations with HR best practices. Our PhD students will become teachers of the next generation of HR professionals, as well as consultants and executives. All these roles of influence will shape the HR world, making HR's contribution to organizational effectiveness increasingly significant.



Nadia deGama  
Top Graduating Student  
(2007)



Ramona Tobler  
Top Research Paper  
(2007)



Gene Lai  
Ambassador Award  
(2007)



## Organic HR and the blossoming career of Kimberly Sharman



Kimberly Sharman, a recent graduate of York's MHRM program, is the winner of the 2008 'Ambassador' Award which is given to the MHRM graduating student who has contributed most to the overall benefit of fellow students and to the program.

Did you know that Syngenta Corporation is one of the world's leading companies with more than 24,000 employees in over 90 countries? This is a company dedicated to "bringing plant potential to life"—increasing crop productivity, protecting the environment and improving health and quality of life. Syngenta has been lauded for its leading edge technologies, global presence and top-notch customer service. For those familiar with Syngenta's employment practices, it comes as no surprise that Syngenta has received national recognition as one of Canada's Top 100 Employers. That recognition is due in no small part to the expertise of its HR Director Kimberly Sharman.

Kim's current responsibilities include overseeing HR processes for the Corporation's 1400 employees distributed among five (5) different strategic business units. Her work covers a diverse range of issues including employee relations, recruitment, performance consulting and management development. Apart from these duties, she has been 'front and centre' in leading the corporation's ongoing change processes. Much of her work over the past two years has focused upon leading the HR due diligence process, and integrating new employees into Syngenta's organizational design, programs, policies and benefits, as a result of several major acquisitions.

After graduating from Carlton University with a BA in journalism, Kim started off her career as a journalist, focusing on economic reporting. She was hired by the Toronto Stock Exchange to be a communications coordinator and reported to the VP of HR at the TSX.

According to Kim, "I first learned about human resources by being surrounded at work with a talented department of 10 Human resource professionals. When they got very busy with recruitment they would ask me to help find new graduates as I was a recent one, and this is how I started my recruitment experience. I began taking HR courses at night, at University of Toronto and at George Brown College while working full-time at the TSX". As this connection to HR evolved, Kimberly saw a career path in HR. It was this initial experience at the TSX in HR, that "opened my eyes to progressive companies, with a commitment and focus on human capital and I had great mentors along the way".

After spending about 4 years at the TSX, Kim desired more global work experience. She moved to Pratt & Whitney where she took on a business partnership consultative HR role for the Ontario location, with over 900 employees. Here Kim gained an opportunity to work within an international organization with multiple locations, unionized and non-unionized. She also gained experience in the areas of recruitment, management development, employee relations initiatives and training and development.

From Pratt and Whitney, Kim moved on to a dot.com company with the goal of creating policies and programs from scratch, and building a team. In that context, Kim successfully developed policies related to recruitment, retention, training and development and performance management for a dynamic, web-based software company. Under Kim's HR leadership, the company's headcount grew from 30 employees in one location to over 140 employees in both Canada and the United States.

Finally, landing at Syngenta in 2001 brought Kim back to the environment that she had loved at the TSX, "with an even more progressive in culture". According to Kim, this is a "global company, with local autonomy opportunities. Fabulous commitment to employees". And most pertinent to Kim's career, "HR is at the table with the executive team, HR is consulted and a true partner at Syngenta. Pro-



gressive succession and talent development programs, excellent benefits and opportunities, highly educated group- scientists, biotech, plus strong sales and marketing professionals and solid work ethic in a fast paced environment". In Kim's experience, Syngenta is "the role model of a company where an HR specialist can grow and develop".

After five years learning and developing at Syngenta, Kim decided to take advantage of another learning opportunity—pursuing graduate studies in Human Resource Management. Kim explains that, "I had always wanted to pursue a masters, and expressed this in my initial interview. Consequently, during my first five years with Syngenta, the Canadian CEO and my boss would continually encourage me to apply and follow through on my goals."

Returning to school came at the perfect time in Kim's career. She was enjoying her role at Syngenta, and had full management and corporate support to take the time to focus on her studies. In addition, Kim adds, "The opportunity to integrate HR research and theory with my work experience was extremely gratifying. The MHRM program at York University was stimulating, challenging and ultimately enriching". Kim notes that there were other benefits from her graduate studies. She comments, "I also made solid personal and professional contacts through the MHRM program at York. The caliber of people was outstanding, and I have new close friends for life as a result, and new professional colleagues and mentors". Kim's peers quickly add that she, in turn, served as mentor for many others with her thoughtful manner and expert guidance.

In addition to her employer's enthusiasm for the pursuit of this degree, Kim adds that, "As soon as my grad studies were coming to an end, Syngenta brought forth one or two opportunities for me to consider beyond Canada. They knew I would be wanting a new challenge upon completion of my masters."

Having completed her academic studies, Kim's learning and development continue unabated within Syngenta. New learning opportunities arise amidst the myriad of responsibilities Kim continues to take on. This includes her leadership role in the people aspects of Syngenta's mergers and acquisitions and her recent promotion to manage a group of HR business partners across the U.S.

Despite the fact that her HR career did not commence as a result of a pre-planned, strategic choice, Kim loves her role and finds the work both extremely interesting and challenging.

*"I never thought I would "fall into a career in HR" but now I could never imagine not working in a field related to human resources. HR is more than I expected... I love the variety, the holistic approach to working with people in a thriving environment, and the career ladders and options it presents. I value being in an industry that can be fluid with mobility and is a necessary and value added part of any business."*

**"I would encourage anyone in HR or considering HR to be open minded to variety, and change. Do be engaged with learning the business, do seek to add value to the company and do treat every employee the way you would want to be treated. Don't be too focused on becoming a specialist or a generalist, but remain open to trying both over the course of your career. Definitely try both small and large, national and international/global, public and private industry. You will find your niche."**

Kimberly Sharman, MHRM 2008, HR Director, Syngenta Corporation

Her advice to those who aspire to advanced level HR work is to focus on learning the overall strategic business operations, and to be receptive and expectant of constant change. Kim adds that, rather than focusing on the polar extremes of being a 'generalist' or 'specialist', it is best to "get exposure to a wide variety of roles in diverse organizational contexts—large and small business, public and private, national and global—because this will provide you with invaluable experience and knowledge, and facilitate the opportunity for you to find your own niche in the HR field".

Kim adds one final note of advice, "Do find mentors in every opportunity".

And if you are lucky you'll find a mentor like Kimberly!

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## and congrats to...

Debbie Jamieson, MHRM Program Assistant, on her Award of Appreciation from York University in recognition of her 35 years of dedicated and loyal service.

## alumni

### congratulations to...

**Doreen Obwanga (MHRM 2006)** who recently joined Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion as HR Associate, Compensation & Benefits.

**Nadia deGama (MHRM 2007)** who was recently admitted to York's PhD program in Human Resource Management, commencing in Sept 2009.

**Mary Ho (MHRM 2007)** who is engaged to marry Martin Lau this winter 2009.

**Silvia Marabeti (MHRM 2007)** who recently founded HR consulting firm, Kindred Consulting. Website: [www.kindredconsulting.ca](http://www.kindredconsulting.ca).

**Lisianne Persaud (MHRM 2007)** who was recently promoted to the position of Assistant Manager, Human Resources at ICICI Bank Canada, and is responsible for all aspects of HR across Canada.

**Sarah Gomes (MHRM 2008)** who married Jon McDermott on October 18, 2008. Sarah is currently working for Toronto Public Health as a People Services Consultant.

**Gene Lai (MHRM 2008)** who in his role as VP Operations for Steelcase Canada, is establishing a new manufacturing operation in China.

**Kimberly Sharman (MHRM 2008)** who is engaged to marry Jeff Ziebell next summer, 2010.

**Ami Au-Yeung, MHRM (2008)** who recently joined Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion as HR Associate, Health Protection and Promotion.



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