

The HRPS Learning Agenda: A Thought Leader Retrospective

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Last year at this time, *Human Resource Planning* published a special edition to introduce its readers to the HRPS Knowledge Areas. These five areas are strategically important to organizations and their leaders and have become the focus of the HRPS learning agenda:

1. HR Strategy and Planning
2. Leadership Development
3. Talent Management
4. Organizational Effectiveness
5. Building a Strategic HR Function

The special edition featured “white paper” articles by *Human Resource Planning*’s editors or their associates to provide an historical perspective on each knowledge area and to identify the key issues facing the HR profession.

Later, in a Thought Leader Exchange at the HRPS Annual Conference, the HRPS Board of Directors, members of the Corporate Sponsor Forum, members of the HRPS Publications Committee, and invited thought leaders from HR gathered to discuss the implications of the issues identified by the editors as they recapped their articles. The HRPS learning agenda was first summarized by Richard Vosburgh, executive editor of the journal. He set the context of “past, present, and future” of the HR profession, which was then represented in the white papers for each of the knowledge areas. Joseph McCann helped facilitate the discussion, which is summarized in the paragraphs that follow. An updated version of the learning agenda matrix is given in Exhibit 1.

Our readers are invited to reacquaint themselves with the special edition (2004: Volume 27, Issue 1) and to reflect on the challenges to be faced in 2005 and beyond.

A PDF copy of this issue can be purchased at www.hrps.org.

HR Strategy and Planning

(Editor: Ed Gubman, Strategic Talent Solutions)

Our discussion centered around a key question: Is it possible to build strategy in the face of a “strategy-poor” era, in which the operating model and execution dominate, and strategy, new directions, and disruptive innovation are absent in many companies? Right now, as illustrated in Exhibit 2 on page 9, HR is focused on “results strategies.” Are these *strategies* at all, or just goals and measures? In considering this question, the discussion took two related turns:

1. Clearly, the emphasis is on results. To have strategic impact, HR must have the leadership/influence skills to produce results. Having the skill to identify issues and build strategies is important, but the best strategy in the world may fail without someone to influence its implementation. A member of the group quickly drew the diagram in Exhibit 3 on page 9.
2. Ultimately, HR strategy is driven not by the personal influence of the leader (although this is a mitigating factor), but by the talent in the organization. Talent quality is a critical enabler of organizational effectiveness. The foundation of a great company is an organizational culture that understands talent and uses it as a competitive advantage.

Two other points of discussion are noteworthy:

1. Disruption is clearly a moderator of strategy. Examples of change were given to illustrate:

- A company’s market-driven focus causes *continuous* change but is a normal factor in strategic planning.
- A new regulation, like the Sarbanes-Oxley Act, is an *episodic* change, temporarily disruptive, but handled operationally.
- A change in CEOs is a *disruptive* change that often results in sharp strategic turns.

2. There is still room for debate on which comes first: leaders to build strategies, or strategies that enable leaders.

Leadership Development

(Editor: Rich Hughes, Center for Creative Leadership)

There is a growing concern that too much of leadership development has been focused on the *leader* rather than on *leaderSHIP*. The complexities of today’s organizations are frequently beyond the capability of an individual leader to manage. While not neglecting the individual, attention needs to be given to the organizational context, the connections, and the system in which leaders must operate. Emphasis must be placed not only on the fit for the job, but also on the fit for the organization and the ability to operate in an environment requiring support, alignment, and trust. The focus on individual leaders has created such an elite class at the top of the organization that the leaders are no longer able to engage people emotionally, whether on the senior management team or among those they lead below that level.

Leadership is especially important now. Surveys show workplace satisfaction is low. At the same time, retention and engagement have become common measurements of leader success. Whether called emotional IQ or authentic leadership, “balance” is the watchword for the future in leadership development. Balanced leadership works within the organization and mobilizes the whole system to create both a great place to work and a highly productive environment.

HR needs to examine its part in creating elite, “unbalanced” leaders and to rethink the leadership development it manages. Future training should be directed at three specific areas:

1. Alignment: Focus on organizational effectiveness

EXHIBIT 1

2005: The HRPS Learning Agenda and Knowledge Management Strategy

MISSION: To help organizations enhance their performance through strategic management of their human resources.

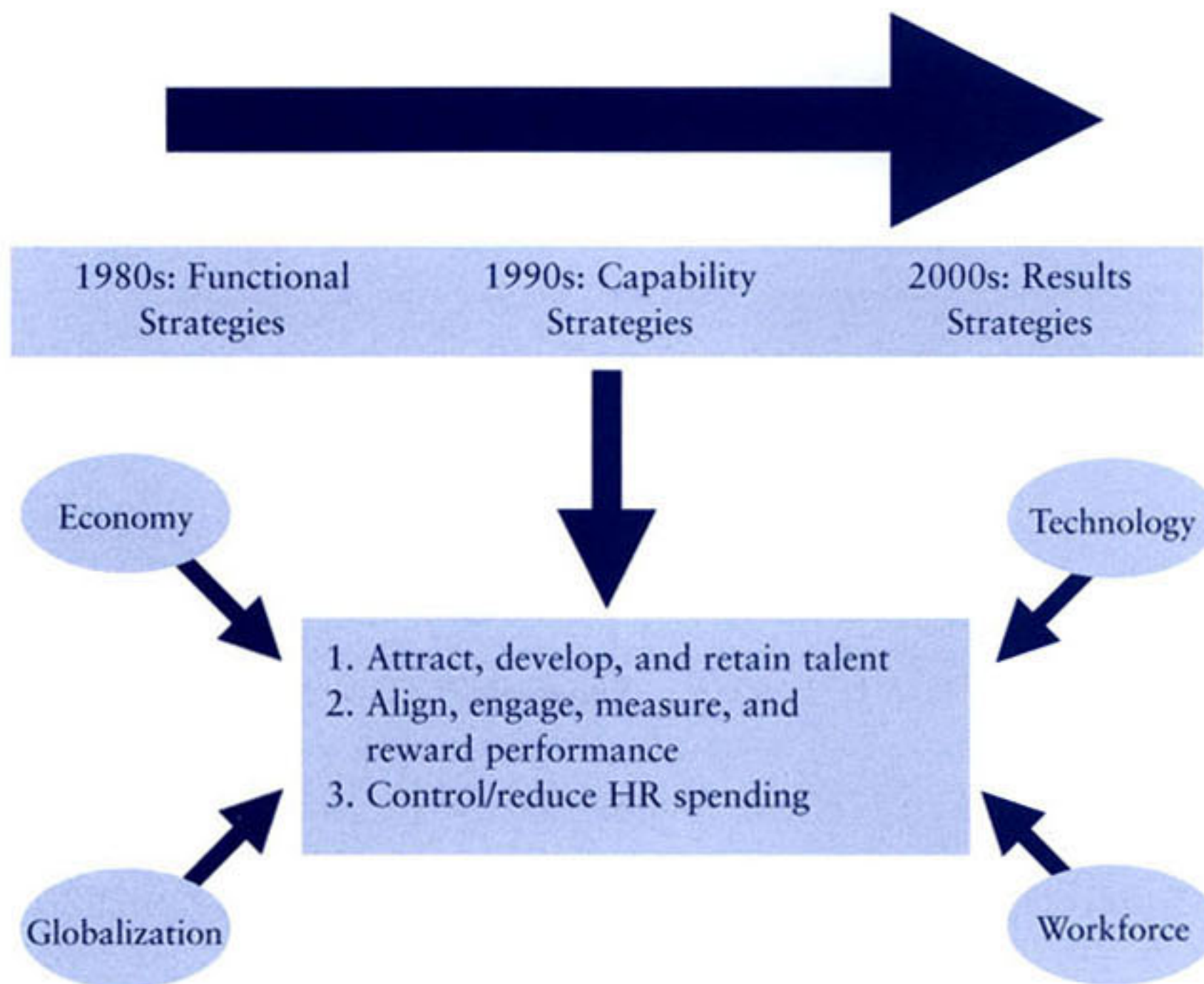
VISION: To be the preferred provider of leading-edge HR knowledge in key strategic areas.

STRATEGY: To bring together a diverse group of thought leaders and practitioners and to align our resources to extend knowledge in selected areas.

	HR STRATEGY & PLANNING	LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT	TALENT MANAGEMENT	ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS	BUILDING A STRATEGIC HR FUNCTION
FROM 2004-2005 EXAMPLES	Aligning business & HR planning; linking business strategy and HR strategy; involvement in corporate governance and decision making.	The acquisition, retention, motivation, & development of leaders; succession planning; providing functional and organizational leadership.	The acquisition, retention, motivation, and development of diverse talent to meet the current and future needs of the organization at all levels.	Managing culture & org. change; building an inclusive learning culture; org. design; intellectual capital; org. learning, agility, & transformation; knowledge mgmt.	Putting up the mirror to our own function with the goal of improving our functional excellence, impact, effectiveness, perception, and reputation; knowing the business.
WORKSHOPS & FORUMS	Developing HR Strategies to Achieve Business Success Corporate Sponsor Forum	Succession Planning and Leadership Development Senior Executive Talent Management	Talent Engagement Attracting and Retaining Talent	Organization Design Mergers and Acquisitions Leading Culture Change	Global HR Practices HR Strategy
WEB TELE-CONFERENCES	Overcoming Top Six Barriers to Strategy	Leadership Gap Case Study	Engaging and Retaining Talent	Building Agility and Resilience during Change	HR at the Table Building Brand Inside
ANNUAL CONFERENCE	HR: An Evolving "Decision Science" HR and Corporate Governance	Leadership: The West Point Experience Accelerating and Sustaining Leadership Success	New Directions in Workforce Talent Development A Whole New Mind	Ethical Business Cultures Perspectives on People, Principles and Practices	Measuring the Impact of HR Examining and Improving HR Performance
HUMAN RESOURCE PLANNING (THE JOURNAL)	HR Strategy: From Birth to Business Results HR Strategies: Inside Out vs. Outside In HR as a Strategic Partner: What Does It Take to Make It Happen?	Leadership Development: Past, Present, and Future Be, Know, Do Model of Leadership Why the Leadership Bench Never Gets Deeper	Talent Management Trends Shaping the Future The Race for Talent: Engaging Workers The Real Costs of Turnover: Lessons	Organizational Effectiveness: Changing Concepts The Human Side of Mergers and Acquisitions Acquiring the Capacity for Operational Improvement	Building a Strategic HR Function: Continuing the Evolution Beyond the Vision: What Makes HR Effective? HR Metrics and Analytics: Uses and Impacts
PUBLICATIONS	Restoring Trust: HR's Role in Corp. Governance Human Resource Forecasting and Modeling	Gold Collection: Leadership Development Shared Wisdom: Best Practices in Development and Succession Planning	People in the E-Business	Managing Strategic and Cultural Change in Organizations Quantum Change @ Light Speed	Gold Collection: Building a Strategic HR Function The New HR: Strategic Positioning of HR
ASSOC. ARTICLES EDITORS	Ed Gubman, Strategic Talent Solutions	Rich Hughes, Center for Creative Leadership	Fred Frank, TalentKeepers	Joe McCann, The University of Tampa	Jay Jamrog, Human Resource Institute
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EXHIBIT 2

Current Emphasis on Results Strategies



Change, Continuity, and Context in HR Strategy and Planning

2. Teamwork: Focus on building cross-organizational, cross-cultural skills
3. Credibility: Focus on developing a leadership team that everyone in the organization will want to follow

As the group progressed through the discussion, the matrix in Exhibit 4 (see page 10) took shape as a way to describe the balanced approach to *leaderSHIP* required for success in an environment requiring agility and resilience.

Talent Management

(Editor: Fred Frank, TalentKeepers)

The discussion participants quickly agreed that retention and engagement are key elements of talent management; however, a new ingredient is *outsourcing*. One participant likened the current situation to a battleship structure on a canoe: The old pyramid structure has been inverted as we have downsized and outsourced the organizational base and we are left supporting a top-heavy organization. One major question is: "How do people feel as they look at their organization: Hopeful about the future and their careers, or despairing?"

The fragility of organizations has an impact on attraction and retention, and makes it much harder to engage employees. A train wreck is ahead: Many people lack trust in their organizations and their leaders. They are waiting for the economy to turn so they can leave them. Although management may be able to have productivity

without trust, engagement is difficult to have without trust. Any lack of information about the business, one's job, or future career prospects creates fear rather than trust.

In this environment, the work done on employment branding may be an Achilles heel as companies fail to deliver on the promise of the brand. Management, including HR management, has not always been good at selecting employees, developing alternative sources of talent, and developing entrepreneurship within the company. Nor have we been good at analyzing our workforce. Some employees may be happy to have a job (this will likely change as the economy continues to improve), or just a different job, but other employees are key to the organization's future and require more attention.

The issue is whether we really know how to create an environment for positive churn, as GE does for leadership and McKinsey for consultants. If we do not take action, we can count on small businesses soaking up talent, employees opting out of corporate life in favor of the intrinsic rewards resident in teaching and not-for-profit organizations, and worse, a political response resulting in unwanted legislation.

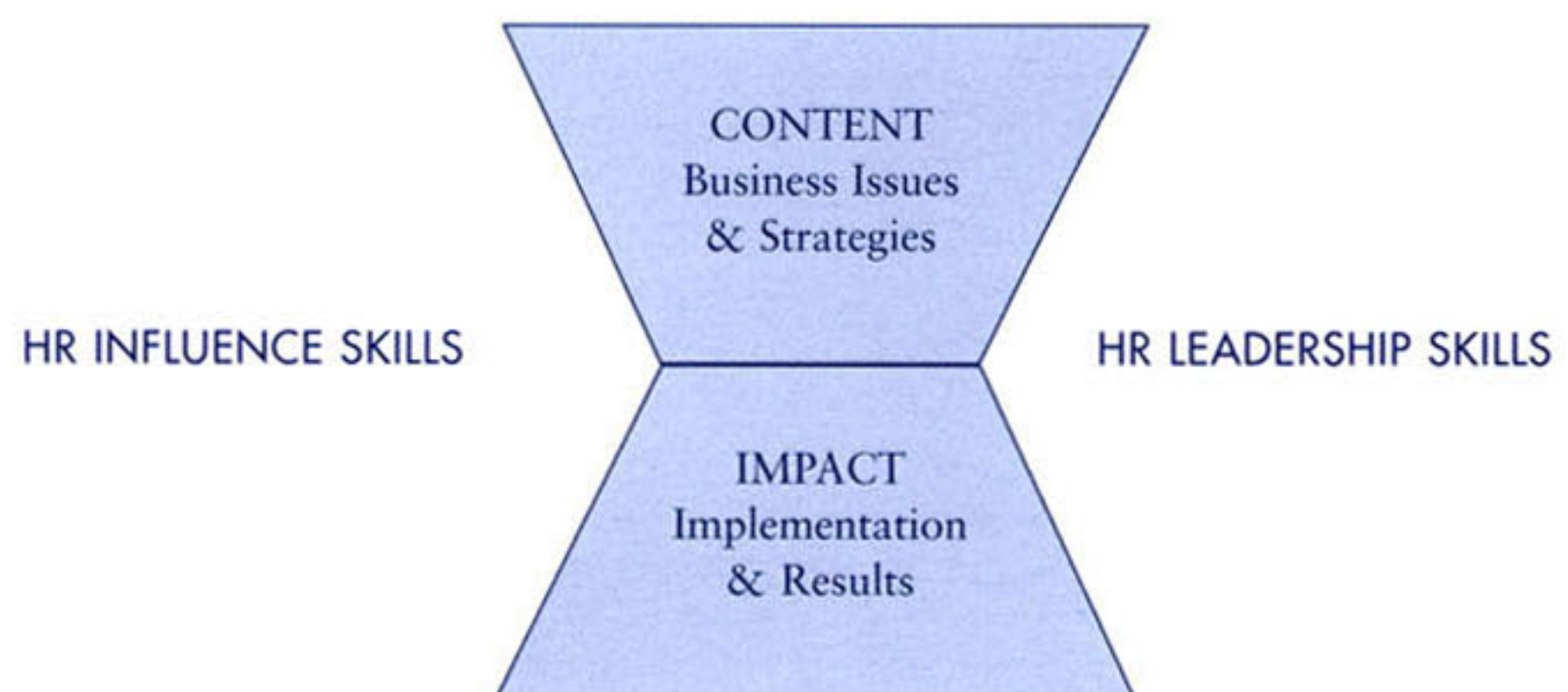
Organizational Effectiveness

(Editor: Joseph McCann, The University of Tampa)

Coming back to topics discussed under leadership development, the group distinguished between agility (flexibility) and resiliency (the ability to bounce back). Agility has to do with adaptation; resiliency

EXHIBIT 3

HR Impact Is About Influence and Leadership



has to do with reinvention and hardiness, and encompasses protection, time to heal, and healthy egos. Agility is more related to the individual and how the individual copes with adversity and *avoids* risk. Resilience, on the other hand, is more related to the organization and how the organization handles adversity and *tolerates* risk. An analogy in the health field is prevention versus treatment. “Opportunism,” “preparedness,” and “balance” are words that come to mind when thinking of the two concepts.

This discussion is not commonly the background for talking about organizational effectiveness, but the connection was easily made by the group. Without agility and resiliency, individuals and the organization cannot long sustain their effectiveness in the uncertain, globally competitive environment most of us operate in today. Many questions come to mind for HR to answer:

- What kind of diagnostics are in place to measure agility and resiliency at all levels?
- Have the risks to be avoided or tolerated in the environment been identified in order to deal with them effectively?
- Is there slack in the system to allow for healing and recovery?
- Have the skills associated with agility and resiliency been identified and developed to build and sustain individual and organizational health?
- Are those skills part of the assessment of talent and organizational fit during recruitment, placement, and succession planning processes?

From an HR standpoint, this is new territory for some and deserves both thought and action.

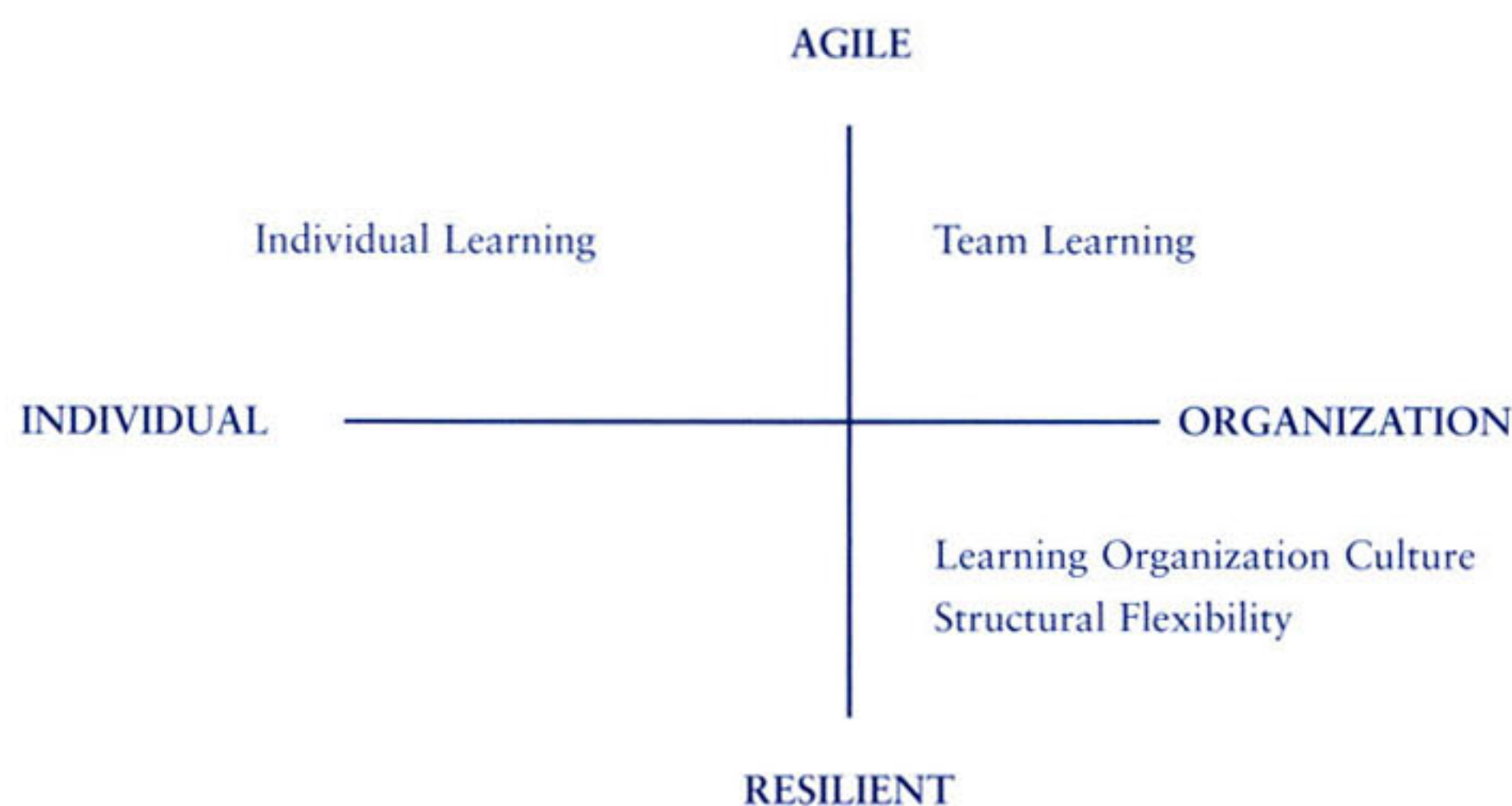
Building a Strategic HR Function

(Editor: Jay Jamrog, Human Resource Institute)

The participants were obviously in their element on this topic. To build a strategic HR function it was first posited that you need CEO support. That support may be lacking in some organizations, either because there is no business strategy to start with, or because the business metrics overwhelm internal beliefs about human resources. The answer is to educate customers and senior line management about HR’s role. For this purpose, a number of participants have found the strategy

EXHIBIT 4

Balanced Approach to LeaderSHIP



maps developed by Kaplan and Norton as part of their balanced scorecard work to be helpful. Using these maps, the HR linkages to business strategy become clear. Another helpful process is to identify the “causal” HR strategies, essentially listing business strategies in one column and the associated HR implications in a second column. A final suggestion is to parlay organizational development skills into a credible, authoritative voice—and, more importantly, force—for positive change in the organization. By becoming known for making things happen in the business, one gains senior management attention and support.

The discussion then turned to assessing the engagement level of employees in strategy implementation. Some have added a two-part strategy question to employee engagement surveys:

1. “I understand the strategy”
2. “I contribute to the strategy.”

One of the participants cautioned that the vagueness of “strategy” may not yield meaningful results. It would be better to be specific by listing three or four strategies and asking employees to identify which strategy they are following.

One of the barriers to building a strategic HR function that cannot be forgotten is the current cadre of HR professionals. HR is going through major changes as it moves from “order-taker” roles (responsive but transactional) to “strategic partner” roles (listening, questioning, reflecting).

Additionally, the risk involved in real metrics and fear of accountability may cause some HR professionals to feel they do not measure up. Others may simply lack the education and business background that others bring to the organization in their day-to-day encounters with customers and suppliers in their jobs in marketing, operations, and finance. There is a critical need for HR professionals to be educated on business fundamentals as well as strategy development and implementation, even more so if the HR reporting chain is through the CFO or CAO.

At the end, the group agreed that an HR function that becomes “trusted advisors” to management at each level of the organization gains ground as a strategic HR function. Talking business results, not HR programs, prioritizing issues and looking for opportunities to make a difference, and picking battles carefully: These are the hallmarks of trusted advisors.