

HR MINDS FORUM · VIENNA · APRIL 29, 2026

THINKING LIKE THE BUSINESS

How HR Connects Strategy, Finance, and People During Change

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I asked a few CEO / GM contacts of mine:

*"If you were standing in front of a room of HR leaders,
what would you want them to know about how you see HR?"*



HR should understand how the company makes money, and HR's work should either add to or protect that.

— CEO, mid-sized global industrial



*Stop making simple things complicated.
Don't tell me what I cannot do; tell me what I can do.*

— Division GM, large global tech



I need HR to come to me with business solutions and ideas. Too much of our leadership meetings are spent on HR administration and process issues.

— Chairman & GM, large global industrial

The most effective HR leaders understand what it feels like to sit in this seat.



Board
pressure



P&L
accountability



Competing
priorities



Risk without
clean answers



Isolation
of the role

A business is a resource-coordination system

Existing to deliver something externally, on an ongoing basis, and requiring coordination of resources. People resources activate the others.



Physical

Plants, offices,
machinery,
infrastructure



Operational & Tech

Processes, logistics,
supply chain, internal
systems & data



Financial

Cash flow, capital,
debt, investments



Intangible

IP, patents, brand,
reputation, culture,
knowledge



People

Skills, judgment,
capacity, leadership

Note: resources and structures vary by industry, business model, and geography.

HR spans every function.



Note: other functions exist — IT, Legal, Procurement, and more. The point here is HR's structural position specifically.

Business-as-Usual is already unusually busy.

Talent & organizational planning

Capabilities, roles, headcount, timing, cost — proactively. Build, buy, develop, or exit. Future orientation.

Forward view & intelligence

Predictability. Surfacing people risk & opportunity before it becomes a business problem. Filtering what reaches the leadership table.

Leadership effectiveness

Making the people who run the business better at running it. Coaching, management development, organizational alignment.

ABOVE THE LINE

Accurate data & clean systems

The foundation everything else runs on. Wrong data undermines every decision HR contributes to.

TABLE STAKES

Operational execution

Reliable and invisible. Risk managed without policy policing. Administration kept necessary, streamlined, and simple.

Table stakes work done well is the foundation that gets the function to neutral. Done poorly, it harms credibility, adds drag, and limits above-the-line impact.

Transformation raises the stakes.

Additional pressure — and HR becomes the integrating force across a business changing while still running.

Mergers & Acquisitions

- People & liability due diligence
- Key talent identification & retention planning
- Harmonization & integration (structure, comp, culture)

Contraction & Closure

- Headcount cost modeling & scenario planning
- Selection process design & legal defensibility
- Transition management and stabilization

Strategic (Re)positioning

- Capability gap analysis vs. the new direction
- Organizational design and enablement
- Change readiness & communications

And when are things not changing?

Step-change or incremental, announced or not yet named - HR should not wait for an invitation.

01

Start with WHY

What is the business trying to achieve or protect? What is the strategic driver — growth, cost, risk, capability gap?

HR that skips this step is building solutions to the wrong problem.

02

Then HOW

What does the organization need to be able to do differently? What capabilities, structures, or behaviors need to shift?

This is where HR's cross-system view becomes genuinely valuable.

03

Finally WHAT

Only now: the programs, interventions, or structural changes.

The 'what' without the 'why' and 'how' is where HR loses the room — and, frankly, deserves to.

Make it land. Make it portable.

Structuring the conversation to the business:

01

The business problem or opportunity

Stated in the language the leader uses. Not an HR topic — a business condition. Something already on their agenda, or a risk they have not yet named.

02

Where it connects

To strategy, to operational pain, to a financial pressure, to a number they are already accountable for. HR is not introducing a new topic — it is connecting to one.

03

What HR is proposing — specifically

Concise. Cost-aware. A clear ask and a clear decision required. Not a program deck. Define “good enough”. A specific choice for the leader to make.

04

The business metric it moves

Every HR action has a landing point: P&L, capacity, operational output, risk exposure. Show it. If it can be estimated, estimate it. Make it portable into a finance review, a board pack, or a leadership team update.

What this looks like in practice

Mergers & Acquisitions

Post-acquisition comp harmonization

- Side-by-side job architecture mapping: acquired vs. acquirer
- Total compensation gap analysis by level and function
- Costing scenarios: full alignment, grandfathered benefits, base+bonus concessions

→ Drops into deal cost model: harmonization cost vs. retention risk vs. synergy timeline

Contraction & Closure

Site exit: two sequencing scenarios

- Scenario A: aggressive timeline — faster GAAP restructuring cost recognition, higher legal & severance exposure, more robust consultation obligations
- Scenario B: phased — slower cost recognition, risk of prolonged engagement drag, illness claims, continuity incentive cost

→ CFO-ready: restructuring P&L by scenario, legal risk quantified, timeline to clean run-rate

Strategic (Re)positioning

Sales reset: country cluster to pan-Europe industry verticals

- Org design: new structure, role architecture, reporting lines
- Capability gap: country generalist vs. industry specialist profile delta
- People cost of transition: redeployment, exits, new hires, revenue timeline during reset

→ Revenue impact modeled by transition speed — build vs. buy vs. redeploy decision for CEO and CFO

HR as integrator during change

The integrating function across the people dimension — from diagnosis to landing. HR influences and enables; it does not dictate. If HR does not engage, functional owners will still address these things — but rarely in an integrated, timely, or people-informed way.

WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE

- ✓ Translates strategic intent into org design and capability requirements
- ✓ Surfaces workforce risk early — as a business risk, not an HR flag
- ✓ Leads change management — communications, training, and reinforcement across all levels
- ✓ Models the financial impact of people decisions — workforce costs, timing, and risk
- ✓ Assesses workflow handshakes across functions; ensures accountability is correctly placed
- ✓ Owns the operative elements — sequencing, integration, and transition design that make the plan land

Whether business-as-usual, or during change, think like the business; **the opportunity is yours.**

Not every CEO or GM is waiting for HR to show up this way. Some have never seen it. Some aren't convinced yet. But some do get it. Whether the business is running steady or in the middle of change, this is the gap HR has the opportunity to close.

- Know the business problem before you design the HR response

- Translate people risk and cost into the language of the business

- Get ahead of the change — don't wait to be invited into the room

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Questions.

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