crf

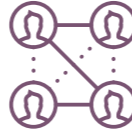## DISCUSSION PAPER:
"IS IT TIME TO REBOOT YOUR APPROACH TO COMMUNICATION AND EVALUATION?"

CONTENTS

FOREWORD

Welcome to CRF's HR Directors' briefing paper, the second in a biannual series. CRF has been researching the field of HR and turning this into actionable recommendations for over 20 years. We offer insights, based both on substantive research, and an understanding of business challenges and HR's potential contribution to them.

In this briefing we'll focus on two aspects of Business and HR that get too little attention:

• Communication; to drive forward an initiative

• Evaluation; to assess how well the initiative worked and to draw some lessons from the project.

Communication can mean many things; here we care most about communications that play a direct role in driving the success of an initiative by changing attitudes or behaviours. For example, if a wellness programme is being rolled out, communication can play an essential role in increasing participation and ensuring employees appreciate this new benefit.

In this paper we'll skip the broad issue of an overall evaluation of the HR function, and instead home in on the more specific topic of evaluating specific initiatives or programmes. Evaluation, at a minimum, ensures that if an initiative isn't achieving its objectives it will be changed or discontinued. More broadly evaluation is a process of drawing 'lessons learned' that may be relevant for other initiatives. It's rarely necessary or practical to do the most formal type of evaluation: calculating an ROI.

What are the issues we must confront to ensure communication changes behaviour? How can we evaluate practically our initiatives to weed out the ones that don't work and learn from experience? We hope this paper will provide insights and spark discussion.

Why would communications and evaluation get too little attention? With communication there is a kind a cognitive bias, whereby people get so narrowly consumed with the work they are doing that they don't adequately communicate it to others who are not so closely involved. In HR we may understand how the new learning programmes we've developed can affect customer satisfaction; line managers may have had their attention elsewhere and not understand the role they need to play. Organisations can be more effective if they counter this cognitive bias by building a culture and processes such that effective communication happens as a matter of course.

With evaluation it's natural for people to shy away for fear of bad news or criticism (or be critical of others). It's also natural to want to move on to the next urgent project rather than dwell on what's passed. Nevertheless, it's an essential part of governance to ensure evaluation is happening. Without evaluation we won't improve the effectiveness of our initiatives.

How do we overcome the tendency to undervalue communication and evaluation? Once they get our attention how do we do them right? That's the challenge many Directors now face.

01

COMMUNICATION
WHY IT MATTERS AND WHAT HAS CHANGED

What we are talking about and why we are talking about it.

WHAT'S COVERED

COMMUNICATION

1.1

COMMUNICATION IS IMPORTANT IN DRIVING CHANGES IN ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOURS

Communication matters because without it there is an increased risk that HR initiatives will at worst fail and at best, encounter resistance.

For example:

- A new model of performance management requires that managers have frequent coaching conversations with employees. Effective communication can persuade managers that this adds value and influence them to act differently.

- A new regulatory environment means anyone handling employee data has to scrupulously follow a new set of rules quite different from what they had to do in the past. Effective communication can ensure everyone knows exactly what they need to do differently and why.

- A new business strategy that requires organisational change to deliver complete solutions for customers. Effective communication enables HR to listen to employee sentiment and be more agile in overcoming barriers to embracing change.

Do you normally see communication in this way: as a means to change behaviour?

1.2

WHAT WE MEAN BY COMMUNICATION

It's best to think of communication as a whole system – not just internal channels and messages. A system that comprises structured and unstructured messaging, formal and informal mechanisms. The figure below provides one way to map the different quadrants of how communication typically occurs during change.

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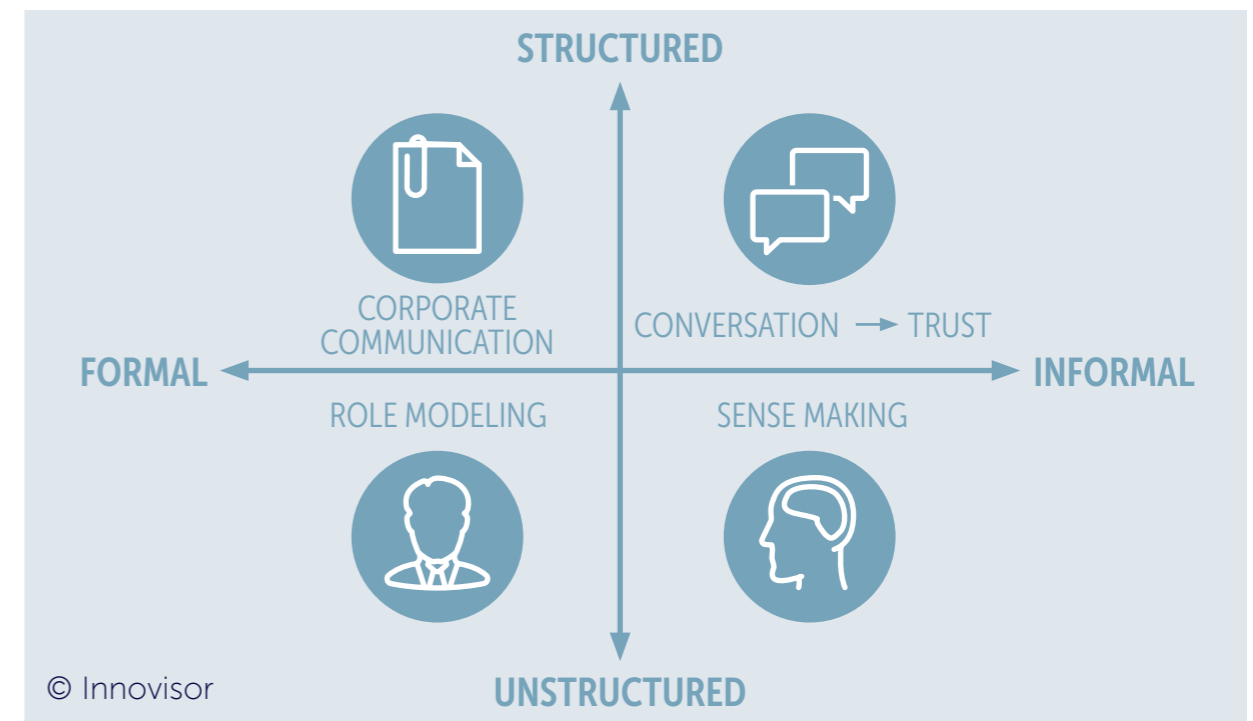
COMMUNICATION

Many organisations continue to apply a very structured and formal approach to their internal communication – particularly during change. This approach can usually be characterised as being top down, one-way, and highly managed. The message is very much determined through the lens of the communicator (the organisation) and not the audience (employees).

The important thing is not to get stuck in the top left of formal, structured communication. With formal structured communication people seemingly lose their common sense, issuing top down edicts that obviously won't achieve the desired behaviour change.

Does 'loss of the common-sense gene' ever afflict your communications? How do you define what is meant by effective communication?

WHAT ARE PERSONAS?

Your audience may cluster into certain 'types' for example 'young eager adopters', 'regional sceptics', or 'harried middle managers'. A persona captures the type into a brief story as if it were a particular individual. The effectiveness of possible messages can then be assessed by thinking how they would be received by each of the different personas.

1.3
CHANGE MEANS WE SHOULD RE-VISIT HOW WE COMMUNICATE

So much has changed in the world of communications that our habitual ways of doing things may be out-of-date. These changes include:

- **The need to grab attention in a world of too much information.**
  Managers and employees may not even see your communication given how overloaded they are.

- **The need to master many new communications media.**
  Ideally we would be skilled in using video, social media, gamified communication and so on.

- **The need to communicate to an ever more diverse audience.**
  Audiences may be more diverse than in the past: different generations, differing commands of English, different sensitivities.

Do any of these changes seriously concern you or do you have them covered? If you are concerned, do you have a plan for addressing the problem?

02

COMMUNICATION
WHAT IS THE CURRENT STATE OF YOUR HR COMMUNICATION?

Let's assess where your organisation stands on communication.

WHAT'S COVERED

2.1
IS COMMUNICATION AT AN APPROPRIATE LEVEL IN THE ORGANISATION?

In the US and Canada, it is not uncommon to see job titles like EVP HR & Communications; there are also communication-oriented titles like SVP Employee Experience or VP Talent Acquisition and Employer Brand. Having communication explicitly a part of a senior leadership role implies, but does not guarantee, that communication is treated as a strategic priority.

In some companies, responsibility for communication is pushed down to a mid-level manager and is seen as administrative rather than strategic. In some cases it might even have been handed to someone slowing down for retirement rather than an up-and-comer driving change. In other cases, organisations do not have a communications specialist and the responsibility lies with the local HR Manager or Team Administrator.

Putting the job title aside, the question is what role your organisation wants your internal communications resource to perform. At one end of the spectrum, is it 'the crafter and drafter' who then simply pushes the message out? Or is it to operate as a 'Business Partner', in the same way that HR professionals have evolved more towards? Or should it be more of a 'Trusted Advisor', where it can carry greater influence across the organisation?

What needs to happen to ensure that strategic HR communication in your organisation is at the appropriate level for it to be effective in influencing leaders and driving behaviour change?

2.2
WHO OWNS HR COMMUNICATION?

If a large initiative is impacting people does HR own the communication? Is it owned by the Strategy function? Does it sit with a Corporate Communication function?

It's not clear that there's any one right answer beyond saying that adequate expertise and breadth of perspective needs to be brought to bear. Whoever owns communication on a project has to be fully in sync with their peers on the leadership team.

In what way is your HR communication hampered or enhanced by its reporting line in your organisation?

HOW READY AND EFFECTIVE ARE YOUR LEADERS?

How ready are senior leaders to play a major role in communication, especially if it is two way? David MacLeod and Nita Clarke reported that one chief executive asserted to us: *"Balance sheets don't answer back. The risk of listening is that you may hear things you don't want to hear."* (MacLeod Report 2009, p. 32). New skills such as more participative management styles may be needed as a result.

COMMUNICATION

2.3

DO WE KNOW IF HR COMMUNICATION IS ACHIEVING ITS GOALS?

How does your HR department know if the communication of key HR initiatives has been successful? Do you use pulse surveys to assess opinions? Do you systematically gather verbal feedback from a set of knowledgeable employees? Do you measure the behaviour that needed to change?

If HR communicates but has no means of knowing if the communication was successful, then it's time to partner with marketing. Spending hard dollars on advertising has forced marketing to come up with reasonable methods for assessing what works. They can point HR communications towards ways to get a more accurate sense of how effective their communication is.

Thinking of recent strategic HR initiatives, which one would you give the highest score in terms of effective communication? Which one would you give the lowest score? What source of evidence did you have to reveal which one was best?

2.4

IS HR COMMUNICATION THREE-WAY?

One of the traditional purposes of communication is to cascade information down the organisation as well as to feed information up the organisation from the front line back up to leadership. An equally important requirement that is frequently overlooked is the enabling of communication across the organisation in a coordinated way. For example, a reorganisation initiative may depend on horizontal communication that was not necessary before.

What proportion of your internal communications activity is listening vs dissemination based? How do you constantly listen to what is being said and how people feel about HR programmes and initiatives?

How do you tap into shared networks to facilitate an exchange of information and knowledge across your organisation?

HOW DO YOU JUDGE COMMUNICATION?

A measure of your communication activity (e.g. how many emails you've sent) is simple, objective and largely useless. Instead you need to be assessing outcomes (Did the behaviour change occur?) and intermediate variables (Did people understand the message? Did they agree with it?) Assessments such as focus groups and surveys are somewhat subjective, but often more valuable than objective activity measures.

03

COMMUNICATION
CONSIDERING THE BIG CHALLENGES

Four new problems in communication.

WHAT'S COVERED

COMMUNICATION

3.1
EVERYONE IS A JOURNALIST

We've entered a world where everyone is blogging, 'liking', sharing and commenting. Everyone is a journalist. This means employees may presume that they will play a role in communications beyond just being a passive recipient – and they'll 'be a journalist' whether you want them to be or not.

This desire to be involved can be used to HR's advantage. If we are interested in agile communication in support of an initiative, then we can use employees' 'likes' and comments to constantly fine tune the message. If we are interested in using advocates to spread our message, then we can encourage our advocates to use blogs, videos, or Instagram photos to spread the word.

However, employee journalists can create challenges. Google has many internal social media platforms and engineer James Damore wrote a memo on one of these platforms critiquing the diversity programme. This led to an internal war between Damore supporters and critics that eventually hit mainstream media.

Is the lesson from Google's experience with the Damore memo that 'everyone being a journalist' is dangerous, or is it that this approach brings important issues to light? Did Damore's memo help HR by revealing potential problems with how the diversity initiative was being viewed? Did the memo undermine what the diversity initiative was trying to accomplish?

3.2
MISINFORMATION CAN SWAMP REAL INFORMATION

Some years ago, in the midst of one of its many transformations, the BBC issued an edict that there was to be no 'whispering in the hallways'. Gossip and rumour, spanning the gamut of the utterly true to the mistaken to the malicious have always afflicted organisations. In today's world misinformation can explode across an organisation in a single afternoon.

Good PR functions stay on top of news relevant to a company and are poised to react quickly. They may even have explicit crisis response teams to deal with damaging news. We are unaware of any HR departments who have that kind of attentiveness and preparedness to deal with fake or damaging news travelling within the company.

Have you ever experienced problems with 'fake news' in your organisation? How did you respond? Can you fill the hallways with 'good gossip' that will drive out harmful rumours?

FAKE NEWS TRAVELS FASTER THAN REAL NEWS
Research showed tweets containing falsehoods spread six times faster than truthful tweets – see http://www.sciencemag.org/news/2018/03/fake-news-spreads-faster-true-news-twitter-thanks-people-not-bots

COMMUNICATION

3.3
THERE IS A CRISIS OF TRUST

The media suggests that the general population does not trust leaders, whether in politics or business. Even more broadly we've seen populist distrust of 'elites' which includes the mainstream media and academics. (Note: you can find data on trust levels at: https://www.edelman.com/trust-barometer).

The HR department can build trust by being meticulous in accurately sharing the facts when it can, explaining why when it can't share the facts, and delivering on its promises (in part, by not making promises it is sure it can't keep). This meticulousness may be a critical foundation for communications meant to change behaviour. Establishing trust won't happen unless a senior HR leader is constantly pushing for it.

Do leaders presume there is more trust than there really is? Has lack of trust ever gotten in the way of communications designed to change behaviour in your organisation? How trusted is the HR department in your organisation?

WHY YOU NEED TO COMMUNICATE THE SAME MESSAGE MANY TIMES

Peter Navin, SVP Employee Experience at Grand Rounds Inc says, "When you are making a change to company culture you have to be ready to explain it over and over again. People probably understand t it the first time they hear it, but later, when you suggest they do something differently, they'll ask why and you'll have to step them back through the logic of the change and why that leads to doing that one thing in a different way."

HOW TO CHECK FOR JARGON

In your own functional area, you effortlessly use terms that will come across as confusing jargon to others. It is almost impossible to know what others will see as jargon. Communication needs to be tested against a real audience to see what they readily understand and what they find confusing.

04

COMMUNICATION
LOOKING AT FRESH OPPORTUNITIES

Three new opportunities.

WHAT'S COVERED

4.1
CREATING VIRAL CHANGE

It's natural for those at the top of the hierarchy to see communication as a combination of giving orders (you have to do it) and convincing people (this is a great idea). In other words, the voice at the top broadcasts to everyone else.

An alternative model is to see communication as a virus that infects (convinces) a few advocates who share it and it spreads from there. This model would involve identifying potential advocates, crafting a strategy to win them over, and then equipping them with the ability to spread the message.

Viral change is started by a few people and rapidly shared and adopted by others. How have you used this viral communication model as a driver for change?

THE TRUTH ABOUT UPWARD COMMUNICATION?

"We have upward communication but it's not so that leaders will do anything differently. It just helps the leaders know how to pitch the message about what they already decided to do." US HR leader.

4.2
EMBRACING AGILE COMMUNICATION

It's been traditional to plan a communication campaign that is rolled out in phases. That approach is analogous to IT's waterfall methodology where detailed planning is followed by execution and then delivery of a final product. In many cases the waterfall methodology, which relies so much on figuring everything out in advance, doesn't work well.

An alternative is agile methodology. The agile approach begins with a minimally viable product to get people thinking, gets feedback from that first pass, and keeps going through the cycle of improving the product a little, getting feedback and moving on.

What would agile communication look like? Have you ever done anything like this? Is this the future of communications?

IS THE COMMUNICATION PERSONALLY RELEVANT?

Time and resource constraints may mean that communications tend to be more generic in nature and based on one or a few channels. It's worth exploring what matters at a specific individual level. Does a given employee have a preferred way of getting information? And how often? What would be the topics that would most concern him/her?

COMMUNICATION

4.3
LEVERAGING TECHNOLOGY TO CREATE A NEW EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE

There are many new forms of communication:

- Blogging by senior leaders (e.g. Sir Richard Branson blogs regularly)

- Video, sometimes including informal 'shot on a smartphone' style videos

- Photos (e.g. using Instagram for job postings)

- Instant messaging (e.g. Slack)

- Knowledge jams for mass sharing of ideas on a particular topic (e.g. IBM's Innovation Jams).

There are almost certainly people within your organisation who have some facility with these new communication technologies; however there is no guarantee that those same people will be leading your HR communications efforts.

Are you continually enhancing your ability to use new forms of communication? Does it matter if you are not? Does your internal digital communications experience match the 'real-life' experience that your employees have when not at work?

ARE YOU READY FOR THE FUTURE: CHATBOTS, VIRTUAL REALITY, SIMULATIONS AND GAMIFICATION?

We might think of 'knowledge jams' as a new means of communicating, but even more radical methods are just around the corner. Organisations are already looking at using chatbots to answer employee questions or interview candidates; virtual reality is just at the edge of being useful, and simulations which are currently used as screening tools could potentially be re-deployed as communication tools. For communication meant to drive significant behaviour change, these new tools might make a difference.

WHAT ARE KNOWLEDGE/INNOVATION JAMS?

Knowledge jams or innovation jams can have many different formats. The core idea is to get many people gathered together, either in person or online, to work on a problem for a few hours. Jams can be used for a variety of purposes one of which is communication. If you were driving a shift to more centralized HR processes you might use a knowledge jam to uncover the most affected stakeholders, the biggest issues, and which behaviours need to be changed. This could be seen as a tool for informing your communications team so that they can plan their approach, but it's more than that. The jam gets many people informed about and involved with the initiative; it can be a tool in driving a viral change by creating advocates.

05

COMMUNICATION
A FRAMEWORK FOR MOVING FORWARDS

Here's a simple framework for thinking through communication.

WHAT'S COVERED

COMMUNICATION

5.1
FRAMEWORK

1 **What are the strategic communication issues where we need to drive change?**
Are we focusing the bulk of our attention on these issues?

2 **Who are we communicating to?**
Have we analysed the different audiences and personas we need to convince?

3 **What do we want them to do?**
Are we clear what specifically we want each set of stakeholders to do differently?

4 **How will we communicate?**
There are a great many media and ways to use those media; have we chosen the right ones?

5 **Who will do the communication?**
What role will be played by HR communication, leaders, middle managers, labour representatives, inspired advocates?

6 **How will we evaluate our endeavours?**
What mechanism are we using to assess if the communication is working?

Key idea: *Instead of starting with the message and medium (what I want to tell them and how); start with the strategic objective, who needs to do what differently, and then what set of communications strategies will get that result.*

Closing comment

If you clearly communicate HR initiatives you are launching, then eventually you'll also be expected to communicate how they worked out. How do you evaluate people-related initiatives? That's the subject of the next section.

06

EVALUATION
EVALUATING WHY WE ARE EVALUATING

There are at least four overlapping reasons for evaluating.

WHAT'S COVERED

EVALUATING WHY WE ARE EVALUATING

1 **Before:** To decide if an initiative is worth doing before we begin so that we don't commit to ineffective or unimportant projects.

This is being done already; how confident are you that it's done well?

2 **After:** To decide if an initiative has succeeded so that we stop doing what doesn't work and do more of what does.

This is often overlooked; is this a lost opportunity?

3 **Purely to learn:** To learn some lessons from a project so that future projects will be more successful.

A good idea, but people usually want to move on to the next project rather than rehashing the past. Informally, something is always learned, but do we miss important lessons by not having more formal evaluation for the purposes of learning?

4 **During:** To track results, perhaps in an HR dashboard, as a guide towards assessing the overall effectiveness of the HR function.

This steps away from evaluating individual initiatives to a vaguer overview of the effectiveness of practices overall. Does the CEO/Board need a dashboard or does the dashboard merely assuage their lack of confidence in their ability to assess if we are doing a good job?

We can see that '1' is pre-launch, '2' & '3 occur at some milestone or at the endpoint of an initiative, and '4' is a kind of annual report card.

Which of these four reasons for evaluation is top of mind in your organisation?

07

EVALUATION
WHY ISN'T EVALUATION ALREADY DONE WELL?

No one would argue against evaluating the success of initiatives, so why isn't it done well in most companies?

WHAT'S COVERED

EVALUATION

7.1
CAN YOU NEATLY LIST WHAT INITIATIVES YOU SHOULD BE EVALUATING?

Textbook descriptions of evaluating initiatives presume initiatives have clean boundaries, a specific start and end date, and a fixed set of goals. In practice, initiatives evolve in messy ways.

For example, one HR pro may be continually working on tweaking the onboarding of entry-level workers, which morphs into a project to use a new assessment in recruiting, then gets refocused on adding a training module around compliance for both existing staff and as part of onboarding. It's being rolled out in different ways to different groups. It feels more like on-going, ever-changing work than a well-defined initiative with a clear start, clear end, and clear goals.

Looking back at what HR worked on last year, which initiatives have a clear start point which could have sparked a pre-launch evaluation? Which ones had a clear end point which could have sparked a post-initiative evaluation?

Does the idea of evaluation get derailed because the boundaries are so fuzzy? Is this a show-stopper?

7.2
EVALUATION DOESN'T HAPPEN WITHOUT A SPECIAL EFFORT

Imagine a part of the organisation feels they need to improve talent sourcing. They ask HR to create a better designed process. HR does so and begins to implement the new process. Over the course of the year they tweak the process and expand it to cover more jobs.

Probably HR should have done an evaluation pre-launch, but it seemed so obvious that the initiative was needed that this was skipped. Potentially HR could pause at some point and do an evaluation of whether the initiative is succeeding, but that is a lot of effort.

Does your HR function have the mind-set that 'We don't embark on projects without evaluation in mind' and 'We take a pause once a year or so to evaluate how well we did?' Is there a process so that these steps happen automatically? How much effort would it take to ensure pre-launch and post-initiative evaluations were routine?

HR SHOULD DO MORE EXPERIMENTS

Often it's impossible to know which option will work best. HR should be more open to running controlled experiments to try things out and see if they work. Experiments don't need to attain scientific levels of accuracy, they just need to provide better insight than you would have if you'd not done them.

08

EVALUATION
WILL EVALUATION BACKFIRE?

If we can get clarity on what we are evaluating and when, then create the discipline to do it, we've made a start; however we need to guard against evaluation going off the rails.

WHAT'S COVERED

8.1
ROI IS OFTEN A FICTION

Most ROI calculations in HR, whether pre-launch or post-initiative, are not credible because the dollar impacts are wild estimates. If we are pushed towards creating ROIs then we will waste a lot of time for an evaluated result that is not credible.

The former CHRO of Marriott got tired of the executive team asking for an ROI only to have them shoot holes in his estimates when he did so. He ended up telling them *"Look if you don't want to do it just say so, let's not pretend a spreadsheet is going to change your mind."*

In fact, when analysts create ROI spreadsheets they routinely start with the result they need to get, then work back to craft assumptions that will deliver that result. It's less a serious attempt to determine whether a project is worth launching than an elaborate game.

At Goldman Sachs, Steve Kerr told leadership that he absolutely would not crank out ROIs for the leadership development programme; he said it would be a fiction that would disrespect both him and the leadership team.

Does your organisation use ROIs when they are largely fictional and hence not the right tool to evaluate HR programmes pre-launch or post-initiative?

8.2
EVALUATION PROCESSES CAN BECOME A WASTEFUL BUREAUCRACY

Pixar routinely used after action reviews to evaluate how well the film production had gone and capture some lessons learned. However, Ed Catmull found that after a few cycles people began to say the same safe things in the reviews. What started as a useful evaluation was becoming a wasteful bureaucratic exercise. His solution was to keep changing up the format to keep it fresh.

Any required process can devolve from serving a real purpose to a pointless exercise of going through the motions. Evaluation is especially vulnerable to this dynamic because it can be unpleasant to face up to disappointing outcomes.

Have you ever seen evaluation processes slide from a value-adding step to a wasteful bureaucratic exercise? How might you have prevented that?

8.3
A POOR MEASURE CAN BE WORSE THAN NO MEASURE

To evaluate hospital performance the NHS measured the time it took from when a patient signed in at the front desk until they were seen by a medical professional. As a result, hospitals started keeping patients in ambulances outside so that the clock didn't start ticking. It was a case where measuring performance led to worse performance – even though the measured variable ('time to be seen by a medical professional') was improving.

If we aggressively create measures, and we get the wrong measures or not enough context, then the pressure to get a good evaluation measure may lead people to doing things that make the real outcome worse.

Have you seen examples of this? If we decide to do more evaluation of HR will it lead to worse outcomes?

EVALUATION IS ABOUT CONVERSATION, NOT NUMBERS

The world is always too complex to be accurately captured in a spreadsheet. Data informs an evaluation, but the actual evaluation has to flow from a thoughtful conversation.

8.4
LEADERS LOVE THE IDEA OF SCORECARDS WHEN THEY DON'T UNDERSTAND A TOPIC

One of the four reasons for evaluation was that leaders want an overall sense for how well HR is doing. However, most scorecards are unexciting and don't answer the question of whether HR is being deployed in a way that will best assist the execution of strategy.

Is an overall HR scorecard a useful element in evaluation? Should we push back against this kind of reporting and instead report on the most important initiatives of the year and our evaluation of how well they worked and what was learned?

PULSE SURVEYS HAVE THEIR LIMITS

There is no more flexible tool for evaluating outcomes than surveys. However, employees get tired of constantly being asked questions. This is particularly the case when their answers to the questions never seem to inspire action. Pulse surveys need to be used with care. The questions have to be well-formulated, wherever possible the actions taken as a result of the feedback should be communicated, and overall the total number of surveys must be controlled.

09

EVALUATION
OPPORTUNITIES FOR BETTER EVALUATION

Evaluation isn't already routinely done well because it's messier, more difficult, and more dangerous than usually acknowledged. Given those difficulties, where are the opportunities for better evaluation?

WHAT'S COVERED

9.1
FOCUS ON BUSINESS OUTCOMES, NOT HR OUTCOMES

It can get tiresome hearing one HR vendor after another justify their offering in terms of improvements in engagement or turnover. If HR leaders feel this way about traditional HR-centric metrics, then you can imagine how business unit leaders feel.

Business leaders would most like to hear how an HR initiative led to higher same store sales, or fewer defects in production, or hitting software release deadlines or improved customer satisfaction. There is an opportunity in centring the evaluation of an HR initiative around a business outcome rather than an HR outcome.

Even though any given HR initiative is only one factor leading to an improvement in a business outcome, would it be better to focus on that in evaluation rather than justify the initiative based on HR measures?

IT'S NOT WRONG TO MEASURE HR ACTIVITIES

HR is often criticized for reporting on HR activities (e.g. the number of days of training that were delivered) rather than business outcomes (e.g. do people have the right skills to be able to sell the new product). We can offer a bit of kindness in saying that HR should indeed track the basic activity metrics, leaders do expect them to know how much training they've given. The critique comes when activity is the only thing HR measures.

9.2
ASSESSMENT IS A BETTER TERM THAN MEASUREMENT

The word 'measurement' narrows focus to objective, easy to collect measures, even if they are not particularly relevant to evaluating an initiative. The term assessment is much broader and more appropriate for most HR initiatives. Assessments could include insight from experts, compelling logic, focus groups, or conclusions from the academic literature – as well as objective data.

There is an opportunity to free evaluation from the restrictive world of objective data simply by replacing the phrase 'measuring outcomes' with 'assessing outcomes'.

It makes life easier if you talk about 'assessing outcomes' rather than 'measuring outcomes'. Would this shift be well-received in your organisation?

EVALUATION

Would a more disciplined approach to clearly articulating a logic model and more confident use of estimates lead to better answers to the question 'Is it worth doing?'

9.3
LOGIC MODELS CAN GO A LONG WAY EVEN WITHOUT PRECISE MEASURES

CRF's HR Manifesto points out 'Is it worth doing?' is a question not heard often enough. It can be hard to find precise measures to prove an initiative is worth doing; fortunately, you rarely need precise measures. You can usually go a long way with clear logic and reasonable estimates.

USC professors John Boudreau and Alec Levenson both talk about using 'logic models' to guide this kind of decision making. Building such a model might sound daunting, but all they mean is a simple diagram of the main causal factors. For example, the notion that poor individual performance may be caused by lack of ability, lack of motivation, or lack of opportunity is a logic model. If a manager is fixated on 'lack of ability' even when there is no evidence that is the problem, then the logic model can point to alternatives which may suggest more effective interventions.

Logic still needs to be backed by numbers and often you can get adequately good numbers from estimates. If you've ever seen TV shows like Dragon's Den where investors size up proposals, they don't pull out spreadsheets to decide if it's worth doing; they look at the logic of the offering (e.g. is there a defensible competitive advantage?) and make estimates on the back of an envelope.

There is a tendency to think the pre-launch evaluation should be done with a complex spreadsheet when in many cases the heart of a good decision lies in clear logic and sound estimates.

There is an opportunity for easier-to-build and easier-to-understand evaluations using logic models and estimates rather than spreadsheets.

9.4
A FEW NUMBERS CAN GO A LONG WAY TO IMPROVE CREDIBILITY

The CRF HR Manifesto notes that HR can be 'numbers shy'. Some professionals in your HR department may have chosen the function specifically because they 'like people, not numbers'. However, the kind of mathematics needed in evaluation rarely goes beyond addition and division, something even a numbers-shy employee should be able to master.

In arguing that, for example, an initiative to improve employer brand is worthwhile, some simple numbers around the Glassdoor rating, percent of offers to candidates that were declined, and answers to relevant questions on the employee survey can be enough to create what Peter Navin, Head of HR for Grand Rounds, calls 'a mosaic of measures'. In the mosaic, even though no one data point in itself is decisive, the overall picture is clear enough for management to evaluate whether an initiative is worth doing.

The opportunity for HR is to build credibility around their evaluation by creating a mosaic of measures that, together, paint a picture of whether an initiative is worth doing (pre-launch) or whether it has succeeded sufficiently to keep doing it (at some milestone).

Is the 'numbers shyness' of HR leading them to overlook providing simple numbers that set context and paint a picture?

EVALUATION

9.5
GIVE LEADERS WHAT THEY REALLY CARE ABOUT

After an HR initiative has reached a point where it can be evaluated, leaders want to know three things:

1. Did it work, or did we make a mistake?

2. Should we continue doing it, or make a change?

3. What has it cost?

If you can answer those questions simply, particularly the second one, then you don't need to venture into fictitious ROI calculations. (See the Framework at the end of this paper for more step-by-step guidance on answering what's top of mind with leaders).

The opportunity for HR is to avoid the bog of secondary factors by being clear about what leaders really care about with respect to the HR initiative. Additionally, they can potentially leverage the data to provide fresh insights for leaders (e.g. a change initiative may have great support at the top and bottom of the organisation but not amongst middle managers).

Can you boil down the desired outcome of a recent initiative into the one factor that the CEO cares most about (that is, the factor that would lead them to continue the initiative or cancel it)?

THE WORD 'PIVOT' IN PART MEANS 'TO STOP'

Silicon Valley firms love to talk about pivoting. They frame it as moving in a new direction. That part is easy. The hard part of pivoting is stopping something you've been doing because an evaluation showed it wasn't working. HR needs to embrace the idea of stopping doing things that aren't working. If it makes people feel better, we can call it a pivot.

EXPERIENCE IS A FORM OF EVIDENCE

When a manager suggests the value of a proposed initiative doesn't need to be evaluated because *"I've been doing the job for 20 years!"* we should take their view seriously. Experience is indeed a form of evidence to be considered in an evaluation. Sometimes it's high-quality evidence and may be all we need for the decision to proceed; sometimes their opinion, despite their many years in the job, is not high-quality evidence and should be supplemented with other sources of data.

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EVALUATION
FRAMEWORKS FOR EVALUATION

Simple frameworks can lead to improved evaluation.

WHAT'S COVERED

EVALUATION

10.1
PRE-LAUNCH QUESTIONS TO DECIDE IF AN INITIATIVE IS WORTH DOING

The CRF HR Manifesto suggests the following framework of questions to decide if an initiative is worth launching:

1 What is the desired business outcome?

2 What do we plan to do to achieve it?

3 How much will it cost?

4 How will we evaluate the success of the project?

Is this on track? Does it miss anything essential?

10.2
POST-INITIATIVE QUESTIONS TO ASSESS SUCCESS

The CRF HR Manifesto suggests the following framework of questions to decide if an initiative was successful (and worth continuing):

1 Have we done what we said we would do? Have we achieved our objectives?

2 How much has it cost?

3 Do we and our sponsors believe that the improvements or attainment from the objectives have been worth the investment made?

4 Was the evaluator informed, experienced and impartial?

Is this on track? Does it miss anything essential?

EVALUATION

10.3
POST-INITIATIVE EVALUATION TO DRAW OUT LESSONS TO BE LEARNED

While lessons learned should be informed by data, they normally arise from conversations. Keeping in mind Pixar CEO Ed Catmull's warning that you need to mix things up to keep it fresh, here is one commonly used set of questions to guide a group through an after action review of an initiative:

1 What was expected to happen?

2 What actually occurred?

3 What went well and why?

4 What can be improved and how?

An evidence-based guide to after action reviews can be found on the website for the Centre of Evidence-based Management: https://www.cebma.org/wp-content/uploads/Guide-to-the-after_action_review.pdf

Is this on track? Does it miss anything essential?

10.4
DASHBOARDS FOR EVALUATING THE OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS OF HR

In this briefing we focused mainly on assessing initiatives, not dashboards, however here is a set of tips for using an HR dashboard when presenting to the executive team or board:

1 Start any report or presentation with a discussion of overall business strategy and situate HR outcomes and HR initiatives in that context.

2 Keep the HR dashboard short (e.g. only the top 10 metrics, if leaders what to add another one then ask which of the less important ones should be dropped)

3 Include an answer to 'So what?' with each metric. This is normally not a conclusion, it's a suggestion such as 'This data suggests we have more than enough talent in Asia to reach our goals' or 'This data suggests we need to look more deeply at what's wrong with our employer brand.'

4 Guide the discussion towards business implications of the issues hinted at by the dashboard, not a dissection of each data point.

5 Follow the 'stage setting' of the outcomes dashboard with a discussion of HR initiatives, the evaluation of how well they worked and from there lead into a discussion of what HR plans to do next. The discussion of initiatives is generally more important than the results in the dashboard.

Is this on track? Does it miss anything essential?

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CONNECTING THE DOTS

Both communication and evaluation presume that HR should step away from doing the work and spend more time thinking about the work. The single most important element in communication is deciding which projects are strategic and what behaviour change we want from that project. Evaluation requires that we chunk on-going work into initiatives that have a start (so we can evaluate whether they are worth doing before we begin) and an end, or at least milestones (so we can evaluate whether they worked and learn some lessons).

The challenge is to create disciplined processes that don't become bureaucratic timewasters. In the case of communication, the risk of bureaucracy is mainly that it will lock in current ways of doing things and lose touch with the rapidly changing capabilities of technology and the unfamiliar expectations of younger employees. In the case of evaluation, the risk of bureaucracy is not just wasted time, it's that inappropriate use of evaluation can be worse than no evaluation.

HR leaders need to consider how they can create more disciplined processes that will improve communication and evaluation without falling into the dysfunctions of bureaucracy.

Considering all the issues covered in this briefing which ones land most heavily with you? Where is the opportunity to evolve or transform the HR function?