



# HRBPS: RESET AND THRIVE

HELPING BUSINESSES PREPARE FOR AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE

On 1<sup>st</sup> July 2020, CRF members gathered for **HRBPs: Reset and Thrive – Helping Businesses Prepare for an Uncertain Future**, a Zoom Interactive Event. Director of CRF Learning **Nick Holley** and **Neil Morrison**, Director of HR, Severn Trent, discussed how HRBPs can help their organisations thrive in the post-COVID-19 landscape.

Holley and Morrison shared the importance of:

- Challenging short-term, operationally-focused line managers to think long-term
- Preparing for and taking opportunities as and when they arrive
- Researching not just HR issues, but issues pertinent to the business and its future
- Asking the right questions rather than having the answers
- Having a framework to think about future capabilities required with a potentially new business model
- Focusing on leaders, managers and people who will be the future of the business.



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### KEY TAKEAWAYS

**The COVID-19 crisis will require many organisations to reset their strategy, because the business environment has so radically changed. Research shows that those organisations that act quickly and refocus during a crisis outperform their peers post-crisis.**

When things are moving quickly and agility is required, HRBPs can come into their own if they understand their business area and how to support the leaders in those areas, demonstrate an ability to deal with ambiguity, and know what to focus on at what time.

*HRBPs have to build up the trust that will allow them to challenge without being seen as disruptive or provocative. Empathy and logic are key parts of building trust. HRBPs also need the situational awareness to recognise when it's the right time to challenge (or not).*

Great HRBPs are distinguished by their ability to listen and to ask the right questions, rather than have all the answers. Often we focus too much on asking questions rather than listening. It's critical to listen to what isn't being said – to the subtext – and then ask the questions to surface those things.

*There is now a massive opportunity for the HR profession to do things differently, but we've also lost a lot. As we look towards thriving in the future, one of the big challenges is to know what new practices to keep and which old practices to revive. The key is to blend together useful new ways of working with old ways that are still useful.*

The HR function has risen to the COVID-19 crisis in many ways. The function has shown agility and the ability to make good situation-based decisions. It has done well at identifying and adapting to individual needs, as the pandemic's impact on individuals has varied. It has shown an impressive ability to triage decision-making – that is, to identify those things that need solving now, a week from now, a month from now, and so on.

**ONE STRATEGY FOR CHALLENGING LINE MANAGERS TO THINK LONG-TERM IS TO ARTICULATE A COMMON PURPOSE FOR THE WHOLE ENTERPRISE, AROUND WHICH PEOPLE CAN COALESCE.**

**HRBPs have to be thinking about the business, not just HR. Part of this is about developing commercial acumen, but equally it's about understanding how it feels to work in different parts of the business. The only way to get this understanding is to go out and talk to people.**

**AS BUSINESSES RESET, THE PEOPLE WHO MATTER IS LIKELY TO CHANGE. HRBPS MUST PROACTIVELY IDENTIFY PEOPLE WHO LOOK AT THE WORLD, THE TEAM, THE BUSINESS, AND THE SITUATION IN A DIFFERENT WAY, IN ORDER TO BUILD BLENDED TEAMS. THIS REQUIRES CONSTANT VIGILANCE, AND IS ESPECIALLY IMPORTANT NOW THAT WE ARE NO LONGER IN A 'BUSINESS AS USUAL' ENVIRONMENT.**



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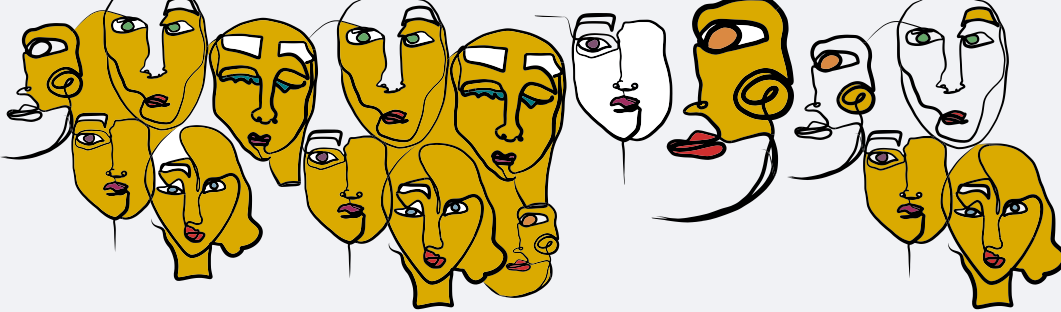
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#### AUDIENCE Q&A

**Q** Do people see the role of the HRBP evolving at all post-COVID-19? If so, how? Which capabilities will need dialling up?

**A** *It depends on the individuals in the business. We've just experienced a human crisis (as opposed to a financial crisis). This has very different impacts on people and organisations. Real human understanding is required to deal with such a crisis, and HRBPs can play a significant role in helping the business navigate this. If HR steps up to the plate, the function could grow in stature. But it depends on the individuals and the business – whether they have the courage and support to rise to the challenge, or whether they shy away from it.*

#### FURTHER READING

CRF. 2020. **Business Partnering in a Crisis**. Post Meeting Notes. <https://www.crforum.co.uk/research-and-resources/post-meeting-notes-business-partnering-in-a-crisis>

CRF. 2020. **Future Insight: Responding to Trends, Threats, and Opportunities**. CRF Briefing Paper. <https://www.crforum.co.uk/research-and-resources/future-insight-responding-to-trends-threats-and-opportunities>

CRF. 2020. **Future Insight: Responding to Trends, Threats, and Opportunities**. Post Meeting Notes. <https://www.crforum.co.uk/research-and-resources/future-insight-responding-to-trends-threats-and-opportunities-meeting-review>

CRF. 2020. **Post COVID-19 Planning Tool**. <https://www.crforum.co.uk/research-and-resources/post-covid-19-planning-tool>

CRF. 2020. **Stop Planning, Start Preparing**. Post Meeting Notes. <https://www.crforum.co.uk/research-and-resources/post-meeting-notes-stop-planning-start-preparing-zoom-interactive-event>

CRF. 2019. **Trusted Advisor: HR Business Partnering, Relationship Building, and Influencing**. Post Meeting Notes. <https://www.crforum.co.uk/research-and-resources/post-meeting-review-notes-trusted-advisor-hr-business-partnering-relationship-building-influencing>

CRF. 2014. **Trust**. Research Report. <https://www.crforum.co.uk/research-and-resources/trust-2>

**Q** I'm assuming there are people (including senior leaders) in organisations who want to go 'back to the way things were' – how can this be avoided?

**A** *This is difficult because different leaders are at different places. Some leaders may be more traditional and wedded to older ways of working (i.e. presenteeism). Other leaders might be ready to embrace change. One way to tackle this challenge is through modelling the desired behaviour. Work with those that do not share the new thinking to change their behaviour.*

#### SPEAKERS



 EMAIL

**NICK HOLLEY** as Director of CRF Learning has responsibility to provide development for HR teams and senior professionals. Prior to joining CRF, Nick spent 10 years at Henley Business School where he was a visiting professor and Director of the Centre for HR Excellence. He has developed and delivered HR capability programmes for organisations across the UK and Europe, and internationally.



**NEIL MORRISON** is currently the HR Director for FTSE100 water company, Severn Trent. Neil has served on the board of the CIPD, and was one of the inaugural members of the Good Recruitment Campaign. A regular writer, he is also a frequent media commentator and speaker. Neil has been named as one of the most influential people in HR for the last five years. His executive career has spanned the media, retail and utilities sectors as well as the public sector. Throughout this time the common thread has been helping organisations to successfully navigate change. He was one of the leads in the global merger between Penguin and Random House, the largest merger in publishing history.

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