

2026 Conference Summary Notes

Turning Uncertainty into Advantage

Uncertainty is one of the most overused – and most misunderstood – words in business. Too often, it is treated as shorthand for risk, instability, or loss of control. But uncertainty is not automatically a threat; in many cases, uncertainty is where opportunity begins.

The challenge at the heart of this year's conference was: How do we stop seeing uncertainty as something to eliminate, and start treating it as something to embrace? The organisations that will succeed will not be those that wait for certainty. They will be the ones that can adapt, learn, and make confident decisions despite incomplete information.

In a more complex, disrupted, and fast-changing world, innovation rarely comes from certainty. It comes from curiosity, experimentation, and the willingness to move before every answer is available. The greatest value often emerges not in spite of disruption, but because of it. That demands a shift from linear thinking – define, plan, control, execute – to systems thinking, where relationships, feedback, adaptation, and learning matter just as much as process. Consider how quickly new technologies, shifting workforce expectations, or geopolitical shocks can upend a five-year plan: organisations that treat strategy as a fixed roadmap are often the slowest to respond, while those that build in short cycles of testing, feedback, and learning can turn that same disruption into a genuine source of advantage.

HR leaders play a critical role in helping organisations navigate uncertainty in a deeply human way – building trust, enabling learning, strengthening adaptability, and ensuring people are supported through change rather than overwhelmed by it. The best organisations will not be “know-it-all” cultures, but “learn-it-all” cultures, where employee voice, challenge, and action go hand in hand.

This is why leadership matters so much. Leaders must create space to experiment, fail fast, and make real trade-offs – choosing, for example, to back a promising but unproven idea over a safer, incremental one. They must model that it is acceptable not to have all the answers, admitting openly where they are uncertain rather than projecting false confidence, and focus instead on creating the conditions in which better solutions can emerge from the people closest to the work.

The future will not belong to organisations that wait for certainty. It will belong to those that know how to turn uncertainty into energy, innovation, and advantage.

The real work starts now: give your teams permission to experiment, your leaders permission to be wrong, and your culture permission to learn. That is how uncertainty becomes advantage.

Maura Jarvis, *Workforce Transformation Practice Leader, Marsh*



Introduction

Uncertainty is a constant, but organisations are operating through a period in which it is heightened. Leaders must make consequential decisions while the conditions informing them continue to change.

The challenge is that uncertainty is not one thing. Some unknowns can be treated as risks because the possible outcomes and their likelihood can be estimated. Others are deeper uncertainties: organisations may not yet know all the actions available to them, the outcomes that could emerge, what is causing what or which trade-offs will ultimately matter. Different forms of uncertainty therefore require different responses rather than a single attempt to forecast and control them.

The strain affects both strategy and people. Decisions can stall as leaders seek reassurance that is unavailable, while disruption can prompt repeated shifts in direction. Organisations may respond by adding forecasts, controls and approval layers, even when these slow down learning and adaptation. For individuals and teams, sustained uncertainty can also create anxiety, defensiveness and fatigue, reducing the capacity to think beyond the immediate problem.

Yet uncertainty also creates opportunities to develop new business models, discover sources of growth and rethink how work is organised. Pursuing these opportunities requires leaders to judge where stability matters, where exploration is needed and how to support people working without complete answers. It also requires organisations to connect signals across functions, experiment intelligently and build relationships that allow people to act with both clarity and discretion.

CRF's *Turning Uncertainty into Advantage* conference examined how organisations can understand uncertainty better, adapt to it more effectively and exploit it to create value. This paper summarises the key messages and provides links to speaker videos and presentation slides.



Understanding uncertainty requires attention to both the conditions creating it and how people respond. Professor Gudela Grote's work challenges the assumption that uncertainty should always be reduced. People regulate uncertainty through a mix of closing behaviours, such as relying on known routines and rules, and opening behaviours, such as questioning assumptions, experimenting and exploring new ways of working. Which response is useful depends on the task. Routine work may benefit from consistency and predictability, while work requiring learning or improvisation needs enough uncertainty and discretion to keep alternatives open.

The difficulty is that people's preferred level of uncertainty does not always match what their work requires, and the demand may shift within the same role. Grote's uncertainty-as-enabling mindset is therefore less about making people comfortable with ambiguity in general and more about widening their repertoire. Leaders and teams need to recognise when uncertainty can be influenced, when it must be borne and when creating more of it may support learning, innovation or better use of diverse perspectives. Communication that encourages speaking up, perspective-taking and cross-learning, together with standards that enable as well as constrain action, can help people regulate uncertainty more effectively.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **Uncertainty is not necessarily something we should always seek to minimise.** People perform best when the level of uncertainty they have to manage to achieve their work goals matches their preferred level of uncertainty.
- **Our task is to identify where tasks require dependable routines and where they require exploration,** then check whether people have the guidance, autonomy and discretion each demands.
- **We should not consider individuals' attitudes towards uncertainty to be fixed.** Grote provided examples of interventions which resulted in mindset shifts and changes to behaviour. Her measurement scale (accessible [here](#)) can also be used to measure capacity for uncertainty.
- **Build your own capacity for uncertainty** by decidedly embracing uncertainty and reflecting on when uncertainty can be enjoyable (for example challenging yourself to master a new skill).



Prof. Gudela Grote

Professor Emeritus, Department of Management, Technology, and Economics, ETH Zurich



Understanding the external environment is equally important. Robert Ward's analysis of the global reset describes a business context in which economics, technology and national security are becoming more closely intertwined. He points to a shift from an era in which efficiency and globally distributed supply chains were often prioritised towards one in which resilience, economic security and regional relationships carry greater weight. Export controls, investment restrictions, industrial policy and requirements for greater supply-chain transparency can all affect where organisations source, invest, locate capabilities and sell.

Ward also places greater emphasis on the relationship between companies and governments. Multinationals can become geopolitical actors, and in some sectors companies may be treated as strategic assets. His practical implication is that geopolitical understanding should not sit only in a specialist risk function. Organisations need the equivalent of a corporate foreign policy: a clearer view of their interests across markets, the political and economic dependencies around them and the scenarios that could change the assumptions behind major decisions.

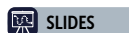
KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **The post-1945 world order came to an end at the time of the global financial crisis in 2008.** Since then we have seen great volatility and a plateauing of globalisation.
- **Forces shaping the new world order include a growing rivalry and divergence of world views between the US and China,** increasing competition for natural resources and technology sovereignty, global financial power shifts and climate change. Our organisations are likely to see increased political intervention in business decisions and direct interference by hostile actors.
- **Companies need to view themselves as geopolitical actors.** Every organisation now needs to have a corporate foreign policy. The message for the c-suite is: "You may not be interested in geopolitics, but geopolitics is interested in you."



Robert Ward

Director of Geoeconomics & Strategy, Japan Chair, The International Institute for Strategic Studies



Recognising uncertainty has limited value if the organisation's ways of working prevent it from responding. Many management systems were designed around assumptions of stability: define the desired outcome, specify the plan, allocate roles, control execution and correct deviations. Sudhanshu Palsule's work on complexity questions whether this logic remains sufficient when cause and effect cannot always be known in advance and the act of intervening changes the system itself.

Palsule reframes 'not-knowing' as an active capability rather than a lack of expertise. The aim is not to abandon targets, accountability or analysis, but to avoid treating prediction as the only route to effective action. His shift from certitude to clarity, content to context, authority to attention and control to conditions suggests a different leadership task: create enough structure to coordinate while leaving enough room for possibilities to emerge. Weak signals may first appear at the edges, interfaces and relationships in a system, so organisations need mechanisms that allow those signals to travel rather than expecting insight to come only from the centre.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **More control is not always the answer to uncertainty.** Industrial-age management assumes we can predict, plan and control outcomes. In complex systems, adding processes and procedures can create complication without improving our ability to respond. HR should challenge where this 'straight-line thinking' still shapes organisation design and leadership practice.
- **Pay attention to 'warm data'** – the understanding gained through conversations, observation and relationships – as well as 'cold data' (metrics, reports and analysis). Warm data will help you understand how uncertainty is playing out in practice. Context is as important as content.
- **Show up differently.** Palsule's 80:20 proposition recognises the need to run today's organisation while developing its capacity for complexity. Protect some time for a different approach: change the conversations, ask more open questions and explore possibilities without rushing to a predetermined answer.



Sudhanshu Palsule

Author, Educator, Leadership Advisor,
and Keynote Speaker



Julia Binder addressed what adaptation means for business strategy. Organisations may recognise that the world is changing, yet continue to invest in preserving how they operate today. Her argument was that resilience requires more than recovering from disruption. Businesses need to use changing conditions to build new sources of advantage.

Her starting point was that economic power is returning to the physical world. Access to energy, materials and infrastructure that digital services, AI and cloud platforms depend upon is becoming less dependable as geopolitical tensions and environmental pressures reinforce each other. This also creates opportunities to rethink how businesses make money. Circular business models that extend product life, recover materials and sell services rather than products can reduce resource dependence while generating new revenue. Rolls-Royce's 'Power by the Hour' illustrates how charging for use can give a manufacturer a commercial reason to keep its products working for longer.

The leadership challenge is to pursue these opportunities while delivering today's results. Binder's Three Horizons model highlights a common trap: innovation intended to prepare the business for the future is absorbed into prolonging the existing model. HR can help develop leaders who can 'perform and transform', connecting across disciplines, bringing colleagues together across functions and making deliberate choices about what to retain and what to change. Becoming 'future-ready, not just future-aware' requires leaders to see themselves as capable of shaping the future.

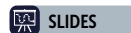
KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **See differently:** develop leaders who can connect the dots. Geopolitics, technology and resource pressures interact. Build leaders' ability to think across these boundaries and understand what their combined effects mean for the business.
- **Act differently:** start by making connections inside the organisation. Knowledge and capabilities often sit in separate functions. Bring people together around emerging business challenges, then identify the external partners needed to develop solutions.
- **Lead differently:** make room for 'perform and transform'. Review whether leadership incentives, development and succession decisions prepare people only to run today's business or also to build tomorrow's. Protect attention for longer-term opportunities and encourage a 'we shape the future' mindset, giving leaders both responsibility and scope to act.



Julia Binder

Professor of Business Transformation, IMD



Adaptation is also a leadership challenge. Gianpiero Petriglieri described how uncertainty can leave people disoriented, distressed and disconnected, pushing them towards a defensive path in which they become more stubborn, work harder at familiar approaches and grow more isolated. The alternative is a developmental path in which people discover new ways of thinking, working and being. Leaders help create that path by providing enough direction and care for people to feel safe, while preserving enough freedom for them to question, learn and act.

At the heart of this is the quality of the relationship. Petriglieri's proposition that 'leadership is a kind of love' describes a demanding commitment that brings people together and moves them forward. We recognise good leadership through the experience of being moved: "I felt something, and we did something." People invest in leaders who understand their concerns and share their aspirations. Those relationships allow them to feel 'safe and free': committed, but not captive.

In uncertain conditions, relationship quality can determine whether organisational flexibility becomes productive or simply feels destabilising. Care requires leaders both to deliver results and to embody the values they ask others to uphold. For HR, this means developing leaders' capacity to pay attention, have meaningful conversations and demonstrate care through everyday decisions.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **Make care visible through attention and conversation.** Help leaders examine what their diaries, meeting agendas, measures and budgets reveal about their priorities. Changing culture requires changing what people pay attention to and talk about. As Petriglieri put it, "Attention is the seed of strategy" and "conversation is the seed of culture."
- **Treat the organisation as 'home'** – a place people inhabit. Ask what it feels like to spend a significant part of one's life there: is it hospitable, fair and somewhere people can feel both safe and free? Distinguish interpersonal care from institutional care. Difficult decisions may protect the organisation's future, but leaders need to explain whose interests they serve and how.
- **Rebalance leadership development towards care and commitment.** Ask leaders: "What or who do I care about?", "How do I show it?" and "Who do I reassure and free up?" Use real decisions and relationships to explore whether their behaviour supports both the results and the values they claim to pursue.



Gianpiero Petriglieri

Associate Professor of Organisational Behaviour,
INSEAD



Uncertainty is not only something to withstand. It can create space for new products, services, business models and ways of working. Vaughn Tan's starting point is the distinction between risk and uncertainty. Risk is calculable because the possible actions, outcomes, probabilities and values are known well enough to analyse. Genuine uncertainty exists when one or more of those elements are not known. Treating every unknown as risk can therefore create false confidence in numbers while narrowing the exploration through which innovation occurs.

Tan identifies four types of not-knowing, each with a different response. Not-knowing about actions calls for active search: take resources or capabilities the organisation already has and ask what else they could do in another context. Not-knowing about outcomes requires widening the set of possibilities before choosing among them. Not-knowing about causation calls for small, well-designed experiments that are cheap enough to run repeatedly and where failure is survivable. Not-knowing about value requires organisations to surface trade-offs explicitly, particularly where leaders appear to agree on a goal but disagree about what they are prepared to sacrifice to achieve it.

These responses are capabilities rather than tools. People need to learn how to recognise when they are in uncertainty rather than risk, design informative experiments, make value judgements and work in roles that remain sufficiently open-ended to evolve. This gives HR a direct business contribution. The question is not how HR can 'own' uncertainty, but how it can help build the judgement, team design, learning practices and leadership conditions that allow the organisation to make progress when established best practice is no longer enough.



Vaughn Tan

Fellow, Singapore Government's Centre for Strategic Futures, and Honorary Professor, University College London

 LINKEDIN

 SLIDES

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **Teach people to distinguish uncertainty from risk.** Risk can be calculated; uncertainty involves 'not-knowing' about actions, outcomes, causation or value. Each requires a different response. Giving teams a framework to recognise what they do not know helps them judge when established risk-management methods are useful and when they need to search, experiment or clarify trade-offs.
- **Build the skill of designing better experiments.** Encouraging people to experiment is insufficient without teaching them how. Start with something a team wants to try, clarify why they think it will work and identify the smallest, cheapest test of that assumption. A useful experiment produces learning and limits the consequences of failure.
- **Set goals by making trade-offs explicit.** Agreement on a goal can conceal disagreement about what people are willing to sacrifice to achieve it. Ask which valuable things will be given up and check the implications for other teams. This makes priorities clearer and exposes interdependencies that conventional goal-setting can miss.
- **Leave room for roles to evolve** – and start small. Where work is changing rapidly, 'negotiated joining' allows people to enter roles whose scope is not fully predetermined, then develop their contribution as new needs emerge.



Conference Chair's Summary

Jessica closed the conference by reflecting on the behaviours of leaders who work well with uncertainty:

They are comfortable saying "I don't know". They acknowledge uncertainty openly, with confidence and curiosity, and commit to sharing what they learn.

They listen before they speak. They recognise that their authority can close down a conversation. They enter discussions expecting to learn something, willing to revise their views.

They stay curious and informed. They seek information broadly and thoughtfully, exploring changes in geopolitics, society, customers and successive generations.

They actively resist the isolation of leadership. They seek contact beyond their immediate circle and the filtered information that reaches the top. They cultivate honesty and recognise that an absence of questions or disagreement may signal a problem.

They invest in relationships that challenge them. They seek colleagues and partners who think differently and will question their assumptions, helping them develop better ideas.

They lead bravely, but not carelessly. Clear principles and values guide their decisions when the way forward is uncertain.

They act, experiment and learn. They move without waiting for perfect information, acknowledge mistakes, seek help and try again. Curiosity and a sense of playfulness help make not-knowing productive.

She left delegates with **three reflections**:

1

FOR YOURSELF. What do I want to do personally to expand my ability to adapt in an increasingly uncertain world? Choose one concrete thing.

2

FOR YOUR LEADERS. What do our people need to see, hear and feel from leaders to be sufficiently safe and free to act in uncertainty?

2

FOR YOUR ORGANISATION. Which systems, processes and structures support experimentation and adaptation? Where are they designed primarily for control, and how do they need to change?



Dr. Jessica Bigazzi Foster

Chief Executive Officer, RHR International

 LINKEDIN

 VIDEO



**Download
CRF's Turning
Uncertainty
into Advantage
summary slides**



1

Where should we seek to reduce uncertainty, and where might more uncertainty be beneficial? Which parts of our organisation require stability, clear standards and predictable processes, and where do we need to give people greater freedom to question assumptions, explore alternatives and experiment?

3

How effectively are we anticipating the implications of geopolitical, technological and economic change for our organisation? What emerging threats and opportunities could affect our workforce, skills requirements and operating model? How can HR work more closely with other functions to translate external signals into strategic workforce decisions?

2

Are we equipped to distinguish between different types of uncertainty and respond appropriately? Where are we treating unknowns as calculable risks when we do not fully understand the possible actions, outcomes, causes or trade-offs? How might recognising these differences change our approach to decision-making?

4

Which of our existing management practices may be limiting our ability to respond to complexity? Where do structures, processes and approval mechanisms create unnecessary rigidity or reinforce the assumption that outcomes can be predicted and controlled? How could we create greater flexibility without losing clarity or accountability?

5

Are we making sufficient use of the knowledge and perspectives available across our organisation? How can we better connect insights from different functions, levels and external partners? What could we change about how leaders listen, share information and identify emerging opportunities that may not be visible through formal reporting?

7

What would it take for our people to feel both safe and free when facing uncertainty? How effectively do our leaders provide direction, reassurance and care while giving people the autonomy to challenge established thinking and try new approaches? What specific leadership behaviours should we encourage and reinforce?

9

Are we sufficiently clear about the trade-offs involved in delivering our strategic priorities? Where might apparent agreement on business goals conceal different views about what we are willing to sacrifice to achieve them? How could more explicit conversations about these trade-offs improve alignment and decision-making across functions?

6

Are we developing and rewarding leaders who can both perform and transform? To what extent do our leadership development, performance management and succession processes encourage leaders to focus on the organisation's longer-term future as well as delivering today's results? What needs to change to create space for both?

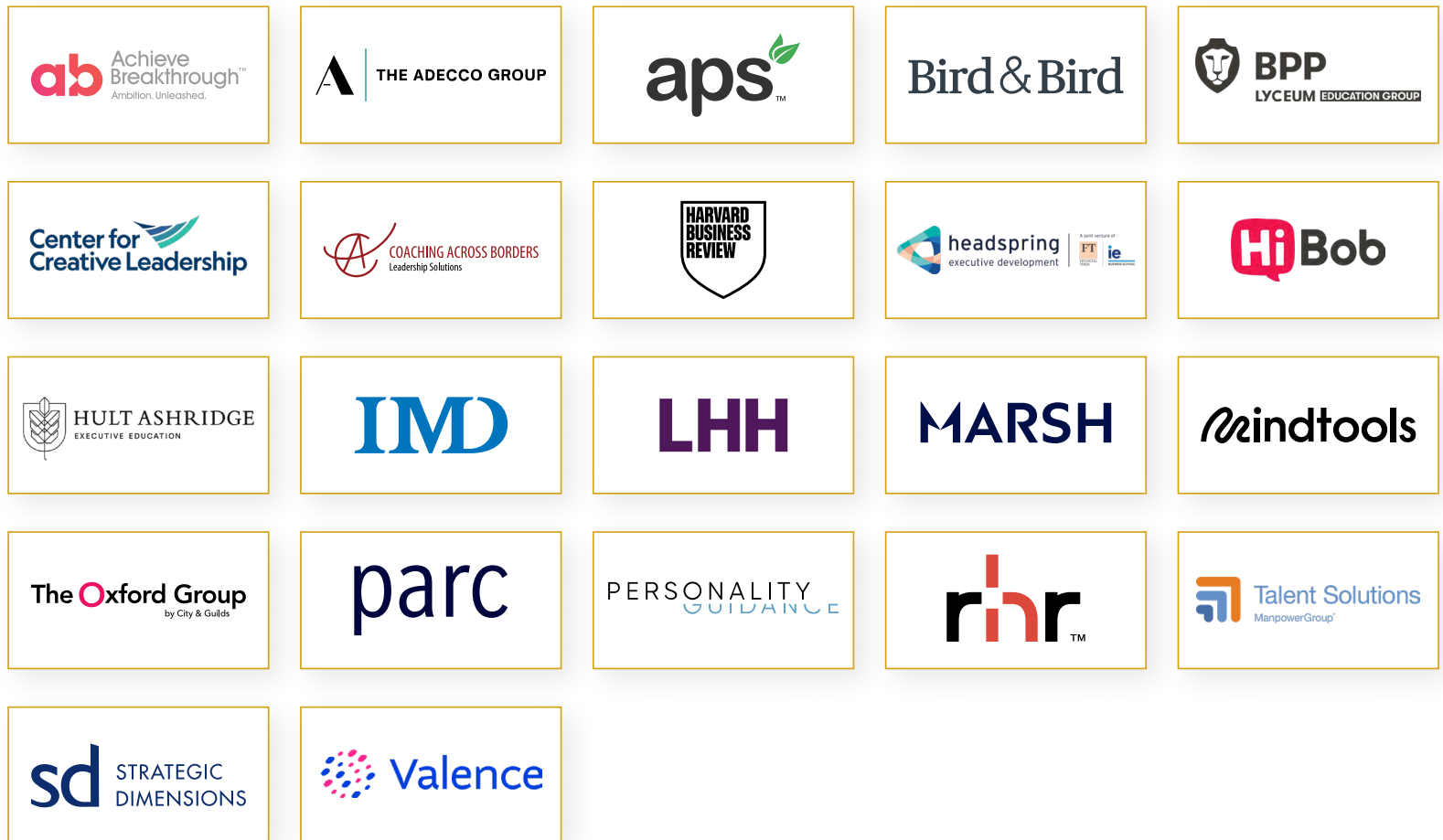
8

How can we make experimentation a more deliberate part of how our organisation works? Which current business challenges would benefit from testing assumptions rather than seeking further certainty through analysis? How can we help teams design small, informative experiments, learn from the outcomes and apply what they discover?

10

How might we need to rethink the way roles and teams are designed for an uncertain future? Where could more fluid responsibilities, cross-functional collaboration or open-ended roles enable people to respond to emerging needs and create new value? What could we test within our organisation to understand whether these approaches work?

With special thanks to CRF Partners



Staring uncertainty in the eye

Turning disruption into advantage



**Staring uncertainty
in the eye**



The leadership
balancing act

Bird & Bird

Restructuring
as a catalyst



Human-centric leadership
for an ambiguous world



Harnessing the Power of
Deliberate Transformation

MARSH

Driving 'performance'
over 'productivity'



Leaning into the
leadership paradox



Your organisation has
already bought the AI

Leadership Lessons from Takeda Research

Uncertainty is no longer something organisations occasionally navigate. For most leaders, it has become the operating environment. In this thought-provoking masterclass, Philippa Moffat, Head of HR at Takeda Research, joined Bella Blazewicz from Achieve Breakthrough to share the story of how Takeda Research transformed disruption into opportunity by fundamentally changing how leaders responded to uncertainty.

Drawing on a real-world transformation journey, attendees heard how Takeda challenged conventional thinking, reshaped its operating model, strengthened leadership capability and created a culture that could thrive amid unprecedented change. Rather than waiting for certainty, leaders learned to take bold action, challenge long-held assumptions and focus on what was possible. Perhaps most striking were the results: Takeda halved its cost base while more than doubling output, demonstrating what becomes possible when leadership, culture, technology and strategy align around a bold ambition.

Attendees left with practical insights into how leaders can build the confidence, capability and organisational conditions needed to turn disruption into a genuine competitive advantage, even when the path ahead is far from clear.

ACHIEVE BREAKTHROUGH CONTACTS

Request masterclass
slides and materials

- ✉ **Bella Blazewicz**, Senior Partner
- ✉ **Gemma Toner**, Strategic Lead Consultant
- ✉ **Johnny Lympus**, Strategic Lead Consultant

FURTHER RESOURCES

- [Introduction to Achieve Breakthrough](#)
- [Beyond the Algorithm – AI white paper](#)

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- 1 Uncertainty isn't the problem.** Our response to uncertainty is. The central message of the session is that disruption, AI, market pressures and changing business conditions are now a permanent feature of the environment. High-performing organisations don't wait for certainty before acting. They develop leaders who can remain curious, connected, ambitious and action-oriented despite ambiguity. The choice is between becoming more controlling and risk-averse or using uncertainty as a catalyst for innovation and opportunity.
- 2 Transformation succeeds when leadership and culture change alongside process and technology.** Takeda's experience showed that changing structures, processes and adopting new technology alone would not deliver the required results. The breakthrough came from changing leaders' mindset, creating stronger enterprise-wide collaboration, challenging old assumptions, and building a shared leadership community. The session repeatedly reinforces that context, mindset and behaviours are decisive factors in determining outcomes.
- 3 Bold ambitions become achievable when people are aligned around a compelling future.** Takeda moved from a position where many believed their goals were unrealistic to delivering results that exceeded expectations. By setting an ambitious vision, connecting people to strategy, encouraging challenge and collaboration, and acting from future possibilities rather than past limitations, they expanded what the organisation believed was possible. The lesson is that breakthrough performance comes from combining ambition, collective ownership and disciplined action.

The leadership balancing act

How leadership versatility shapes team climate and organisational resilience in uncertain environments



Staring uncertainty in the eye



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Your organisation has already bought the AI

This session highlighted how leadership versatility is essential for navigating uncertainty and building organisational resilience. Rather than relying on a single leadership style, effective leaders adapt their approach to the situation, balancing different behaviours to create the right climate for their teams.

Through practical discussion and exercises, the session allowed participants to explore how leadership behaviours can be overused or underused, and how this directly impacts psychological safety, engagement, and performance. A key message was that versatile leaders create engaged, adaptable teams, which enables organisations to respond more effectively to change and uncertainty.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- 1 Leadership versatility is a competitive advantage.**
In uncertain environments, success comes from adapting leadership behaviours to the situation rather than relying on a fixed style.
- 2 Team climate is a direct reflection of leadership behaviour.**
The way leaders balance forceful and enabling behaviours, as well as strategic and operational focus, significantly influences psychological safety and engagement.
- 3 Resilience starts with people.** Organisational resilience is built when leaders create environments where employees feel safe to speak up, contribute ideas, challenge thinking, and respond proactively to change.
- 4 Awareness drives improvement.** Leaders cannot improve their impact without understanding how their behaviours are experienced by both their teams and key stakeholders, making feedback and measurement essential development tools.

APS CONTACTS



Rob Field

Learning and Development Director

Request masterclass slides and materials

FURTHER RESOURCES

- An introduction into how PSE can support team performance, available [here](#).
- Bitesize Insights: into The Power of High Psychological Safety article, available [here](#).
- How the Leadership Versatility Index (LVI) can help leaders build the conditions for people and teams to thrive, available [here](#)

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Restructuring as a catalyst

Turning workforce disruption into strategic advantage

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PARTNER MASTERCLASSES



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The leadership
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Workforce restructuring is often viewed as a response to crisis, but it can also be a powerful opportunity for organisational transformation. Drawing on cross-border experience supporting multinational workforce changes, this session explores how businesses can use restructuring to build more agile, future-ready organisations while balancing legal compliance, employee engagement, and long-term growth.

A successful restructuring should begin with a clear business objective. Rather than focusing solely on cost reduction, organisations should define the future workforce and operating model they want to create. Early engagement with employee representatives, unions, and other stakeholders can improve decision-making by identifying risks, capability gaps, and alternative solutions before plans are finalised.

Communication is critical throughout the process. Employees are more likely to trust change initiatives when organisations are transparent about the reasons for change, the intended outcomes, and where employee input can influence decisions. For international projects, businesses should maintain a consistent global message while allowing for local legal and cultural differences.

Effective restructuring also requires organisations to design the future workforce before assessing employees. Businesses should identify future skills and capabilities, explore redeployment and retraining opportunities, and ensure any selection processes are fair, objective, and evidence-based.

The growing role of AI is reshaping workforce transformation. Employers should clearly communicate AI's impact, support workforce adaptation through reskilling, and maintain human oversight. Organisations must also be prepared for employees using AI tools to challenge restructuring decisions, making robust documentation increasingly important.

Finally, restructuring does not end once changes are implemented. Long-term success depends on supporting employees through transition, managing workloads, equipping managers, monitoring organisational effectiveness, and adapting where necessary.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- 1 **Treat restructuring as organisational transformation**, not simply workforce reduction.
- 2 **Prioritise meaningful consultation, employee voice, and transparent communication.**
- 3 **Focus on implementation, future workforce planning, and continuous review** to deliver sustainable results.

BIRD & BIRD CONTACTS

✉ **Jorge Sanz**
Partner

✉ **Daphne Diorio Borri**
Counsel

✉ **Charles Hill**
Senior Associate

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FURTHER RESOURCES

-  [Overcoming organisational challenges and reshaping the workforce](#)
-  [Horizon Scanning](#)
-  [Global Employment Projects](#)

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Lead with AI
Your organisation has
already bought the AI

This masterclass by Gina Eckert and Nick Richardson laid out how organisations can tackle ambiguity and uncertainty through purposeful and concerted efforts in developing culture, leaders and leadership alike.

The Center for Creative Leadership (CCL) research on ambiguity shows having to master multiple crises at once is faced by most leaders across the world and leads to fatigue, exhaustion and disillusionment among the workforce and across generations. CCL coined the phrase **Polycrisis** – multiple crises that entangle, amplify each other and cannot be solved in isolation. They require systemic solutions, and organizations and leaders need to learn how to develop and act such systemic solutions.

CCL made a case for the development of organisations and leaders to mirror the way that polycrisis can be tackled: Together, not alone, in a purposeful and concerted effort.

FURTHER RESOURCES

- 🌐 [Leading the Organisation: When Multiple Crisis Converge](#) by CCL Scientist & Senior Fellow Jean Leslie
- 🌐 [The Case for Leadership Wisdom](#) by George Hallenbeck & Dave Altman
- 🌐 [Neurodiversity in the workplace](#) by Sarah Pearsall & Jeff Kosovich, focusing particularly on neurodiverse leaders
- 🌐 [The 3 Critical Capabilities for Leadership in Europe Today](#) – CCL's insight on specific capabilities for leaders in Europe
- 🌐 [Succession Planning Reimagined](#) by Marcia Dawkins & Dan Smith

EVENT INVITATION

- ★ Free Webinar invitation: [How Human Relationships Define Leader Success](#). Oct 28, 2026, 8:00 AM CET, with a particular focus on leadership in the APAC region. Register for free, learn and exchange with hundreds of global HR leaders

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- 1 Organisational culture needs to shift towards the collective:** Organisational cultures evolve and need to evolve – their purpose is to enable the organisation tackle the challenges of present and the future. In a polycrisis landscape, cultures that are less dependent and more interdependent win out against paternalistically led and hero-styled cultures in the long run.
- 2 Create a sustainable learning culture:** A learning culture focused on continuous growth equips leaders with expanded mindsets, not just skillsets. This means that leadership development focuses even more on developing mindsets together with skillsets.
- 3 Amplify Adaptability:** The ability to engage in complex problem-solving is an essential leader capability for managing in polycrisis. Such adaptability comes from a combination of skillset and mindset.
- 4 Unleash and Guide Collective Action:** Embracing collective action and shared problem solving creates greater organisational and personal agility. Redefining the role of leaders as those who orchestrate the social process of leadership, they need to ensure the organisation shares direction, create alignment, and inspire commitment across boundaries.

CCL CONTACTS

- ✉ **Irina Gribanova**, Sales Director Europe (request discounts on CCL's upcoming open-enrolment programs)
- ✉ **Nick Richardson**, Sales Director Europe
- ✉ **Gina Eckert**, Strategic Business Director

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Harnessing the power of deliberate transformation



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Leaning into the leadership paradox



Your organisation has already bought the AI

How leaders can anticipate disruption, manage cumulative change load, and build the organizational capability to sustain performance.

Transformation is no longer episodic. Uncertainty is no longer a temporary condition to manage through, but rather the environment in which organizations must perform. Change arrives as a cumulative load of competing demands, shifting priorities, new skills, and emotional pressure, testing not only individual resilience but the organization's capacity to adapt.

The advantage comes from becoming more deliberate: detecting signals earlier, translating uncertainty into clear choices, and aligning the pace of ambition with the capacity to absorb change. Resilient organizations do not simply ask people to endure more. They design clarity, learning, recovery, and adaptability into how work gets done. In doing so, they harness the power of deliberate transformation to enable their success.

This session translated uncertainty into straightforward, practical insight that leaders can apply at every level of the organization. At the organizational level, participants explored how to anticipate disruption, manage increasing change load, and design resilience into operating models. At the leadership level, the discussion focused on creating clarity, making trade-offs visible, and empowering decisions through clear guardrails. At the individual level, participants considered how to build the confidence, adaptability, and learning agility needed to act effectively when conditions continue to shift.

FURTHER RESOURCES

 [Harnessing the power of uncertainty](#)

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- 1 Change is Cumulative.** Employees experience the combined volume, velocity, complexity, and emotional cost of change. Leaders have the ability to influence each of these levers to improve the overall experience of their people and teams.
- 2 Reduce Surprise.** Build a repeatable discipline to detect signals, interpret implications, prioritize, and act.
- 3 Design for Resilience.** Use sequencing, trade-offs, capacity, decision rights, manager enablement, and feedback loops to build flexibility and strength into day-to-day work.
- 4 Create Clarity in the Absence of Certainty.** Give people honest direction, visible priorities, and clear guardrails for action, even when you don't have all the answers.
- 5 Treat Capacity as a Strategic Advantage.** Attention, energy, learning bandwidth, and trust are finite organizational resources and should be treated as such.

LHH CONTACTS

-  **Darren Philpott**
Vice President, Workforce Strategy & Innovation
-  **Allison Ruyak**
Global Practice Director, Change & Transformation

 **Request** masterclass slides and materials

Driving 'performance' over 'productivity'

in your workforce in the age of uncertainty

The C-suite has viewed AI as the 'silver bullet' investment to achieve productivity and cost savings, but the return on investment is not materialising. On top of this, employees feel more overworked than ever and are looking for reassurance, and leaders are trying to guide their teams through unexpected internal and external change, all whilst thinking about their own futures.

This data-informed workshop looks at current workforce trends and identifies the 5 key levers that organisations need to focus on to drive performance in an uncertain and changing world. Marsh will present their views on the market and you will have the opportunity to spend time sharing your own experiences, tip and tricks with each other to ensure that you leave with practical value from the session.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- 1 **Our definition of 'performance' is evolving** – and so the goals we set and the metrics we use need to evolve, too
- 2 **Traditional metrics are causing organisations to confuse productivity with performance**, and activity with value creation
- 3 **Not only are we measuring the wrong things but we're doing too many things** – one of the biggest contributors to performance 'drag' is having multiple initiatives all happening at the same time
- 4 **HR plays a vital role in supporting the organisation** to think through the inter-connected nature of key performance drivers
- 5 **Taking a holistic view of the organisation's internal and external environment** is key to developing a sustainable performance framework

MARCH CONTACTS

Request masterclass
slides and materials

- ✉ **Maura Jarvis**
Workforce Transformation Practice Leader
- ✉ **Marcus Downing**
Workforce Transformation Partner
- ✉ **Jenny Merry**
Employee Experience Director

FURTHER RESOURCES

- 🌐 GTT full report: Introduction – [Mercer | Global Talent Trends 2026](#)
- 🌐 AI ROI article: [The AI talent imperative: Turning investment into impact](#)
- 🌐 Upcoming future of work trends webinar: [European rewards and workforce trends](#)

Leaning into the leadership paradox

Balancing scale, agility, and talent in times of uncertainty



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MARSH
Driving 'performance'
over 'productivity'

rhr
Leaning into the
leadership paradox

Lead with AI
Your organisation has
already bought the AI

In their 'Leaning into the Leadership Paradox' masterclass, Natasha Abajian and Orla Leonard from RHR International explored what sustained uncertainty is doing to the job of leading. They argued that the challenging nature of senior leadership today lies not simply in making difficult choices, but in holding competing demands that are equally legitimate and often required at the exact same time: scaling operations while remaining highly agile, driving disruptive innovation while executing reliably, and retaining experienced talent while inviting fresh thinking.

Building on this foundation, the masterclass explored three essential ideas for leading in today's environment:

- **Reframing disruption as a permanent condition:** Uncertainty is no longer an episodic crisis to manage and move past; it is the constant operating reality. Leaders must learn to navigate ongoing tensions continuously, rather than assuming that the operating environment will return to a predictable baseline.
- **Relying on judgment over established playbooks:** As business playbooks age faster, the quality of a leader's judgment in ambiguous situations is increasingly valuable over historic methods or past performance track records.
- **Embracing the paradox mindset:** A conventional problem-solving mindset treats conflicting priorities as trade-offs to be resolved. A paradox mindset recognizes that many competing demands are both legitimate and persistent; they must be held simultaneously.

These ideas were brought to life through a confidential case study of a merger between two large consumer goods organisations. This case study was chosen because an M&A acts as a "paradox pressure cooker," serving as an illustrative example of where everyday leadership tensions are significantly heightened. The session also explored the specific paradoxes the HR leadership team needed to hold during this high-stakes integration: such as balancing speed with fairness, and hard decisions with care, and highlighted the practical actions that made them successful. The masterclass culminated in small-group discussions in which attendees reflected on the leadership paradoxes most alive in their own organisations, and distilled practical takeaways for HR, followed by a facilitated plenary that drew out insights from across the room.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- 1 **Acknowledge the paradox:** Uncertainty is no longer the exception leaders plan around; it is the operating condition they lead within. Because many of the demands placed on leaders are legitimate at the same time, paradoxes are not problems to be solved, but rather realities that must be led deliberately.
- 2 **Use objectivity and keep the tension visible:** Applying an objective lens to high-stakes decisions reduces risk and makes hard choices trusted. However, gathering this data is only the first step. Because the right balance today may not hold tomorrow, HR must act as a persistent strategic advisor, leveraging these objective insights far beyond a single point in time to continuously recalibrate the team as circumstances evolve.
- 3 **Orchestrate your talent intentionally:** Past success is a lagging indicator in a changing environment. Rather than relying on historical track records, HR must evaluate leaders based on their readiness to scale and future potential. Building a leadership team equipped for this future state requires intentionally orchestrating a diverse mix of profiles.

RHR CONTACTS

- ✉ **Natasha Abajian**, Partner
- ✉ **Orla Leonard**, Senior Partner

Request masterclass
slides and materials

FURTHER RESOURCES

To find out more about RHR's philosophy and approach, please check out the following resources:

- 🌐 [RHR Overview](#)
- 🌐 [Executive Assessment at RHR](#)
- 🌐 [Leadership in Times of Uncertainty](#)

Your organisation has already bought the AI

Build an assistant yourself, then learn the five steps to make it pay



Staring uncertainty in the eye



The leadership balancing act



Restructuring as a catalyst



Human-centric leadership for an ambiguous world



Harnessing the Power of Deliberate Transformation



Driving 'performance' over 'productivity'



Leaning into the leadership paradox



Your organisation has already bought the AI

Most organisations are already paying for enterprise AI such as Copilot or ChatGPT licences, yet few can show which workflows it has improved. This masterclass helped HR leaders reflect on how they can close that gap, starting with their own work.

We spoke about foundational skills and the necessary mindset shifts, such as treating AI as a coworker. We discussed why the essence of AI fluency is finding the use cases that immediately create impact on your own work with the tools you already have, and why knowing tools and features is not enough on its own. Alongside productivity, the most important outcome is building capabilities you did not have before.

We closed with five steps to a successful AI transformation: Research, AI Strategy, AI Fluency, Solution Building, and Adoption & Change. Emma Lucas and discussed how to drive adoption and change through internal champions.

LEAD WITH AI CONTACT

✉ **Paweł Górski**
Co-founder & Chief Growth Officer

Request masterclass slides and materials

FURTHER RESOURCES

- 🌐 Whitepaper: [From AI Use to AI Fluency: The Lead with AI Fluency Matrix](#)
- 🌐 [Weekly executive briefing on AI](#)
- 🌐 [AI Leader Advanced](#) – flagship AI Fluency programme

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- 1 Start with three questions:** What did we spend on AI this year? Which metrics should it have improved? Can we show what caused the change?
- 2 Leaders go first:** You cannot lead an adoption you have not experienced yourself. Building useful AI assistants for themselves gives leaders credibility and time back.
- 3 Start with the right steps:** Stanford and Carnegie Mellon research found people worked 18% slower when they handed AI a whole piece of work, and 24% faster when AI supported only the steps suited to it. In one tested example, combining human and AI strengths made the work 69% faster.
- 4 Doubt first, then own every word:** AI sounds confident even when it is wrong. Question it, check it, and take ownership of everything you share.
- 5 Champions are the missing layer:** Most organizations currently stop one layer too early. Internal AI champions turn individual skills into changed ways of working across teams.

CRF DELEGATE SPECIAL OFFER

★ A free year of Lead with AI senior leaders community, masterclasses with global thought leaders, and executive briefings on AI for enterprise, open until 31 October: <https://lp.leadwithai.co/crf-malta-2026>

Building HR Capability

CRF's 2027 programme

Already a CRF member?

...and have a question on how to further optimise the value of your membership, please email memberrequests@crforum.co.uk

Not yet a CRF member?

...and interested in your organisation joining our growing global network, please email jessica@crforum.co.uk



	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
UK AND ONLINE	Transforming HR: Purpose, Capability and Technology	Planning and Preparing for HR Transformation Delivering HR Transformation in Practice	Evidence-Based Selection for Better Business Outcomes ER/IR Network: What's Next on the Employment Rights Act		Work Psychology Network: Evaluation of Learning Interventions ER/IR Network: Case Management in the Age of AI	Beyond Culture: How Behaviour Drives Performance Beyond Culture: Creating the Conditions for Performance	Beyond Culture: Aligning Organisational Systems to Drive Performance	Work Psychology Network: Assessing Job Performance ER/IR Network: Approaches to Pay Claims and Pay Movement		Driving Value Through Talent	HR Leaders' End of Year Dinner ER/IR Network: Peer Exchange Dinner
EUROPE		Transforming HR: Purpose, Capability and Technology		Leading Teams in the Age of AI	Behaviour Change in Organisations				INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE: Competitive Advantage in a Changing World		
GULF					Transforming HR: AI, Capability and Growth					Effective Leadership Development: Navigating AI and Uncertainty	
OPEN PROGRAMMES	From AI Readiness to AI Roadmap: A Playbook for HR Leaders	Strategic Learning for Business Impact	Reimagining HR Business Partnering	Reimagining HR Business Partnering	Becoming an Effective Talent Partner Becoming an Effective HRD	Mastering Strategic HR: Driving Organisational Performance		Aspiring Group HRD Reimagining HR Business Partnering	Creating a 'Win-Win' Employee Relations Strategy	Future-Ready Talent Management: Adapting Approaches to a New Reality HR Business Partnering Accelerator	

Work Psychology Network

Every organisation needs to shape the behaviour of its people so they can contribute effectively to its success.

Work psychology forms the foundational knowledge base about behaviour at work and should therefore always be used to inform how organisations identify, design, implement and evaluate effective people practices.

However, decisions about people practices are often driven by fads, received wisdom or opinion rather than the fundamental work psychology principles grounded in scientific theory and evidence.

The Work Psychology Network was created to bring work psychology to practitioners who work in people practice areas. It develops their capability to work in a more systematic and evidence-based way so they can more effectively diagnose problems and opportunities, identify effective interventions and evaluate their impact.



Prof. Rob Briner
Associate Director Research
rob@crforum.co.uk

Explore the Network,

read a sample report and find the membership option that's right for you [here](#) or contact Melissa Bull at melissa@crforum.co.uk

The Work Psychology Network (WPN) helps experienced practitioners apply evidence from work psychology, including behavioural science, to make better-informed decisions in order to improve people practices and deliver better business outcomes. Through participating in the network, you will:

- **Gain access to an exclusive research library** of clear, practical guidance based on reviews of the best available work psychology evidence.
- **Work through important workplace questions with experts and fellow practitioners** in interactive in-person and online sessions focused on application.
- **Learn from others tackling similar organisational challenges**, exchange experiences and test your thinking with a community committed to evidence-based practice.

Psychological Wellbeing at Work

Wellbeing spans moods to clinical conditions: work mostly helps, sometimes harms, and shapes performance unpredictably.

9 February, London

24 February, Online

Evaluation of Learning Interventions

Most evaluation measures reactions, not learning or behaviour. Better evaluation starts with goals and transfer.

18 May, London

25 May, Online

Assessing Job Performance

Performance is more than tasks. Current appraisal is unreliable – so what should we measure instead?

14 September, London

16 September, Online

Employee and Industrial Relations Network

Employee and Industrial Relations has become a board-level risk. From the UK's Employment Rights Act and European Works Council reforms to a shifting union landscape and AI-driven workforce change, ER/IR leaders are facing greater complexity and scrutiny.

CRF's ER/IR Network helps leaders and their teams respond with confidence, build capability and manage regulatory and industrial risk more proactively. Our approach combines exclusive events, original research, expert legal and practitioner input, structured learning and a confidential network of senior peers. The network helps practitioners stay abreast of change, learn how others are responding, test their thinking and make better-informed decisions in their own context.



John Whelan MBE
Director
john@crforum.co.uk

Nick Dalton
ER/IR Network Lead

Through the network, you will:

- **Stay ahead of legislative change, case law developments and policy trends** to support more proactive decision-making.
- **Exchange solutions with senior peers** during closed-door in-person and online events, free from commercial or reputational risk.
- **Gain direct access to legal expertise** and Strategic Dimensions' ER/IR Interim Talent pool when you need specialist support fast.
- **Benefit from one free place** on CRF's 'Creating a 'Win-Win' Employee Relations Strategy' 2 day open Programme.

Explore the Network, read a sample report and find the membership option that's right for you [here](#) or contact Melissa Bull at melissa@crforum.co.uk

Emerging Issues in Trade Union Strategies

Trade unions are evolving their tactics and testing new legislative powers. This session looks at what that means in practice and how organisations can respond effectively.

28 January, *Online*

What's Next on the Employment Rights Act

The next stages of the Act are taking shape, bringing fresh challenges through implementation. We consider how organisations are adapting their ER strategy in response.

17 March, *London*

Case Management in the Age of AI

Case volumes are rising and AI-generated grievances are becoming more common. This session examines how to handle the workload and address the root causes driving it.

27 May, *London*

Approaches to Pay Claims and Pay Movement

Pay claims are harder to navigate in a low-growth, high-cost environment. We examine pay compression, multi-year deals and alternative reward approaches.

21 September, *London*

Year Ahead Planning

An end of year dinner to discuss topical issues in a confidential environment.

2 December, *London*

