The duality of employee perspectives and organisational requirements: a diagnostic framework for the international HR leader

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The Duality of Employee Perspectives and Organisational Requirements: A Diagnostic Framework for the International HR Leader.

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Abstract

Why do we love to hate Human Resources (HR)? The evolution of the HR function and the required focus and capabilities of HR practitioners remain topical despite decades of research and discourse. Traversing the duality of employee perspectives and organisational requirements upon HR, this research explores this concept with resulting recommendations and a diagnostic framework for the HR Leader.

The overall purpose is to contribute to the Human Resources knowledge and practice of HR professionals. The research aims to explore the role of HR Leaders and practitioners in facilitating transformations alongside providing targeted and timely support to the employees experiencing the transformation. Situated within a one-off organisational transformation for a large multi-national company located across Asia Pacific and the Middle East, it offers the distinctive triad of simultaneous perspectives from myself as the Researcher: - as an employee, the HR Leader, and the inside-researcher.

The research adopted a phenomenological, qualitative methodology, achieved in three phases. Phase 1 was the bespoke design of a pilot Masterclass, delivered face-to-face with 15 senior business leaders, which evolved into a series of virtual Masterclasses for 104 international employees. Phase 2 comprised focus group discussions with 40 employees and employee representatives in two countries. Phase 3 incorporated semi-structured interviews with ten senior leaders who had attended the Masterclass and externally with five peer-level international HR Leaders and one HR scholar. The collected data from the 175 participants was thematically analysed, resulting in seven identified themes with accompanying recommendations for the HR Leader.

A resulting diagnostic framework is presented that enables HR Leaders to traverse the duality of people and organisation requirements. Supporting evidence of the framework application within an international healthcare

organisation during COVID-19 is detailed, demonstrating this research's broad and distinct contribution towards HR knowledge and practice.

Acknowledgements

The pursuit of a professional doctorate is a solitary adventure, but one that is only made possible by the gifts of trust and time from others.

To the participant voices of Fox, my thanks for sharing your experiences and trusting me to hold your emotions confidentiality in such uncertain times.

To Fox Networks Group – I wish to acknowledge both the kind permission and support of the research activities during a challenging transitional period for employees. Some of the voices captured are reflective of that discomfort. The openness to transparency by the organisation is greatly appreciated. This is an example of best practice by Fox, that was willing to create a safe space for employees.

To my external HR participants and scholar – thank you for sharing your wisdom and practice.

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Dr Paula Nottingham has been a constant voice of both encouragement and sound reason over the past seven years. She enabled my shift from the practitioner to a scholar mind and never allowed me to think the journey was impossible for a dyslexic student.

As my second supervisor, Professor Annette Fillery-Travis has challenged and broadened my thinking, smartly harnessed my ranting, and very nearly inspired me to love coding.

My children Teressa and Jasmine have aged 7 years from the start to the end of my DProf journey and have coped brilliantly with having a

“HR Nerd” for a mother at the weekends. Sadly, neither of them wants to go into HR.

To my husband – who made it possible – he has aged those 84 months in canine years. He now knows more than he has ever wanted to about HR, how NVivo crashes, that iMac’s can implode and that my early morning writing requires both 3 espressos and tough love encouragement. If he decides to do his own doctorate, I promise to return the favour.

Disclaimer

I declare that the work in this document was carried out in accordance with the Regulations of Middlesex University.

The views expressed in this document are mine and are not necessarily the views of my supervisory team, examiners, or Middlesex University.

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Glossary List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

Fox: Fox Network Group, the company I was employed by that was being acquired. Fox provided consent for the research to be undertaken and Fox employees consented to participate.

Acquiring Company: The Company which acquired Fox

Close: The date that a transaction is finalised, also referred to as Day 0

Day One: The first date that the combined organisation operates as a single entity.

HR: Human Resources

IHH: IHH Healthcare Berhad. A healthcare company who provided consent for the description of the deployment of the practitioner model to be detailed.

Trust: For the purposes of Trust in the context of this research Trust is limited to the discussion of employee’s and organisational trust of the HR role and HR personnel.

MORE: Middlesex Online Research Ethics

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1 Introduction

A critical and learning juncture in over a two-decade-long career in human resources (HR) was when I received this feedback from a global business leader whom I both admired and respected:

> **You are the best HR Leader I have ever worked with … but let's be honest, the benchmark is pretty low, so it's not that difficult.**

As a newly appointed junior HR Leader, this was a crushing revelation. However, it would not be the last time I would hear a similar refrain about my chosen profession.

From the 'evil HR Director' Catbert (Adams, 2022) in the popular Dilbert cartoons to the HR jokes, the sentiment appears to be universal: we love to hate HR. Indeed, in 2015, Harvard Business Review (HBR) extended this view with the cover story suggestion that 'It's Time to Blow Up HR' (HBR, 2015), concluding that the function required a comprehensive reset. The narrative about HR had been established.

Many organisations have HR functions within the modern working experience, whether in the private, public, for-profit or not-for-profit sectors. HR is the primary connection point between employees and the organisation, from the first recruitment contact point when applying for a role, guiding annual appraisals and pay raises, and then the last contact when leaving the organisation. Therefore, HR teams are well placed to have an impact on employee engagement and their working lives (Beltrán-Martín, Guinot-Reinders and Rodríguez-Sánchez, 2023). This employee engagement is of critical importance to organisational leaders because the link between employee sentiment towards the organisation and resulting organisational performance has been well established (Meyer and Allen, 1991). The employee's decision to identify as a member of the organisation, to form an emotional attachment to it and to be vested in its organisational success creates a commitment that has continued to demonstrate positive outcomes for the organisation (Iverson and Buttigieg, 1999) And HR has a pivotal role to play in building trust with employees to enable this (Klimchak et al., 2020).

It can be further suggested that the causation link proposed in the 'employee–customer–profit' chain, as exemplified in the Sears-Roebuck case study (Rucci, Kirn and Quinn, 1998), prompted a number of leaders to prioritise HR. This prioritisation of HR was reflected in my professional experience of being hired following a CEO's attendance at a Harvard programme that examined that case study and resulted in his creation of an HR function.

Most employees and organisational management or leaders will engage with their HR team at some juncture. The most frequent touch points are when employees either join or leave the organisation or contact their team if there is an issue or problem to solve. For organisational leaders, contact will be more frequent depending on the role that the HR team plays within the organisation. Therefore, the opportunity for HR to deliver successfully is open-ended. However, as will be demonstrated, research has consistently demonstrated that the HR function is essentially not meeting expectations from either of these critical stakeholders – neither the employees nor the organisation – and there is, therefore, an opportunity for HR to create trust with both stakeholders (Klimchak et al., 2020).

As an HR practitioner, I accepted this as a norm. However, at this later juncture of my career, now leading, as I do, teams of hundreds of international HR practitioners and being responsible for both their development and their functional success, it became imperative to address this wicked problem. How could I better establish a practice for my team that would seek to address these dual and often conflicting concerns? How could I contribute to the broader discourse within the HR function and ultimately encourage more talented individuals to join the profession?

It was indeed this problem that I experienced as a practitioner that became the catalyst for this research. Therefore, this thesis sets out to examine the perspectives of the employee, business leader, HR Leader and HR function, uniquely positioned within a significant transformative organisational event. The event can be defined as a transformation or change programme and, therefore, of the category many HR practitioners will experience during their professional lives.

It is important for the reader to note that I was diagnosed with learning difficulties, specifically Dyslexia and Dyspraxia. I have made special adjustments to accommodate my learning requirements throughout this research, including the use of visual analysis tools and word-processing software.

1.1 The Research Opportunity

Previous research and studies have primarily sought to examine the HR competency models and success metrics from an organisational perspective (Lo et al., 2015). Chapter Two's described evolution of the HR function will explain this phenomenon. As will be detailed, the requirements upon the HR function to save costs while adding value, and to contribute to organisational success, evolved over decades to the widely profession accepted HR Business Partnering Model as created by Professor David Ulrich (1997). Less common as a research topic has been the examination of perceptions, as compared to competencies, of the HR function (Sheehan et al., 2007).

My distinct contribution to the HR domain through this research will extend one component of the Ulrich HR competency framework, specifically on the dimension of Paradox Navigator (RBL, 2015) This distinct contribution will be achieved through a theoretical examination and the creation of a resulting framework. I will evidence a practical application of the framework in an organisational transformation context, which is commonly required of HR Leaders, adding to both knowledge and practice.

From the business knowledge domain, leading researchers have considered the broader business imperative of managing transformation or change and how to do so from an organisational perspective. From a social sciences perspective, there have been studies on the psychological impact on people during change, mainly within a personal capacity, such as grief. From the growing field of applied neuroscience, more recent studies have considered the impact of change on the human brain and, therefore, can provide an indicator to be utilised to predict the resulting human behaviour. All will be considered.

The golden thread of the research has been this potential integration of both employee perspectives and organisational requirements, drawing from knowledge across these multiple disciplines with consequential outcome considerations for the HR Leader regarding the approach that they themselves adopt, the mindset of employees at all levels and the consequential role that their HR function plays. One distinction of this research is that it will invert the approach most often taken in HR research and instead commence with individual employee perspectives, then organisation requirements and finally HR considerations. In Chapter Two, the HR literature is presented as the last section, not the first, thereby representing my intention to take an alternative approach.

Therefore, the relevance of this thesis lies in a practitioner, interdisciplinary approach demonstrating the integration of real-time insights from these various disciplines to ultimately form the foundation of a theoretical yet practitioner-orientated practical framework for application by other HR Leaders and their teams.

The research will not focus on the already well-established typical HR interventions during a change process, such as employee relations and communications: instead, it will focus on what else the HR Leader and function can do and how to attempt to balance the people–organisation paradox in order to contribute to both the theory and practice of HR.

As organisations across the globe emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic era, there are rising trends of redundancies, unionisation, economic uncertainty and job insecurity. There are significant people shortages in some industries, such as healthcare, while at the same time, redundancies are being made. Therefore, the HR Leader and the HR function remain on the ‘front line’ of implementing organisational change, engaging with employees and still delivering the organisational demands. Indeed, this requirement was acutely emphasised during the pandemic, given the significant impact on working environments. This placement of HR at the intersection of organisation and employees’ demands, and the paradox of these often-conflicting requirements and expectations, is a trend that will continue. Therefore, it is imperative to equip HR Leaders and their teams to navigate this paradox which has a broader societal impact beyond the HR function and the organisation. The impact on the professional lives of employees also has implications for their personal lives, their well-being, their families and, therefore, the broader community. I seek, in a small way, to make a positive impact on this.

1.2 The Research Purpose, Aims and Objectives

Purpose:

> The purpose of this research is to contribute to the Human Resources knowledge and practices of HR professionals.

Aims:

To explore, evaluate and re-envision the role of HR Leaders / practitioners in facilitating transformations, while providing targeted support to employees experiencing the change.

Objectives:

- Utilise the learnings from the knowledge review to create bespoke training interventions/toolkits for employees to enable them to thrive during the integration.
- Conduct interviews with leaders and focus groups with other employees.
- Seek external peer (HR Leader) perspectives through interviews.
- Conduct an interview with a leading HR scholar.
- Develop a practitioner outcome that can be shared with my wider professional practice community.

The Research Purpose, Aims and Objectives will be discussed further in Chapter Three.

1.3 The Research Project

The research project on which this thesis was based was driven by a one-off event of a major competitor's acquisition of one organisation and subsidiaries. Although this was a global acquisition, I will focus on Asia Pacific and the Middle East for the purposes of this research. The research spans the process of preparing the organisation – both its leaders and employees – for the potential acquisition and then the post-acquisition integration of the newly combined business in Asia Pacific. This event was a well-publicised global acquisition, with media scrutiny and coverage over the many months it took for regulatory approval worldwide to be finalised, and the deal closed. Consequently, employees at all levels knew that the deal might happen and that it was not confidential.

I obtained consent from the Fox Networks Group (Fox) organisation to undertake this research which was submitted as part of the Middlesex Online Research Ethics (MORE) approval. As per the MORE authorisation for Fox, all sensitive company information and any identifying personnel details will be anonymised. This research could not have been completed without the kind permission and support of Fox permitting me to undertake the research activities during a challenging transitional period and creating a safe space for employees to share their views. Some employee voices captured are reflective of the discomfort experienced during this time.

I was not employed by the acquiring company and no research activities took place with any employees of the acquiring company.

While the event itself was a ‘once in an industry’ acquisition, the categories of the event – acquisition, post-acquisition integration, change management/transformation, redundancy – are very common for HR practitioners, as will be discussed in Chapter Two. Therefore, the learnings from this research can be applied in other contexts, as will be clearly evidenced in Chapter Six.

The event created the opportunity to invert the process that is often adopted by HR – that of focusing on the organisational requirements (and instead creating the parallel perspective, that of employees) – while simultaneously exploring and challenging the mindset and role of the HR practitioner and seeking opportunities to align these. For clarity, the typical HR deliverables were achieved alongside the research activities: During the span of the research project, I was responsible for communications and restructuring, including redundancies. The required cost savings were achieved, and union negotiations were resolved. However, I have elected not to include these HR deliverables as part of this research because they are already very well established by previous research (Bansal and King, 2022), and I did not believe I had anything novel to add to this research area. Instead, the research focuses on the additional parallel path of designing and deploying employee-centric interventions while also delivering the organisational requirements and the challenge to do so. As will be described in Chapter Six, by applying my findings and using my approach, I believe HR has the opportunity to do both for the mutual benefit of both stakeholders.

It is pertinent to acknowledge here the asymmetry of power in this context. The research did not change the outcome for employees whom the organisation determined were to be either retrenched or retained, and this consideration will be further explored in Chapter Three. One aim of the research was to improve employees' experience during this time and to place their well-being at the heart of HR planning so that the inevitable disruption to their professional lives was minimised and managed respectfully. As will be described, the organisational requirements were delivered, and no employee litigation was provoked, which means the programme can be considered a success.

Senior HR Leaders in Asia Pacific participated in the research to describe their experiences of leading similar change programmes and their views on the modern HR function and role of the leader. Completing the diversity of viewpoints, Professor Ulrich consented to be interviewed so that the leading academic considerations of HR would also be considered. Professor Ulrich was selected for inclusion as the industry-acknowledged expert on the HR function and in his capacity as the creator of the HR Business Partnering Model. His research was a component because my research aimed to expand on the dimension of Paradox Navigator (RBL, 2015).

The research participants, therefore, spanned the following dimensions to ensure cohesive findings.

- Employees.
- Business leaders.
- External HR Leaders.
- HR academia and HR professional bodies.

The opportunity created by the research was also intended to reset my mindset as an HR Leader, approach my role differently, and examine how and where this approach would be of value to my peers and – more broadly – to the HR community. At this juncture in my career, I believed that one aim of this research was an opportunity to contribute both to my profession and the development of the next generation of HR Leaders.

As previous research and studies have often sought to examine the HR function from the organisational perspective, this research, therefore, inverted the well-established HR Business Partner approach to examine if and how an HR Leader could approach a conventional HR issue (transformation) unconventionally by simultaneously holding the duality of people and organisations, not as a matter of Paradoxical Navigation but as a duality of requirements.

The starting point was to deploy activities within the organisation, designed from the prior knowledge review, to learn how to best equip individuals from different cultures to manage themselves and lead others during transformative events. These learnings were then implemented and evaluated in real-time.

The first method was delivered through a masterclass: a learning programme designed specifically for the acquisition and delivered to over a hundred employees. All attendees were given a follow-up employee survey and interviews to define the effectiveness of the programme. The findings demonstrated that the adoption of a ‘Growth Mindset’ (Burnette et al., 2023; Dweck, 2006) was the most useful conceptual framework and frequently applied by the employees, as were considering differing cultural perspectives and applying these to their own experiences. A Growth Mindset encouraged the attendees to accept a learner mindset and actively find and accept challenging experiences from which they could learn.

Building from the masterclass findings, the research method employed a series of employee focus groups and one-to-one leadership interviews. These findings demonstrated a request from the employees for HR to support them better, to be accessible and to communicate with them. The employees recognised the information asymmetry (Connelly *et al.,* 2011) that HR could not share all confidential information and had the organisational requirements to deliver but still wanted a trust-based relationship to be built with them. These findings activities were then developed to deliver on these expectations reflecting the HR requirement to quickly pivot to address both the leadership and employees' requirements.

From the subsequent HR Leaders' interviews, the critical finding was how the mindset and chosen identity of the HR Leader shaped their strategic HR agenda to minimise the impact on the professional and personal lives of the employees. In the absence of a defined model, a key finding of this research was that the employees' experience in an organisation is primarily shaped by the identity adopted by the HR Leader.

Finally, as a stand-alone interview, Professor Ulrich discussed the concept of the Paradox Navigator (RBL, 2015)

1.4 Conclusion

As a management function in an organisation (Armstrong and Taylor, 2023), HR will always need to deliver on the organisational requirements. However, as this research demonstrates, it is both feasible – and I would argue desirable – for the HR Leader and, therefore, the function also to hold the duality of the people perspectives and to simultaneously deliver to those, the requirement being that the HR Leader chooses to do so by adopting the mindset and behaviours required. I believe there is an organisational imperative to do so: building employee advocacy and, ultimately, shareholder return through the delivery of human capabilities is a requirement of HR.

The resulting model from this research: provides a practitioner-orientated practical framework to be used for diagnostics by the HR Leader and their function to assist the HR Leader to define requirements for their specific context.

The findings and analysis from this research, as will be demonstrated, can be applied within other industries and geographical settings, showing that the research's relevance is not limited to the event described or to Asia Pacific.

1.5 Outline of the Thesis

Chapter One has mapped the overall research approach and context, defined the aims and provided a high-level overview of the research project and myself as the researcher.

A significant proportion of the research focus was based upon prior knowledge, which will be outlined in Chapter Two – an iterative process that considered broader domains that can be applied within the HR domain in addition to the HR domain area itself.

Chapter Three outlines the subsequent qualitative methods identified to undertake the research, establishing the subjective and unique experience of those individuals experiencing change and the HR Leaders who manage those events.

The research activities will be outlined in Chapter Four, detailing how the learnings from the knowledge review were applied within a bespoke masterclass method that was designed to enable over a hundred leaders and employees to thrive best during a prolonged period of uncertainty. One-to-one interviews with leaders and focus groups, using semi-structured, narrative-based interviewing with employees, created qualitative data to be thematically interpreted and applied within the HR offerings during this time, which is a unique characteristic of the research, as will be outlined: the findings were applied real-time as well as described.

The project findings will be discussed in Chapter Five, demonstrating the process of determining the final seven themes that was the result.

Conclusions and recommendations will be detailed in Chapter Six, which demonstrates how the research can be applied by the utilisation of a new diagnostic framework together with a short description of how this was applied during COVID-19 as an example of application beyond the research.

Finally, Chapter Seven will explore the subjective insider-researcher/practitioner journey through the research with the unique perspective of myself being simultaneously an employee, HR practitioner and researcher during the event described.

2 Review of Literature Landscape and Knowledge

2.1 Introduction

At the core of this research is the proposition that Human Resources (HR) sits at the intersection point of organisations and the people who work within them. Therefore, exploring the evolution and mindset of the HR function and the HR Leader in delivering organisational requirements, such as transformation, would require allowing for the interests of both employees and the organisation to be held simultaneously by myself while reflecting the broader context. While finalising this chapter in 2023, this proposition has never been so pertinent with employee engagement challenges following COVID-19 work practices. As an HR practitioner, I have witnessed how the role and priorities have pivoted to design and implement strategies to safeguard the physical, financial, and emotional well-being of employees while, in parallel, planning for recovery as the organisation accelerates out of the pandemic.

Is it possible for the HR function to address both priorities? In other words, is it possible to be simultaneously both employee and organisational-focused? Francis Scott Key Fitzgerald, the American writer and novelist, in his 1936 essay The Crack-Up, could have been talking about HR when he stated that "*The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in mind at the same time and still retain the ability to function.*" (Fitzgerald F.S., 1936).

Indeed, this has been my quandary. If the word 'intelligence' is replaced with 'Human Resources' or 'HR', how does HR as a function hold these opposing ideas and needs during major transformational shifts and do so in a functioning way that is both ethically anchored and commercially viable? My role has also required me to hold additional competing views:

As an employee experiencing the change covered in this research.
As an HR practitioner, developing the change programmes.
As a researcher, evaluating the programmes.

The review of the literature domain reflects the complexity and diversity of this complex dilemma. It was not a linear approach, as will be explored, of simply taking one domain of knowledge as the base. Instead, my strategy was to deliberately be multi-faceted and multi-dimensional: to acknowledge science and art, history and disruption, HR, business, and culture and to challenge my biases and beliefs. The knowledge review will commence with broader concepts, cascade down to individuals and then pivot to the HR function to explore the application of the knowledge. As a scholar-practitioner, I advocate that integrated knowledge balances academic theory with the practical 'so what' and how practitioners can apply it.

As will be discussed further, the review process was deliberately broad and iterative not systemic, with some topics included or discarded based on the practitioner's lived experience of what 'really happens' in organisations at these times.

2.2 Strategy for Literature Search and Knowledge Review

In preparation for the Literature review, I first considered the purpose of the research, which was to contribute to the HR domain by exploring the duality of people and organisational requirements of the HR leader and the function. The creation of the knowledge review strategy was then to consider the categories of knowledge available that would align with the research purpose as well as the aims. This approach would ensure an aligned strategy that would enable the development of a conceptual framework to create the architecture for the research. (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2008) (Hart, 1998)

The outcome was that the identification of the literature would extend beyond just the HR domain. Therefore, a systemic HR literature review was not an appropriate approach as I considered the role of literature in the creation of my "roadmap" for the research (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). As I considered the broader context of people and organisations, I determined that knowledge relating to organisations, change management, psychology, and Social Cognitive Neuroscience would first need to be examined. I would then consider these learnings before focusing on the existing HR knowledge.

I acknowledge that this approach was intentionally open-ended and exploratory and that I would need to adopt and discard topics during the process. My intention was to understand what broader knowledge was available and if and how these different domains could connect to the role of the HR leader. I was deliberately seeking new perspectives that would enable me to connect these to the HR practice area before considering the historical context of the HR function (Hart, 1998)

The preparation for the knowledge review included building familiarity with the possible sources available to me through Middlesex University. As for the duration of the Doctoral programme, I was residing in Singapore, and I also considered libraries and options available in this geography and online repositories through my professional bodies.

As someone with Dyslexia, I created a system for managing the data and how best to take in information. For example, my preference is reading hard copy and making handwritten notes as I find it harder to accurately read large volumes of data on electronic devices without words “slipping”. As I prefer audible learning, where possible, I used the auditory version of books, although I note a limited supply in the academic domains.

The knowledge review strategy was therefore based on a model of online searching (Jansen, Booth and Smith, 2009), modified from Anderson’s (2001) taxonomy of learning. This taxonomy affords a framework with which to process the levels of knowledge acquisition through comprehension, application, analysis and finally, critical evaluation to support the analysis of the available literature.

2.2.1 Knowledge acquisition – Search

The search strategy employed the stated aims and objectives to identify the key concepts and the related keyword and synonym search terms. The search terms were expanded to include combinations and synonyms using 'contains' with operators 'and', 'or' and 'not'.

Keywords and synonyms were entered using the online Middlesex University library search facility, Ex Libris Discovery and the search was expanded and supplemented by the Google Scholar search engine. When available, the searches utilised the advanced search facility to identify a set of applicable results.

By using the advanced search in the university library, the scope of the search engine could initially search 'All Resources' and then be filtered and finessed to 'Articles+' or 'Books'.

Initially, the search was open dated, but it was further enhanced in the final stages for subsequent searches to revisit more recent research by restricting the search criteria to return only articles published since 2020. This restriction ensured that only recently conducted and published articles after the pandemic were considered, given the significant implications of that period on employees and the workplace. These identified articles were evaluated following the same model of online searching as mentioned earlier.

2.2.2 Knowledge acquisition – Comprehension

The resultant abstracts were assessed for appropriate content after reviewing the search results generated by the search criteria. If the abstract content was relevant to the research, the article's contents were scanned, and themes were identified. Articles for inclusion were logged with an indicative set of themes. Concurrently, the references of selected articles were further reviewed to identify additional sources. I sought the links to existing HR knowledge and peer-reviewed examples, specifically in the HR domain.

2.2.3 Knowledge acquisition – Application

Articles were further assessed for inclusion by being examined in detail to establish their relationship and relevance to the research. At this point, the provenance and objectivity of the authors of the article and the value of the article's research findings and discussion were determined. The article was excluded from further review unless these criteria were met, and the provenance of the author or authors of the article were established. This filtering excluded many articles from the commercial HR publication arena, for example, those that were not referenced, or peer reviewed.

2.2.4 Knowledge acquisition –Analysis, Evaluation and Creation

Selected articles were grouped and critically analysed to verify related counterarguments, evidence strength, and research applicability. Related articles were evaluated and clustered to compare and contrast arguments, identify the gaps in the available research literature, and identify further keywords for subsequent search criteria. Articles and material were synthesised and condensed to support presentation within the literature and knowledge review (Hart, 1998).

2.2.5 Conceptual Framework

While the starting point for the review was structured, the inherent challenge I experienced as a researcher was the determination of what to include or discard and where and when to cease. It must be acknowledged that this was an evolving rather than a systemic strategy, and it was based on the practitioner's experience of what can be applied in an organisational context, specifically a context set in Asian geography. It was only when I considered that I was not discovering more new perspectives that I closed the literature review.

From a curiosity perspective, the approach reflected the opportunity to frame this opportunity for an unexpected learning journey. The research as an HR practitioner aimed to deliberately unlearn and learn (Park and Kim, 2020), and it was noted in the Reflective Journal that my own bias triggered strong reactions to some of the materials examined in this process! It would also have been easy to disappear into the literature rabbit hole. For example, I considered coaching and how this impacted the HR Leader before ceasing this exploration as it did not fit with the aims and objectives of the Research.

Within this chapter, I will present the selected topics, commencing with the broader concept of how and why organisations change, before considering the people dimension and, finally, the HR domain. The initial broad focus of the knowledge review was an explicit choice so that I could best consider the debates in these areas and then consider how the HR profession is responding to them.

2.3 Why Organisations Change

The research context was a significant organisational change, which, therefore, was selected as the starting point for the knowledge review. This topic of organisational change has been well-researched, and I acknowledge the endless scale of knowledge available. However, to provide structure and alignment to the research topic, the scope was limited to the way change is typically taught in the HR curriculum to the 'average' HR practitioner. To guide this, I reviewed the curriculum of various international HR degrees and practitioner programmes available as of 2017. As outlined later, I believe there are opportunities to evolve the HR education pathway to continue to establish solid foundations for HR practitioner success.

Organisational transformations and change can take many different forms and most often commence at the direction of the management team and boards of companies. Rarely is it a matter that the broader employee base can influence or has agency! The research environment under review was one of corporate acquisitions. The first news for employees came from the CNBC news network, which announced on 6th November 2017 (Faber, 2017) that talks were underway with the acquirer. Therefore, Fox employees did not hear the acquisition news from their management. As will be discussed, this triggered an emotional response.

2.3.1 Mergers and Acquisitions

Fast-changing consumer markets, digitalisation and human behaviours constantly demand that organisations stay relevant to their consumers' needs and transform their operations to ensure that they have the capability to affect the change needed to thrive (Deloitte, 2016).

Quattrone and Hopper (2001) defined organisational transformation as the change in an organisation's strategies, processes, structures, and culture. Organisation transformation, which is often perceived or described as a linear process (Casa and Lodge, 2015), is, in fact, a strategic and drastic change that takes place not only in physical operational processes. Nograšek and Vintar (2014) viewed organisation transformation as a kneejerk reaction triggered by globalisation, diversification, environmental change, significant advancement in innovation and technology, and the acquisition and merger of companies (Cummings and Worley, 2000; Dunphy and Stace, 1988).

The disruptive nature of change could arguably deter many organisations from re-examining themselves and moving towards a new mission, even when radical change is often imperative. However, in the event of a merger of companies, when full integration of the acquired company is the aim, transformation becomes a necessity rather than an option, particularly for the acquired organisation.

Integral to the success of mergers, especially cross-culturally, is the socio-cultural integration and a level of autonomy, which is essential throughout the acquisition process and highlighted as a critical factor post-acquisition (Khan et al., 2021). Cultural implications will be examined as a separate topic later in this chapter.

Over the past 30 years, it would be fair to acknowledge that increasing attention has been paid to acquisitions on the human side (Sarala, Vaara and Junni, 2019; Cartwright and Cooper, 1995). This gradual change in focus is accurate with the recent digital transformation trend due to a paradigm shift from the physical to the virtual experience (Mitra, Gaur and Giacosa, 2019; Worley and Beaujolin, 2023). The COVID-19 pandemic further reinforced the sentiments of the above authors because it acted as a catalyst in forcing organisations to transform in order to continue operating. Another type of transformation is structural transformation, which can be understood as the restructuring and reallocating of employees and resources within an organisation (Van Graan and Ukpere, 2013).

Additionally, Levy and Merry (1986) proposed that organisations experience three orders of transitions. They suggested that organisations go through a sub-system change in the first order, followed by an organisation change in the second order, before changes are seen across the entire sector in the third order. Organisation transformation lies within the second order of the proposed framework (Levy and Merry, 1986; Maes and Van Hootegem, 2019). It is a multidimensional and multilevel revolutionary transformation resulting in a renewed organisational mission and vision (Levy and Merry, 1986). Kuipers et al. (2014) believed that an organisation's transformation often occurs first in terms of systems and processes before ultimately changing the organisation's core values and identity. Hence, organisational transformation could extend beyond a single type of change.

In analysing the stages of organisational transformation, Dixon et al. (2010) focused on dynamic capabilities and organisational learning, arguing that organisational transformation is often restricted by organisational history, inherited assets, and the capability of leaders (Bartlett and Ghoshal, 1998; 2009). As Fubini, Price and Zollo (2020; 2016) pointed out, the success of company mergers and transformation relies heavily on the fast formation of a top management team that is capable, appropriately structured, and clear on its agenda while also having the ability to build confidence in its employees to enable them to work cohesively. This requirement has been defined as a critical step for the integration of the acquiring company and Fox in Asia Pacific.

The business press does consider consequences on the psychosocial well-being and somatic health of employees (Kivimäki et al., 2001; Oreg, Vakola and Armenakis, 2011; Bamberger et al., 2012), which are critical factors for consideration during integration post-acquisition. The complexity is highlighted by Fløvik, Knardahl and Christensen's (2019) study on the effects of organisational changes on the psychosocial domain of the work environment. The five organisational changes assessed in this study were relevant to companies experiencing mergers and acquisitions (M&A): restructuring, downsizing, layoffs, partial closure, and partial outsourcing. Fløvik's study concluded unsurprisingly that organisational changes have an adversative effect on various aspects of the psychosocial domain and contribute negatively to employees' health. However, when an unforeseen event or crisis such as COVID-19 emerges during an organisational change, these psychosocial effects are further compounded, and leaders must be allowed to empower both individuals and teams to respond to novel events with agility and experimentation (Andres and Heo, 2023; Riaz, Morgan and Kimberley, 2023).

These changes are often associated with employees experiencing a sense of reduction in job control while feeling overwhelmed in navigating new job demands and adjusting to new collegial dynamics (Paulsen et al., 2005; Campbell and Pepper, 2007; Baillien and De Witte, 2009; Fløvik, Knardahl and Christensen, 2019; Schoellbauer et al., 2022). Their research suggested these accompanying consequences of organisational transformation as reasons why some organisations fail to attain their intended outcome. The output is that a successful transformation hinges on the capability of leaders, communication strategies (Haumer et al., 2021) and a collaborative work culture.

These findings reinforce the importance of the careful navigation that companies must undertake when merging assets and integrating employees. The failure of Daimler-Benz and Chrysler's merger in 1998 is a painful reminder for companies undergoing mergers (Viana, Silva and Thiago, 2010). Instead of becoming a leader in the industry, the failure to reconcile the culture and identity between the two companies forced it to split in 2007, with Chrysler being sold to Cerberus Capital Management (Fox, 2007).

In contrast, the success story of Procter and Gamble's (P&G's) acquisition of Gillette in 2005 exemplifies the points raised by Bartlett and Ghoshal (1998; 2009) and Fubini, Price and Zollo (2020; 2016). P&G tackled the merger patiently, studying Gillette's business processes and evaluating the employees while strengthening their communication strategies to establish synergies between them (Marufuji, 2019). Other success stories of a similar nature included CEMEX's acquisition of RMC in 2005 and the Publicis Group's acquisition of Saatchi and Saatchi in 2000.

In 2014, Microsoft underwent a significant reorganisation and cultural transformation after Satya Nadella was appointed Chief Executive Officer (CEO). The often-vicious internal competition between departments in Microsoft was described as akin to the challenge of merging employees from two different companies. The cutthroat culture and silo working structures impeded breakthroughs in innovation that would otherwise have allowed Microsoft's business to dominate in the industry (Ibarra and Rattan, 2018; Nadella, Shaw and Nichols, 2017). Similarly, the success factor for its transformation demonstrated the requirement of a proven capability of the CEO's leadership (Bartlett and Ghoshal, 1998; 2009) and the establishment of a collaborative culture between departments.

In summary, organisational transformation can be understood by the types or degree of transformation required. There are varied reasons why organisations undergo a transformation, with acquisition and merger being just one of them. Regardless of the reason for transformation, if I were to summarise the knowledge review, it would be to say that the successful implementation of change requires three Cs – Capability of top leadership, Communication strategies and a Collaborative culture, which were exemplified by both the successful and unsuccessful cases described earlier.

What, though, of the people below the management team? Employees, regardless of their positions, are often considered and described to be assets of an organisation. The refrain, ‘people are our greatest asset’, has appeared in many company communications.

Peter Drucker (1993) declared that post-capitalist society had moved into an ‘employee society’ and that in most modern economies, employees (labour) were no longer only an asset. However, later research reclassified employees as human capital assets and liabilities (DiVanna and Rogers, 2005). Ulrich challenged this definition of Human Capital, stressing that the value is from the employee decisions and choices, not as assets (2005).

The negative impact incurred from neglecting employees' psychosocial well-being or perspective can be detrimental to the company's bottom line as transformation fails. However, in my view, the business literature does not go deep enough to understand the people's perspective, why employees resist or struggle and how organisations can best address this. Hence, it has been my decision to align research from both an organisation and an individual perspective with the outcome of how the HR function and Leader can deploy this.

2.3.2 The Role of Complexity and Impact on HR and HR Leadership

Complex Systems, Mechanisms, and Theories

A complex system is where the behaviours of its various parts relate interactively with one another according to some guiding mechanism or force. Each part, as a simultaneous response to these interactions and relation within its local context, may, without explicit inter-part co-ordination or coordination at the global level, give rise to new patterns, behaviours or phenomena that cannot be explained or predicted solely by the properties of the part (Maguire and McKelvey, 1999; Jacco Van Uden et al., 2001; Maguire et al., 2006).

Organisations are by nature an abstract concept and can therefore only be loosely understood in terms of complexity, order, and chaos, measured by how much information is needed to explain the system. The more information needed to explain the organisation, the more complex the system is deemed to be. Self-organisation is the simultaneous appearance of order, or global coordination, through local-level interactions or disorder (Thiétart and Forgues, 1997; Ulrich and Nielsen, 2020). It was, therefore, pertinent to understand how these theories could be applied to an organisation in flux.

Complexity theories focus on the study of the emergence of dynamic and non-linear systems that operate between both order and chaos and where - even though the order in the system is typically unpredictable, patterns of behaviours emerge out of a process of self-organisation, characterised by simple rules that generate orders (Burnes, 2017; 2005). Three key concepts surrounding the understanding of complexity are the chaos theory, a dissipative structure, and a complex adaptive system.

Chaos theory is concerned with the study of systems that constantly change in a manner that is irreversible and, hence, in an evolutionary manner (Haigh, 2002). Rather than a linear-causal effect, chaotic systems are characterised by complex patterns that are not proportionate to their causes and cannot be predicted from them. Instability is necessary for the system to reach critical points where self-organisation occurs to develop a new and different structure, also termed a dissipative structure (Burnes, 2005; Stacey, 2003).

Dissipative structures are self-organised structures formed as a system undergoes turbulence or randomness. It is a semi-stable structure characterised by a non-linear causal effect and can be affected by even the most minor disturbances within the system (Rosenhead, 1998). In the context of complexity science, dissipative structures may undergo moments of instability when they reach a critical point that facilitates self-organisation, in which new structures that cannot be referenced to the previous state may emerge (Prigogine, 1997).

A complex adaptive system, on the other hand, emphasises the agents within the complex system that behave according to their principles but adjust their actions to accommodate the behaviours of others (Stacey, 2003; Burnes, 2005). A complex adaptive system is self-organising because there are no formal rules guiding the behaviours of the agents. Instead, behavioural patterns emerge from the interactions between agents in the local context. This self-organising allows systems to adapt and transform to their environment to ensure survival (Frederick, 1998).

Three key concepts that are central to understanding complexity theories (Maguire and McKelvey, 1999; Burnes, 2005; Stacey, 2003; Burnes, 2005) are:

(i) nature of chaos and order.
(ii) the edge of chaos and
(iii) order-generating rules.

In complexity theories, chaos is seen as a new form of order rather than as a state of pure unpredictability without order. Burnes (2005) and Stacey (2003) identified three forms of order and disorder: stable equilibrium, explosive instability, and bounded instability. This concept is also reflected in Cramer's levels of complexity (Cramer, 1993; McKelvey, 1999), which were termed: '(i) subcritical, (ii) fundamental and (iii) critical complexity'. Stacey (2003) and Burnes (2005) suggested that only systems with bounded instability can transform, adapt, and survive. Conversely, overly stable systems will necessarily stagnate and dissolve, while those that are overly unstable will lose control and self-destruct. Under bounded instability, systems functioning within the edge of chaos are perceived to exhibit creativity, growth, and valuable self-organisation (Kauffman, 1993; Burnes, 2005; Lewis, 1994). However, such bounded instability must be sustained through 'order-generating rules', which permit some level of chaos while allowing a form of order to develop. Reynold (1987) described this self-organising principle using flocks of birds, whereby each bird operates on individual and straightforward rules of interaction (i.e. ensure the distance between other birds, fly at a consistent pace, move towards the centre of the flock) to develop coherent and self-organised behaviours that govern the entire system.

As complexity theory perceives organisations as self-organising systems, cultural processes will affect connections between agents (people), which may facilitate or impact the ability to reproduce a system that supports self-organisations (Hatt, 2009). Chiu and Qiu (2014) performed a simulation study to understand an organisation's cultural ideas and practices. This study uncovered that shared ideas and beliefs within organisations do not occur through repetitive and structured patterns of interactions between agents. Instead, it involves a complex, neither linear nor deterministic pattern, whereby interactions between individuals with similar or differing opinions can simultaneously stabilise dominant opinions.

This research has been located in Asia, and therefore, it is appropriate to consider research pertinent to the geography and how this impacts HR. In Asian organisations, the application of the above complexity theories may be questioned given the typical cultural elements surrounding collectivism, which is generally seen as having rigid hierarchies (Lok and Crawford, 2004) and centralised decision-making and control, with limited empowerment given to lower ranks within the organisations (Wright et al., 2000). Such factors may impede the successful application of complexity theories to organisational management, particularly during significant changes such as post-acquisition integration. They are, therefore, provisional considerations.

2.3.3 Implications for Mergers and Acquisition

For an organisation to maintain itself as a non-linear, decentralised, self-organising entity that operates within the ‘edge of chaos’ to allow for adaptation to changes such as new ownership, there is a need for changes to the role of management (Beeson and Davis, 2000; Wolfram Cox, Madison and Eva, 2022). Self-organising principles reject hierarchical and rigid systems of control, which are often the way in which organisations are designed. Shifting this practice requires reconceptualising management and control, managing changing contexts, facilitating processes that promote self-organisation and learning to use microstate activities to promote systemic changes (Morgan and O'Sullivan, 1998; Burnes, 2005).

Organisations that are the target of an acquisition undergo tremendous stress and often non-linear and unwanted behaviours. Despite that, constructive self-organising behaviours may not always occur because the conditions needed to promote them may not be present (Lauser, 2010; Razi and Garrick, 2019). To facilitate and promote a level of self-organisation, HR and general management are counselled that one needs to build and deploy management and leadership skills to create integrative activities that promote self-organising behaviours (Lauser, 2010; Javed et al., 2019). Managers will need to be bold in encouraging experimentation and innovation and bend the rules to destabilise their organisation to develop the art of managing order and chaos concurrently (Tetenbaum, 1998; Maguire and McKelvey, 1999; Powell et al., 2023). This approach could be an overly challenging ask from a practitioner's perspective, given the psychological aversion to risk in a period of limbo and the apathy that often sets in.

One key aspect of developing self-organising structures is to organise the system into basic units from which new structures that facilitate information dissemination and sharing can emerge (Jenner, 1998). Organisations also need to embrace more democratic principles to facilitate self-organisation, which may be less feasible in Asian hierarchical structures. Authority needs to be delegated, and human activities need to be granted the most significant importance because complexity theories suggest that micro-level activities have the potential to lead to significant consequences within an organisation (Bechtold, 1997; Jenner, 1998).

Maguire and McKelvey (1999) further suggested that managers create structures to address adaptive tension during organisational change; in other words, management needs to create transient pockets of stability (i.e. emergent dissipative structures) with the aim to address the difference between the organisation’s current state of being and its ideal optima state. The creation of such structures during organisational change can allow other parts of the organisation to interact and structure themselves around them. Examples of such emergent dissipative structures may include self-directed teams, working groups or cross-functional teams. Creating such dissipative structures also allows for the development of network effects that may lead to synergy across the parts of the organisation (Maguire and McKelvey, 1999). In this way, tasking a project team of employees from Fox and the acquiring company with looking at some of the required changes could have been an option once the deal was signed.

For an organisation to sustain itself over a prolonged period of time, the complex system must also withstand environmental disturbances and competition through adaptative leadership (Powell et al., 2023), constant innovation or more change. Such a system must support real-time information exchanges through a structure with minimal rules (Brown and Eisenhardt, 1997). Rather than promoting incremental change or radical transformation, innovation or change programmes should be in the form of a ‘third’ structure, one which lies between the former two and should focus on self-organisation at the various parts of the system (Hanelt et al., 2021; Brodbeck, 2002a; 2002b; Brown and Eisenhardt, 1997).

While some of the authors argue for the need for organisations to respond spontaneously to changes in the environment to function at the edge of chaos (Burnes, 2005), other authors have suggested that order-generating rules can guide the transformation of organisations in adapting to changes in the environment. However, order-generating rules are typically an automatic natural process, which is unlikely to occur in most organisations because individuals think and exercise their own free will, thereby resulting in the interpretation of events in different ways (Stacey, 2003; Törmänen, Hämäläinen and Saarinen, 2022).

In summary, there are three key implications in the application of complexity theories to organisational change knowledge that, I could apply to the practice area of HR and HR Leadership. These are as follows:

1. The democratic and equal distribution of power throughout both organisations. This power distribution opposes the typically limited employee participation in change decisions.
2. Incremental or radical approaches to change could be abandoned in preference for a novel approach lying between the two, favouring self-organisation in the local context.
3. Lastly, an order-generating rule can potentially overcome challenges posed by a linear, hierarchical, strategy-driven management to support effective change within the new organisation (Burnes, 2005).

2.4 The Influence of Culture on HR Practices

In an acquisition, each organisation has its own pre-existing identity and way of doing things, so a potential priority for the HR integration team is to manage this dynamic. Within an international organisation, the additional factor of national cultures is layered on top of organisational dynamics, which I assert are highly relevant in the context of a US-led acquisition that would impact Asia Pacific.

There is substantial knowledge surrounding the importance of organisational culture and leadership within the context of transformations. Leading with culture in mind may be one of the few competitive advantages left to companies today should successful leaders stop regarding culture as a hindrance and instead use it as a management tool, as reported by the Harvard Business Review in January 2018 with an entire issue dedicated to the topic (Groysberg et al., 2018).

There is general acceptance in the literature that leadership shapes culture through conscious and unconscious acts, such as unspoken mindsets, values, behaviours, and social patterns. As an international HR practitioner with a research opportunity in Asia, I was more curious to explore the interplay between organisational and national culture. Indeed, the influence of national culture is becoming critical in the practice of international human resource management as markets become more internationalised and businesses expand across nations with the need to manage both people of diverse cultural backgrounds and a geographically dispersed workforce (De Cieri, Fenwick and Hutchings, 2005a; Peretz, Fried and Levi, 2018; Bleijenbergh, van Mierlo and Bondarouk, 2021).

National culture refers to a system of the deeply founded values, attitudes, and behaviours of the members of a society (Leung et al.,2005), often defined as a country or race. The Singaporean culture, where the research will be primarily located in terms of volume of participants, is typically described as traditional and conservative.

Singapore was formed as a republic in 1965 and is a multicultural country. As a result of both migration and colonisation, there are three broad racial categories of Chinese, Malay and Indian, each of which hold their own religion, food, cultural practices and languages (Reddy and Gleibs, 2019). In addition, Singapore is a temporary home to a number of migrant workers, including myself which lends to the broader multicultural norms.

The workplace culture reflects the Asian societal norms and Singapore is considered a higher power distance culture (Hofstede, 1983). One study concluded that local Singaporean employees were more accepting of what would be considered workplace mistreatment in Australia, which is classified as a low power distance culture (Loh, Thorsteinsson and Loi, 2021) and therefore their work outcomes were less effected. As a citizen of a low power distance society, I am cognisant of this dimension in my practice.

Singapore is acknowledged as having a culture of excessive competitiveness (Kirby et al., 2010), known as 'kiasuism' (Cheng, 2015). This competition results in a long work hours culture and a loss of individual creativity because one focuses on avoiding failure rather than engaging in learning (Cheng and Hong, 2017). This strong desire to avoid failure, which is common in Chinese culture, arguably hinders the experience of psychological safety, inhibits behaviours that promote learning, such as feedback seeking (Hwang, Ang and Francesco, 2002), and impedes self-expression and innovation in businesses (Chia, 2016).

Given this knowledge, it was less likely that local employees in Singapore would engage in growth mindsets (Wanless, 2016). This factor was considered during the design phase for the interventions for the integration programme. I therefore consider that there is a gap in the SCARF and growth mindset research regarding cultural nuances.

How, then, as a practitioner, could I, for example, best effect transformation in a traditional, conservative culture?

2.4.1 Hofstede's Project GLOBE

Gerhart Hofstede's 1980s study remains the most notable model in the field of national culture. It highlights five dimensions of national culture found in the Hofstede study across 117,000 employees of IBM (Hofstede, 1983). Project GLOBE (Global Leadership and Organisational Behaviour Effectiveness) expanded Hofstede's five original dimensions to nine (House et al., 2013). HR practitioners can utilise the nine dimensions to design policies and procedures best suited to the national culture. For example, an individualistic society such as the UK may measure employee performance on individual achievement, whereas a communitarian culture (e.g., Thai society) may perform better under a team appraisal. As a practitioner, I must acknowledge:

a) that the cultural characteristics of countries are dynamic, not static, and can often be linked to generational demographics; and
b) these changes in culture, known as ‘culture convergence’ or ‘culture divergence’ (Thomas and Peterson, 2018), should impact the deployment of HR practices across countries.

The validity of Hofstede’s study on HR practices was subsequently analysed in two studies and found to be largely valid. Đorđević (2016) conducted thorough research on the relevance of Hofstede’s national culture in shaping HR policies in different countries and established a clear link between HR policies’ preferences and specific dimensions. Beugelsdijk, Maseland and van Hoorn (2015) studied the scores of Hofstede dimensions and found that cultural change is not relative but absolute, indicating that Hofstede’s scores are stable (Beugelsdijk, Maseland and van Hoorn, 2015; Beugelsdijk and Welzel, 2018).

However, for myself in the role of a practitioner, there are arguable limitations that I considered in the design of this research. The main criticism of Hofstede’s dimensions is that his study does not fully encompass the diversity within national cultures, proposing less of a role for minorities (Cacciattolo, 2014). Additionally, an analysis of Hofstede’s original research reveals that in his data, country data only explains a tiny proportion (between 2% and 4%) of the variance in respondents’ values, which is contrary to Hofstede’s interpretation. Interestingly, Gerhart and Fang (2005). found that organisational culture results in more variance in cultural values than a country’s culture. Likewise, these studies are cultural generalisations and do not consider personal values at an individual level (Sagiv and Schwartz, 2022). Therefore, the implications of organisational culture or differences must be studied alongside the country, particularly regarding global organisational changes such as the integration programme for Fox.

National cultures of different countries give an insight into the prominent leadership behaviour. A research study in China and India revealed a higher power distance index, indicating that people respected hierarchical structure and authority (Pihlak and Alas, 2012a). The study further found that national cultures resulted in different responses to change management initiatives. For example, change projects have been more successful when employees are involved in decision-making in Estonia, but employee involvement has a negative effect in China and India (Pihlak and Alas, 2012b; Sidhu et al., 2020), indicating how the context of culture is essential in implementing change.

In terms of organisational culture development, the responsibilities fall on leaders to build a solid organisational culture. A strong culture can bring out the best in people. However, this, therefore, requires an HR Leader who sees managing organisational culture as their key task, someone who recognises the importance of aligning organisational strategies with cultural ideals (Warrick, 2017; Schotter, Meyer and Wood, 2021) and can influence the management team to prioritise this. HR Leaders are, therefore, often tasked to develop initiatives to manage culture, which can help maintain positive employee attitudes and increase organisational commitment - predictive factors for other HR metrics (Sinclair et al.,2005).

For the specific context of M&A, as has been described, culture can make or break the merger equation (Fralicx and Bolster, 1997), and the importance of culture has been well established (Stahl and Voigt, 2008). However, the research shows that the cultural implications are often determined to be a low priority for the management teams overwhelmed with operational tactics and the requirements of closing a deal (Marks and Mirvis, 2011). There is, though, the suggestion that when M&A is across borders, the potential integration issues are more apparent to management teams and are therefore ranked as a higher priority than deals completed in one geographical territory. (Pucik, 2015)

HR has been identified as an essential component in the success of these cultural alignment programmes. The belief that the HR function moderates the organisational culture gap and commitment indicates that HR should play an essential role in M&A success (Febriani and Yancey, 2019).

‘Like water for fish’ is how an early mentor defined organisational culture. Regardless of the definition, cultural norms help influence HR in providing a broad structure to assist in developing HR policies overseeing the development of technical and behavioural skills in an organisation. Because organisations differ in terms of cultural content due to differences in values, beliefs and assumptions, organisational culture is therefore defined as a shared belief and value that helps shape the behavioural patterns of employees (Heskett, 2011; Harris, 2023).

How does an HR practitioner apply this knowledge to their practice? Karen (2014) suggests two approaches to analysing culture: interpretive and structural (Barbera, 2014). The interpretive approach implies that the organisational environment continually shapes culture. The structural approach stems from the functionalist/materialist school of thought that relationships are structured rather than perceived (Barbera, 2014; Parboteeah, Weiss and Hoegl, 2023). Johnson and Scholes' cultural web model (2002) is an example of an interpretive approach that is used to describe the culture of an organisation through analysing the organisation's web, which consists of paradigms, control systems, organisational structures, symbols, rituals, routines and stories (Johnson, Scholes and Whittington, 1999; Whittington et al., 2023). Johnson views his work on the cultural web as a model for researchers to develop an analytical framework because this encompasses practical elements (Johnson, 2000). An early example of a structural approach to culture is Charles Handy's (1993) power structure, which associates four types of culture with organisational structure: person, task, role, and power culture (Handy, 1992; Cornuel, Thomas and Wood, 2022).

2.4.2 Organisational Culture

Another key culture concept is by Edgar Schein (Schein, 1971; Schein, 2019; Kunert and Bachmann Thomas, 2023), who postulates a deep-level culture model to study organisational culture (Willness, 2016; Coghlan, 2021; Coghlan, 2023). Schein (1971) argues that the most challenging organisational element to change is culture and illustrates three cognitive levels to provide organisational culture with a definition: artefact level, espoused value level and implicit hypothesis level (Williams et al., 1993; Thomas and Peterson, 2016):

> The first level deals with artefacts or physical attributes visible in organisations, from dress codes to furniture.
>
> The second level is called ‘espoused values’ or the apparent culture of an organisation in the form of an expressed mission statement, philosophies and functioning beliefs.
>
> The third innermost level deals with the organisation’s implicit hypothesis, which includes elements of culture that are not visible, such as unspoken rules that employees are not conscious of (Williams et al.,1993).

Schein’s model (1971) is often quoted for culture change, with the first level being the easiest to change and the third being the hardest. In this research context of the acquisition and integration of one company into another, changing the name on the door from Fox to the acquiring company would be easy. The cultural integration, however, would not.

The core criticism of Schein’s research has been methodological: his methods, such as surveys and interviews, were assessed as superficial and insufficient to draw out insights. More in-depth methods, such as clinical sessions, have been proposed to study the more overlooked fundamental dynamic elements of organisational culture by organisational behaviourists (Karen, 2014). Karen noted that organisational culture is not wholly ‘homogeneous’, which proposes the existence of subcultures in complex organisations that may disagree with one another, while no organisation possesses only a single type of culture. Karen’s view is supported by Trompenaars (1995) and Deal and Kennedy (2000). Handy (1993) further illustrated that employees thrive in certain cultures according to their personalities and may not be successful in other less compatible cultures. In summary, it is essential to understand the complications of cultural issues in order to adapt HR policies to manage underlying cultures or assist in cultural change, although, as HR practitioners, we may lack some of the skill sets to do so effectively.

In a later addition to this field, Meyer (2014) conceptualised the ‘Culture Map’ to better understand how cultural patterns of belief and behaviour influence our perceptions, cognitions, and actions (Portman, 2018). The eight scales identified – communicating, evaluating, leading, deciding, trusting, disagreeing, scheduling, and persuading – allow people, managers, and HR practitioners to examine how diverse cultures relate based on the relative position of two countries' cultures to each other rather than absolute positions of either culture (Portman, 2018). Meyer's culture map is arguably grounded in notable national culture studies by Hofstede (1991) and Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (2012), and, as I would agree, could be seen as an extension of those culture studies by complementing them with Meyer's research and experience (Kregel, Ogonek and Matthies, 2019). Her cultural map is more of a contemporary concept. Therefore, arguably, the model's effectiveness has not been adequately tested. However, the study by Kregel et al. (2019), analysing lean management in different countries, expressed the view that Meyer's culture map explained the national cultures more appropriately than Hofstede's cultural dimensions did. Another study by Vouillemin (2020) validated Meyer's cultural map in explaining cultural relativity. This consideration is applicable for a US organisation such as the acquiring company, acquiring a multi-country organisation (even with Fox being a US headquartered company).

Meyer's cultural map is best classified as an essentialist approach to culture, similar to those other notable models by Hofstede (1991) and Trompenaars (1995) and Hampden-Turner (2012), whereby the essence of culture is captured and categorised into groups in terms of core values or cultural dimensions (e.g. high-low context, masculinity versus femininity) (Romanowski and Bandura, 2019). One criticism of Meyer's cultural map and the essentialist approach is their emphasis on cultural consistency over flexibility, which ignores cultural complexity. This emphasis makes the model susceptible to reductionism (Hua, 2019). Another drawback of Meyer's cultural map is that culture may be misunderstood as a determinant of behaviour. This misunderstanding leads to a potentially unwarranted belief of culture predicting individual behaviour, neglect of in-group heterogeneity and reinforcement of stereotypical thinking (Hua, 2019). This finding suggested an opportunity for myself as a researcher to identify individual rather than national responses to the acquisition and change behaviour to add to the knowledge domain.

As a practitioner researcher, I have considered the knowledge evolution of the cultural dimensions of Hofstede and Trompenaars that have progressed from conceptual models to practitioner based. In my professional capacity, I have more frequently applied Meyer's Culture Map (2014) particularly as I prepare and develop leaders to work across boundaries, either as expats or in virtual teams. I have found the Meyer Culture Map and Culture Mapping Tools (Meyer, 2016a, 2014), better suited for practice rather than theory, making it more relevant and digestible for a busy executive with minimal capacity for additional learning but I do acknowledge that it is an extension of the existing knowledge by Hofstede and Trompenaars.

Overall, it is noted that a one-dimensional continuum is unable to fully encapsulate the contextuality of interactions (Romanowski and Bandura, 2019). A non-essentialist approach to viewing culture has been proposed to shift the focus from static to dynamic. However, this approach entails studying individual differences or the 'self', which is overly complex (Romanowski and Bandura, 2019), as will be explored. So, the essentialist approach – or Meyer's cultural map – remains relevant in identifying cultural patterns (Romanowski and Bandura, 2019). Cultural due diligence should be conducted using models such as Meyer's map or Hofstede's cultural dimensions as tools to analyse cultures and enhance performance in mergers and acquisitions (Vouillemin, 2020). Cultural awareness assists in preventing communication breakdown, which is essential in building the trust critical for successful mergers and acquisitions (Vouillemin, 2020).

The importance of observing national and organisational culture in the context of M&A cannot be undermined because it has been studied and found to have an effect on the success of M&A in both national and organisational cultures where the cultural difference plays a role in deploying appropriate integration approaches to prevent culture clash (Weber, Tarba and Reichel, 2011).

Because this research was based on the context of an acquisition, this was a significant matter to consider. Communication has been identified as a vital factor that helps in cultural integration, so HR must adopt the most effective communication channels through regular dialogues, enhancement of shared goals, sharing differences and similarities of organisations in terms of values, norms and expectations, and handling conflicts (Vazirani and Mohapatra, 2012). Additionally, organisational justice is studied as a critical factor in ensuring successful cultural integration because employees must perceive fairness in treatment during M&A (Ismail, Baki and Omar, 2018).

Essentially, the influence of culture on the role of HR in these scenarios cannot be understated because both national culture and organisational culture are said to influence HR policies and decision-making. One study of cultural influence on HR by Osibanjo and Adeniji (2013) showed, for example, how HR culture influences training and development programmes, in addition to recruitment processes, to enhance the effectiveness of the organisation. I would further suggest that the HR culture starts with the HR Leader in the same way that the broader organisational culture starts with the CEO.

Management consultants Bain and Company conducted a 2017 survey of executives who had managed through mergers, and they presented the view that culture clash was the primary reason for a deal's failure to achieve the estimated value. If ways of working are fundamentally different and lead to misinterpretation, this can lead to employees feeling frustrated and anxious, and some may leave or stay but be disengaged. The problem's identification is clear, yet the issues have not been resolved.

This research project has been located within the acquisition of one US-headquartered multinational organisation. The integration objective was to create a larger organisation by bringing together four different business lines and organisational cultures across multiple geographies. This objective can be defined as a full integration, whereby Fox would dissolve into the acquiring company, and the brand would disappear. The cultural end state can, therefore, be described as an absorption, as indicated below in Figure 1:

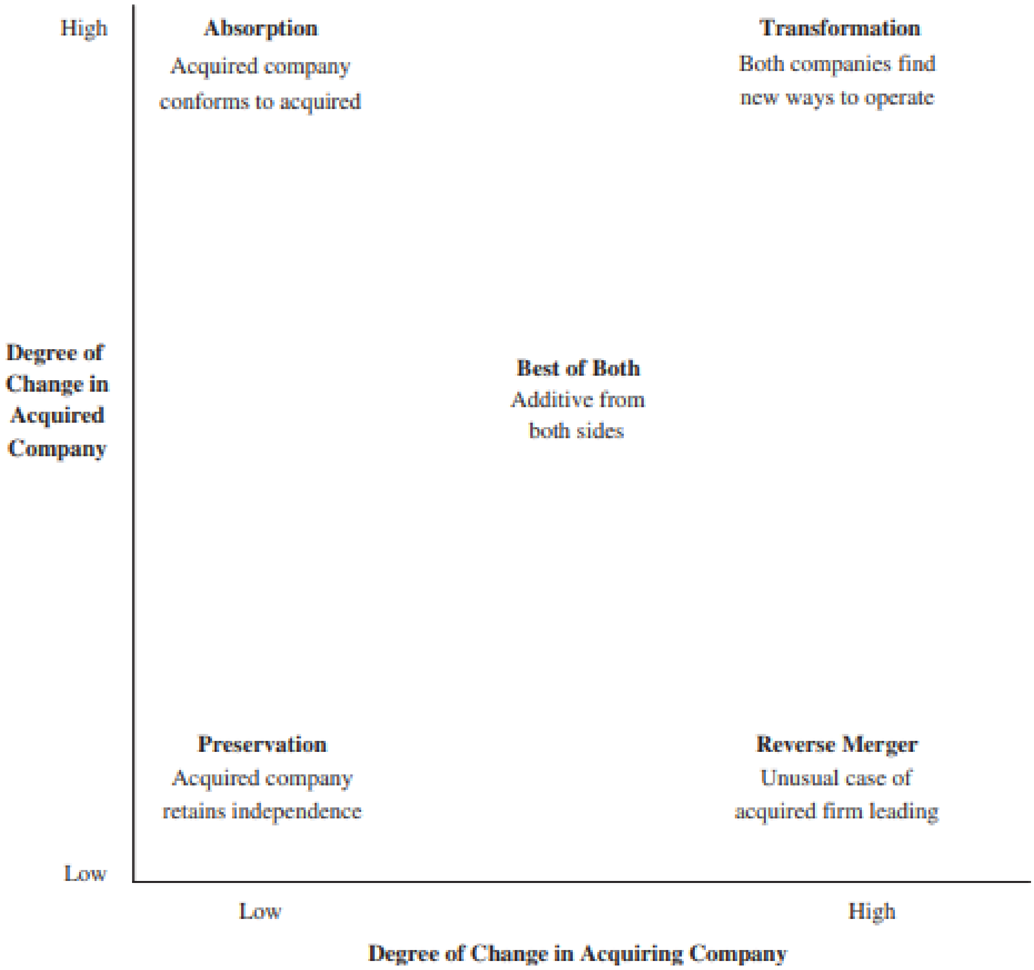


Figure 1: Cultural Endstates (Marks and Mirvis, 1998)

The alignment between these cultural and organisational cultures was material to the research because I anticipated significant cultural clashes based on my observations of these organisations pre-close and the learnings from the above literature. The knowledge review on this topic provided a set of indicators that I, as the HR Leader, could practically incorporate into the integration planning and deployment.

2.5 The Individual Experience of Organisational Change

2.5.1 The Employee perspective

I then considered the employee perspective, first exploring the topic from the broader organisational and national perspective. As outlined in the previous section, the organisational-orientated literature has evolved over the past 30 years to consider the human elements more thoughtfully (Cartwright and Cooper, 1995; King et al., 2020; Harikkala-Laihinen, 2022). This research led to an understanding that the hard (task, systems, processes) and the soft dimensions (people and culture) are critical to a successful acquisition. Whereas task integration focuses on delivering operational synergies, employee activities aim to create engagement and, ultimately, one culture within a national setting. Without this delicate balance, the result would likely be suboptimal, and I would fail to deliver the organisational requirements. Concentrating only on the people side of integration will, of course, create satisfied employees but potentially prohibit the realisation of the desired operational synergies, whereas focusing only on task integration will no doubt achieve the required synergies but potentially at the cost of people engagement (Birkinshaw, Hakanson and Bresman, 2000; Stahl and Voigt, 2008; Stahl and Maznevski, 2021). Again, I am reminded that as an HR practitioner, I must be conscious of and balance both requirements.

Acquisitions are mostly defined as a process of adaptation rather than singular events in the involved companies' life cycles (Cartwright and Cooper, 1995). From the human point of view, the process is often called 'acculturation': the coming together, clashing, and adaptation of two previously separate cultures (Nahavandi and Malekzadeh, 1988; Rottig, Reus and Tarba, 2014; Klok, Kroon and Khapova, 2022). Acculturation in acquisitions refers to a process whereby a single unified culture is formed from two previously separate sets of organisational beliefs, assumptions, and values (Larsson and Lubatkin, 2001; Sarala, Vaara and Junni, 2019; Filatotchev et al., 2020; Kroon and Reif, 2023). This process assumes that a new culture is an intention, but I would suggest that this is not always the case. In the construct of Fox and the acquiring company, it was communicated to the HR community that Fox would be absorbed and become an indistinguishable part of the acquiring company. There was to be no acculturation - only possession. At a conceptual level, conflict and adaptation are necessary for acculturation. However, this often leads to a change in resistance behaviour from employees. At worst, this may trigger the merger syndrome — a fear-the-worst response causing significant stress in the affected employees (Sinkovics, Zagelmeyer and Kusstatscher, 2011; Kusstatscher and Cooper, 2005; Marks and Mirvis, 2011; 1998). As an HR practitioner tasked with delivering a successful change, I needed to understand how best to negate the risk of such a response so that I could navigate and deliver both organisational and individual objectives, a requirement of an HR Leader.

It is evident that at the time of writing, there remains limited research exploring how HR can best influence employee behaviour during an acquisition and how that guidance continues to prioritise areas such as effective communication, teamwork, and training to encourage affiliation towards the new organisation. As a practitioner seeking knowledge to be applied, this remains a challenge because HR teams need to understand better how to achieve this. The following section describes the experience of organisational change from an individual psychological perspective and presents the factors influencing this experience from the socio-economic and socio-cognitive neuroscience perspectives.

2.5.2 Psychological Experience

Current understanding of the employee experience of change is based on emotions, defined as a reaction in response to a decisive event, external stimuli, or internal representations (Ochsner and Gross, 2008; Frijida, 1986; Scherer, 2000). Fear and grief are significant emotional responses triggered by the loss or impending loss of an integral part of life, for example, the death of a loved person or our impending death. This emotion was potentially pertinent in the Fox context, whereby the Fox branding would vanish, teams would be reconstituted, colleagues would be retrenched, and existing work identities would be lost. The employees had limited agency and control and an uncertain future.

Fear

Fear is a common psychological reaction to unilateral organisational change (Straatmann et al., 2018; Ahmad et al., 2021). In the specific post-acquisition integration context, fear is a response to the event and the uncertainty of the organisation's future state, specifically around an employee’s job security or perception of lack thereof. The sense of job security has been linked to employee attitude because it links to employee satisfaction and commitment to the organisation (Hur, 2022) and directly impacts individual and organisational performance. This lack of job security makes fear management an imperative for the organisation and the HR function. However, it must be noted that not every employee responds with fear.

The COVID-19 pandemic created a variety of different fear responses in many employees, including for their health and well-being. Those broader issues of physical well-being, as manifested during the pandemic, are beyond the defined scope of this research, and so will not be covered here. With regard to fear of redundancy and job loss, however, the opportunity for the managers to effectively communicate with employees was identified as one tool to reduce job security fears (Guzzo et al., 2021) and to build trust. Trust will be considered as a separate topic below.

Grief

Individuals may experience grief in an organisational context as well as in their personal lives. Grief in an organisational context can be articulated as a reaction often arising from a sense of loss due to changes in company branding, team compositions, or job identity. The most well-known grief model is the Kübler-Ross (1969) Grief Cycle, which describes the five emotional stages many individuals report experiencing while grieving and is still the most often applied in the context of organisational change (Gūğerçin, 2022).

Kübler-Ross (1969) introduced this model to articulate the various stages of grieving that an individual can go through after a decisive event until reaching a stage of accepting their new reality. In management research, several studies have subsequently applied this theory of grief and researched the topic of grieving in the context of reorganisations (Blau, 2006; 2007; 2008; Harris and Sutton, 1986) or the closure of a business (Bell and Taylor, 2011). Zell (2003) provides an account of how individuals who are used to a higher level of control and autonomy in an academic organisation react to organisational changes and notes that this adheres closely to the stages in the Kübler-Ross grief cycle.

The model has been widely accepted by psychologists (Tamlyn, 1997) and was applied in bereavement services across cultures (Bergman, Haley, and Small, 2010). However, its validity has been questioned. Researchers from differing disciplines, including Walter (1999), Bell and Taylor (2011), and Maciejewski, Zhang, Block, and Prigerson (2007), were unable to validate the model in empirical studies while still acknowledging its value in bereavement services. Despite the absence of empirical validation, the original model of Kübler-Ross (1969) is often referred to in organisational settings as the standard description of the individual experience of change within the prevailing HR textbooks.

How should HR practitioners potentially apply the grief model, specifically in this instance, to the acquiring company / Fox reorganisation? According to the psychoanalytic theory, for individuals to transition through the grieving process, they would have to perform ‘grief work’ – the objective being to remove any emotional attachment they had to the lost object or concept. This removal of emotional attachment is followed by the reconstruction of an identity that then does not involve the lost object or concept. Psychoanalyst Masarwi (2019) highlights that the process requires individuals to undergo loss of acceptance at an intellectual level first and then at an emotional level. They then adjust to an environment without the lost object or concept before finally becoming able to reinvent themselves in new relationships. Additionally, Zell (2003) noted that

– in an academic re-organisation – because interviews were conducted with various faculty members as part of data collection, speaking up about their pressures and responses could have allowed them to gain valuable insights and speed up the mourning process. This research provides further evidence for the moderating effect of manager support in helping individuals through the process.

De Smet (2020) highlights that leadership in the workplace is best effected when one as a leader can connect emotionally with the people experiencing the loss. He links the typical emotional responses of employees to each of the stages of grief and then provides tips on how to deal with them. For instance, he promotes using meetings as opportunities for leaders to provide support, empathy, and compassion for colleagues with unresolved emotions. The process he introduces is similar to that covered by Zell (2003), which implies that, 15 years later, the grief experience is still prevalent and can be similarly applied. Moreover, while De Smet (2020) writes from the perspective of a person in a managerial role, his insight that the emotional support of managers is crucial in implementing lasting organisational change is supported by research (Zell, 2003; Gärtner, 2013). For this research activity, there was clear signposting that I would need first to support managers and then upskill them so that they could best support their people.

Attachment

The attachment theory is aimed to describe the cognitive–affective process of human attachment and explain the general propensity to seek and bond with others (Bowlby, 1969; Ainsworth and Bowlby, 1991). The resulting process drew on concepts from ethology, cybernetics, information processing, developmental psychology, and psychoanalysis. It was designed to determine whether children form what Ainsworth and Bowlby define as ‘secure attachments’, which enable them (or not) to form emotional attachments as adults. This concept includes attachments within the work environment and surmises what happens when these attachments are ruptured – for example, as a result of reorganisation – thereby causing changes affecting the employees’ workplace attachments. This innate attachment behavioural system can be triggered by perceived situational threats, such as organisational change, that can only be satisfactorily dampened upon receipt of social support from, for example, peers and managers. In the absence of this much-needed support, the instinct becomes hyperactivated or suppressed, leading to feelings of dissatisfaction and isolation (Johnstone and Feeny, 2015).

This knowledge review indicates that the exploration of attachment theory within organisational settings is growing, with what appears to be more articles published since 2012 than the entire output of the two decades before. The focus has pivoted to include situational influences on attachment states, attachment as a moderating variable and attachment as a dynamic process in various forms of work relationships. This innate psychological system accounts for why and how people seek support from others (social connections), which aligns with the proposed HR emphasis on team and manager dynamics. There are no apparent links between the employee's experience in terms of how safely they feel attached to the organisation and the impact on the customers or people who use the organisation's services (Mura et al., 2023).

HR functions often deploy attachment as a concept with the intention of encouraging employees to assign themselves to that organisation. At Google, for example, employees are referred to as 'Googlers', the belief is that this language and philosophy strengthens the attachment to the organisation and is ultimately a retention tool.

Harms (2015) argues that adult attachment in the workplace has more robust predictive accuracy than alternative personality tests such as the widely used Big Five personality types (Goldberg, 1993). Harms found associations between the degree of attachment experienced by the employee facing change towards their leader figure and the employee's perception of managerial support and job satisfaction. Securely attached leaders tend to adopt a relational leadership style that allows followers to experience greater security and emotional support during high-stress situations (Harms, 2015). These leaders contribute to the individual employee’s experience of increased job satisfaction and trust, thereby reducing the risk of burnout, which increases productivity overall. Conversely, insecurely attached leaders are more likely to have task-oriented leadership and less likely to provide appropriate emotional support. This leadership style leads to increased burnout and reduced job satisfaction and trust among followers. Further evidence suggests that leaders’ sense of engagement and individual performance are higher the more they feel like they belong and have developed an emotional attachment to their organisation. This attachment can be defined as a ‘high affective commitment’ (Geibel and Otto, 2023).

Followers’ attachment styles can moderate the adverse effects of avoidant attached leadership. Securely attached followers do not experience the identical reductions in well-being and job satisfaction as do insecurely attached ones, which is likely explained by the availability of alternative support systems, perhaps from peers or social connections outside work (McBain and Parkinson, 2017). The impact can also be moderated by the emotion regulation strategy employed by the followers. For instance, followers with a greater inclination towards emotional suppression are more likely to experience increased adverse emotional outcomes in the face of avoidant attached leaders.

Harm’s (2015) later research suggests that securely attached individuals are more likely to face fewer stressors and negative effects even during high-stress scenarios such as organisational restructuring. Furthermore, such individuals may help to reduce fear and grief in their surrounding co-workers through a positive spill-over effect. However, this does not imply that insecurely attached individuals are immediately more prone to stressors, given that other factors can moderate such effects and contribute to increased resilience, such as having adaptive coping mechanisms in place for stressful scenarios (Troy and Mauss, 2011).

Group attachment is an individual-level construct that also accounts for situational influences on individual affect, behaviour, and cognition. These general attachment styles are shown to have moderating effects (Rom and

Mikulincer, 2003). Specifically, individuals with high group attachment anxiety do not experience emotional support in times of distress because they are unwilling to share. An individual with a low in-group attachment may be less of a team player, leading to a weaker sense of group identity. This group dynamic is significant, given the link between attachment and burnout (Simmons et al., 2015). Employees unwilling to confide in their group or access group support impact their well-being and performance. Interestingly, even though high group cohesion has a moderating effect on anxiously attached group members that attenuates the adverse effects experienced, it has the opposite effect on avoidantly attached individuals (Wang and Howell, 2012). These findings imply that, even in the presence of situational factors, general attachment styles strongly influence the likelihood of the change recipient receiving support.

The learnings from this section of the literature review were that I, as the HR Leader in the acquisition scenario, would need to provide interventions that focused on both manager and group dynamics as well as looking at how best to build or support group support mechanisms with opportunities to share and reflect. The knowledge review suggested that the Leader/manager's self-reported sense of belonging and well-being was critical and, therefore, would be the starting point. (Kaluza et. al; 2020). Chapter 4, Research Activities, will detail this approach.

Identity Loss

An identity is simply a human construct that enables self-expression and actualisation of values in humans and is continually shaped by contextual forces throughout one's life (Kroger, 2015). Identity is a broad domain that can include identity markers such as race, gender, citizenship, sexuality, and others that the individual selects or society ascribes to them (Sets and Burke, 2014). This topic, therefore, needed to be limited to definite parameters within the workplace only. While it would have been interesting for me to delve into, for example, the experience of employees of a specific ethnicity in Asia, it was beyond the defined scope of this research. As a practitioner, however, I am further exploring this topic within the context of Asian headquartered organisations operating in the West.

If identity can be self-chosen, this implies that individuals who have lost their work identity during the restructuring process can reshape a new identity or, indeed, adopt a preferred identity (Brown et al., 2021). However, the process through which the reshaping is processed is still not entirely known and understood, and one cannot as yet predict which employees will be able to do so, thereby presenting a problem for the HR practitioner.

The earliest framework for identity formation was conceptualised by Erikson (1963), who describes ego identity as consisting of experiences from infancy, childhood and adolescence that are then reshaped with age and changing circumstances in adulthood as the individual starts shifting focus from the 'I' to the 'We'.

This inherent human desire to create meaning in change (Sommer et al., 1998) is combined with a requirement to build self-awareness and sustain an adequate self-esteem level (Brown and Starkey, 2000), all of which are required to make the necessary transformational shifts. A suggested link exists between these shifting contextual circumstances, personal experiences and resulting identities (Sommer et al., 1998). If an organisation manages this well, and I would argue that it is HR's role, affected employees can arguably shift through the change process and increase their ability to thrive in the reorganisation (Alvesson and Robertson, 2006).

There is a suggestion, therefore, that in order to thrive through change, employees need to conduct 'identity work' (Sommer et al., 1998) – that is, the 'forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising the constructions that are productive of a sense of coherence and distinctiveness' (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003). This suggestion has since been challenged with the view that identity work is simply a metaphor and that:

a) The choice, stability, coherence, positivity, and authenticity a person makes would be more effective tools (Brown, 2015); and

b) A leader's sense of identity, in particular, has implications for organisational creativity and innovation (Bracht et al., 2023).

For myself, in the researcher role, the observation was that identity is such a broad construct that creating practical concepts in the workplace would be challenging. As an HR practitioner, I can only guide employees and leaders to self-reflect on the topic.

It is clear, however, that where employees are not fully supported and therefore struggle to make sense of change, they may deploy coping defences such as denial, idealisation or fantasy (Gabriel, 1995; Brown, 2019) that prevent them from developing their new identities and subsequent changes in behaviour (Petligileri (2011). Narratives are needed to tell the personal stories of experiences with change and associated identity work. The shared meanings inform employees across the organisation (Alvesson and Robertson, 2006). Resinner (2010) stated, “Therefore, personal identity development at the workplace can support or hinder the success of an organisation through employee motivation and performance.” I would suggest this remains highly relevant to the acquiring company / Fox integration.

This research is critically important for HR because employees may regard their work identity as crucial to their self-confidence, self-fulfilment, and status (Sayce, Ackers and Greene, 2007). A strong work identity means that some employees may experience a strong sense of loss when their job role is threatened by organisational restructuring or, in this case, acquisition (Reay et al., 2017). This sense of loss can lead to feelings of isolation and detachment, causing employees to become disaffected and unproductive, similar to the effects of depression. In this scenario, when employees were manifesting or reporting psychological distress, they were immediately referred to specialist help and were not included in this research.

Sayce, Ackers, and Greene's (2007) study shows that individuals with solid traditionalist sentiments tend to react more aggressively towards unwanted changes, particularly if they are older and have a fixed identity. This reaction could be attributed to their increased difficulty in adapting and upskilling, compared with their younger counterparts, while fearing a loss of benefits and a diminishing sense of security and certainty in terms of job, income, and identity. Sayce, Ackers, and Greene argue that younger and less traditionally minded individuals tend to react faster to change and are more willing to reshape their identity to fit, presumably due to having less attachment to the implications of their identity in the particular job role. As the Fox employees were mostly Generation X and Y, this potentially implied that the process would be more straightforward even though many were based in traditional, conservative Asian cultures.

However, Kunze, Boehm and Bruch (2013) highlighted the lack of empirical validity to the claim that advanced age is related to an individual's resistance to change (Oreg, 2003), which can be differentiated into four dimensions.

1. Routine seeking: the extent to which the individual requires routine and environmental stability.
2. Emotional reaction to change: the individual's experience of change.
3. Short-term focus: the extent to which an individual becomes focused on short-term disadvantages over longer-term benefits of change.
4. Cognitive rigidity: the individual's cognitive reluctance to engage with new concepts and perspectives.

Indeed, contrary to ageist stereotypes (Posthuma and Campion, 2009) held against older workers across cultures (Chiu et al., 2001; Becton, Walker and Jones-Farmer, 2014; Kunze, Boehm and Bruch, 2013) found that older workers are more open to change than their younger counterparts. This difference can be explained by cultural values, which influence the stereotypes and socioemotional ageing experienced by these workers (Chiu et al., 2001; Fung, 2013). Cultural values also influence organisational identity (Khan and Law, 2018). As workers age and internalise societal values (Fung, 2013), their identities may experience a more substantial alignment with organisational identity. From an Asian research perspective, evidence suggests that older workers could be more receptive to organisational change and willing to adapt (Choi, Kang and Choi, 2021). The older working population may align with their workplace identity, given the higher emphasis on cultural value.

Organisational identity is a general feeling of shared fate between the individual and the organisation. In their article on the topic, van Dick et al. (2004) provided staunch support for the close relationship between organisational identity and job satisfaction, as well as organisational identity and turnover intentions. The relationship begins with the finding that as individuals identify more with the organisation, they will be more likely to adhere to the organisation's norms and values. Through doing so, the individual eventually incorporates the organisation’s identity into their self-concept, thereby entwining the individual's identity with that of the organisation and contributing to levels of self-enhancement, self-continuity, and reduced uncertainty. As such, employees become intrinsically motivated to remain in the organisation to retain the group membership in their identity. In this scenario, as employees' organisational identity relating to Fox was about to disappear, this finding was of concern with the potential risk of voluntary attrition.

Indeed, this finding implies that the stronger the sense of attachment and cohesion, the stronger the sense of loss experienced. Additionally, this could help explain the finding that older employees, who are presumed to have intertwined the organisation's identity with their work identity for lengthy periods, are more prone to frustration, grief, and anger reactions in the face of organisational restructuring (Sayce, Ackers and Greene, 2007).

Van Dick et al. (2004) postulate that the relationship between organisational identification and plans to resign can be mediated by job satisfaction. They theorize that individuals with strong organisational identification are intrinsically motivated to perceive neutral stimuli as positive and to downplay the impact of negative stimuli as necessary for continued functioning in the organisation.

Moreover, strongly identified individuals are more likely to experience the same sense of bond and membership with other strongly identified individuals in the organisation, further contributing to satisfaction and well-being as the individual enjoys the perception of increased social support in the event of distress. When evaluated from the lens of Rock's (2009a) SCARF model, this could imply that employees with strong identification are more likely to view the organisation as relatable and fair, leading to increased job satisfaction and higher retention rates. The question became how this could be deployed during the integration process.

Building Resilience

Resilience is the experience of continued or improved mental health and well-being even in the face of considerable stress (Troy and Mauss, 2011): a common psychological reaction to any demand or challenge. There is growing evidence to suggest that resilient employees contribute more, and therefore there is an organisational imperative to both understand and build individual resilience in the workplace (Liu et al., 2023)

Building resilience is, therefore, an organisational imperative as well as an individual requirement — an example of a requirement on HR to facilitate employee resilience and organisational sustainability. Beyond the individual implications, there is a developing focus on what makes a resilient team (Stoverink et al., 2020), which includes identifying how to progress teams beyond adaptability to enable the organisation to succeed.

This progression has most likely been precipitated by the pandemic when resilience was a primary concern for many organisations, given its impact on well-being. However, I would suggest that this is not a new topic for HR practitioners – there is a well-established link between mental health, psychosocial outcomes, and biological outcomes to individual performance outcomes (Robertson et al., 2015). Organisations have sought to build resilience for decades (Hartmaan et al., 2020), but not every HR function has prioritised this within their agendas because it is not, as will be discussed, a component of the HR business partner model.

Stress is the primary negator of resilience and is associated with a wide range of adverse effects, including reduced mental and general well-being and increased chances of diseases and disorders (Troy and Mauss, 2011). Scholars (e.g. Bonanno, 2005) who have investigated individuals' cognitions in times of high stress agree that resilience could be enhanced if an individual could reframe their subjective appraisal of an event, thereby influencing one's emotional reaction to it. Two cognitive regulation strategies could be deployed: attention control and cognitive reappraisal.

Attention control engages the person to selectively adhere to favourable stimuli to acquire a less threat-provoking appraisal of the situation. From laboratory studies, research has found that attention control functions as a distraction away from negative emotions in the short term. However, frequent engagement in this strategy can be detrimental to long-term coping mechanisms and increase the likelihood of developing mental illnesses, such as depression or anxiety. These long-term illnesses typically occur when the individual is unwilling or unable to remove their focus from negative thoughts or situational factors and becomes increasingly stressed out from endless rumination. Ironically, studies show that when individuals completely ignore negative stimuli, they face increased vulnerability to mental health problems, which could be explained by the change recipient (a Fox employee) failing to build sufficient resilience through earlier experiences.

Ideally, to build personal resilience, individuals should be able to ignore irrelevant and uncontrollable negative information and focus instead on relevant and changeable material. This approach is described as a form of goal-driven, active coping strategy that can enable an individual to make fewer disturbing appraisals of a given situation and experience fewer negative emotions. Fortunately, a follow-up study conducted by MacLeod et al. (2002) supports the finding that it is possible to change an individual's selective attention stimuli bias and that cognitive control training is one way to train individuals to attend selectively to specific stimuli. With reduced stress from a less threatening appraisal, individuals become more likely to experience fewer negative emotions and to be more able to cope with adverse situations, enhancing resilience in the long run. However, for myself as a practitioner, the imperative remains to achieve this with the individual. If the fear of redundancy stresses an employee, simply advising them to focus on something else is unlikely to work.

Another strategy, cognitive reappraisal, focuses on reframing the situation so that it appears less threatening. This reappraisal usually occurs after an initial appraisal and directly impacts coping capacity. Cognitive reappraisal allows individuals to reframe situations more positively and reduce negative feelings. During stressful situations such as the announcement of an acquisition, a cognitive appraisal is an adaptive strategy that allows individuals to reappraise a negative stressor so that the stressor becomes easier to manage. The strategy's reliability and efficacy are supported by neuroimaging studies, which can identify significant changes to the areas of the brain that process emotion – the amygdala and insula – when the strategy is used (Troy and Mauss, 2011). Additionally, individuals who frequently engage in cognitive reappraisal reported experiencing less negativity and increased overall well-being, thereby promoting greater emotional resilience during high-stress situations.

Interestingly, Troy and Mauss's (2011) research reveals that individuals with high cognitive reappraisal abilities significantly experience lower stress in high-stress situations. The stress level can become comparable to that of an individual in a low-stress situation. Furthermore, by involving participants with varying levels and types of stressors in the experiment, Troy and Mauss demonstrate that cognitive reappraisal can be an adaptive regulatory strategy across various situations and is essential to healthy stress regulation in individuals.

As an HR practitioner, it was apparent that building resilience would become a critical component of the programme design. However, building resilience alone would not be sufficient. The organisation required the individuals to use this resilience to 'thrive' and continue to perform.

Thrive

Thriving is a potential outcome of becoming more resilient. In this context, if employees have developed adaptive coping mechanisms, they can continue to develop and deliver in spite of the scenario surrounding them. Much of the literature in this space builds upon the resilience efforts that emphasise the positive traits, emotional states, and behaviours of employees in organisations that enable them to thrive (Bakker and Schaufeli, 2008).

Thriving at work is now understood as a psychological state in which individuals experience a clear sense of purpose and personal development. The contextual enablers, such as leadership, organisational support and fairness, job characteristics, and peers, can facilitate people to thrive at work (Liu et al., 2019). However, in a period of significant change, such as an acquisition, these contextual enablers can be in flux or disappear. What or who, then, can support people at this critical time? Potentially their manager?

In an organisational setting, managers are most frequently both agents and recipients of change. They are required to personally thrive amid this change while also driving this positive outcome with their teams. Zander (2020) identifies that change is now an inherent feature of today's workplace, emphasising the role of middle managers in organisations and the 'inner world of change' (i.e. the personal experience of making sense of change and remaining resilient amid change in order to thrive). Harikkala (2019) highlights the benefits of positive emotions and interactions with employees in order to build a culture whereby employees can thrive after challenging events. Given this insight, the manager's role, and ability to build connections at challenging times would form a cornerstone of the HR interventions within the programme.

2.5.3 Social Cognitive Neuroscience

Neuroscience is the study of an individual's nervous system, which includes both biological and chemical processes. Social cognitive neuroscience (SCN) applies these processes in order to understand human behaviours, reactions, and decision-making (Lee and Harris, 2013). It is further defined as the study of 'the mental mechanisms that create, frame, regulate, and respond to our experience of the social world' Lieberman et al., (2001). Lieberman (2010) built upon the work within social and cognitive psychology domains and defined a subset of the epistemological foundations of cognitive neuroscience.

With respect to organisational settings, Williams (2019) argues that organisational change has systematically failed due to insufficient consideration of each employee's neuropsychological systems of change - that is, the processes of behavioural and mindset shifts that those individuals experience as a result of organisational change. Therefore, I was curious to explore whether considering each employee's neuropsychological systems of change would improve the outcome because this topic is not included in the typical HR knowledge on change.

SCN, the broader base of neuroscience and a subset of neuropsychology, is not currently widely deployed within the HR practice area. They are admittedly emerging, often highly contested fields. With roots in psychology and other behavioural sciences, the methodology of seeking answers distinguishes this field, using brain activity recordings instead of pure behavioural observations. There are inherent limitations from an academic perspective. Applied neuroscience research, for example, is problematic to conduct and publish in peer-reviewed channels due to intellectual property and commercial privacy restrictions.

There is an acceptance across the various strands of the academic community that employees' negative emotions limit their ability to accept and adapt to change, mainly when fear is their overarching response. Using an SCN perspective, I explored options to create HR interventions for employees of Fox. Gordon (2000) argues that the need to minimise danger and maximise reward is the brain's primary focus, and Rock (2009a) subsequently developed a model that has become a 'go-to' for organisations looking to deploy these neuroscience-based principles in business. Rock's (2009a) model proposes providing rewards to induce performance based on employees' need for Status, Certainty, Autonomy, Relatedness and Fairness (SCARF).

SCARF Model

Rock (2009a) discusses the neurocognitive processes behind the SCARF model, identifying the neurological processes that limit the brain's processing power under perceived threat. The key concept underlying the model is the application of a 'threat and reward' mechanism to social life. Evidence shows that perceptions of being socially slighted can trigger the same brain responses as physical pain and that an individual is biologically motivated to engage in a threat response in that context. This becomes relevant in an M&A context when being socially slighted can easily be inferred by an anxious employee as signalling redundancy.

The first characteristic of the SCARF model is *Status*, which Rock (2009a) describes as an unconscious, comparative mechanism that reassures an individual of their relative importance to other members of the organisation. When an individual perceives a threat, such as a job status change arising from organisational restructuring, stress-inducing cortisol is released by the brain, increasing vulnerability to sleep deprivation, chronic anxiety, and mental health problems. In an organisation, these threat effects could be associated with the loss of creativity, productivity, and engagement in an employee. I would suggest that this could also be defined to include identity.

The second characteristic of the model is *Certainty*, which is linked to an employee's ability to predict future events. When the event is familiar, the brain can rely upon previously established neural connections in the basal ganglia and motor cortex – the same function that the script mental model activates. Any deviation from the script causes arousal in a threat response that must then be corrected to deactivate the threat response. In the event of organisational restructuring, some employees may feel more vulnerable, causing increased stress levels as their brains struggle to adjust to the new script. When HR and leaders are available to provide specifics on the organisation's plans for restructuring, change recipients experience increased confidence in a plan as well as increased trust from the reduced ambiguity (Rock, 2009a).

Autonomy, a trait that influences the change recipient's sense of control, is the third characteristic of the SCARF model. In uncertain situations, individuals who perceive more significant autonomy benefit from increased certainty and mental well-being arising from the impression that they can make their own decisions, which is less stress-inducing. Employees experiencing change who have greater perceived autonomy are more willing to accept and take ownership of the change process. Autonomy will be explored in the methodology of opportunities to provide Fox employees with some areas where they would have autonomy.

The fourth characteristic is *Relatedness*, which refers to an individual's sense of social connectedness to the people around them. According to the social cognitive theory of otherness, individuals tend to perceive people in the same social group as friendlier. Social bonds are created when the brain secretes oxytocin in response to the recognition of a friend. Oxytocin deactivates the threat response and further activates neural networks to increase the goodwill experienced by the recognition of a friendly person. However, when these social bonds are not established or are lost – for example, a colleague is made redundant, the individual experiences loneliness and isolation instead. Both are profoundly stressful emotions that activate the same areas as physical pain in the brain. Change recipients who can establish and seek social support show better motivation and coping abilities than those without social support (Rosales, 2016).

The last characteristic of SCARF is *Fairness*, which promotes certainty when upheld by the organisation. Rock (2009a) highlights that people value fairness so highly that they are happier with fair and minimal rewards as opposed to unfair and substantial rewards, which is supported by the finding that the experience of fairness activates reward sensations in the brain akin to eating chocolate. In the context of organisational restructuring, change recipients are more likely to remain engaged and motivated throughout the process when their leaders are perceived to be impartial, transparent, and timely on details, even if the change results in staff reductions. Regarding the acquiring company / Fox integration, ensuring fairness is when determining – for example, which employees were appointed to which roles appeared to be pertinent.

Counter-positing to Rock's body of work was Synder (2016), who proposes that protecting and enhancing self-image is aligned but arguably more relevant than Rock's Status driver. The combination of both, using Synder as a lens to view Rock's model, will be explored further in Chapter 3. On a social dimension, Lieberman (2010) suggests that our brains are designed to respond to and be influenced by others because our need for social connection is a primary motivator, which, in the context of change, suggests that social connection could be an anchor for people undergoing significant change. This idea of building connections will also be further explored in Chapter 3.

Mindset

Rock directly applied Dweck's (2006) body of work around mindsets, applying how our ways of thinking define how we understand our own experiences and determine the emotional, cognitive, behavioural, and neural responses to those experiences. Dweck defined two mindset positions: fixed and growth, with research suggesting that those individuals exhibiting growth mindsets are the most likely to flourish even during challenging times by learning new skills and adapting. Dweck (2006) suggests that individuals hold different innate perceptions and reactions to learning and progress depending on their mindset choice.

The research context was primarily focused on children in an educational setting. Subsequently, this work has been challenged by other researchers, including Bates (2018), who have been unable to validate findings and found statistical errors (Brown, 2015). The lack of validation has not prevented a full-scale adoption of her thinking, including by Rock (2009b) and academic recognition, including the Yidan award of a USD four-million-dollar prize in 2017 (Yidan Prize Awards Presentation Ceremony, 2017). The topic is an example that resonated in the practitioner domain despite lacking academic rigour.

A growth mindset is a belief that one's primary intelligence and talent are flexible and changeable. Conversely, a fixed mindset is a belief that one's primary intelligence and talent are determined from birth and cannot be altered. There are many advocates for the development of a growth mindset due to associated advantages, such as having a more open and positive perception of challenges as opportunities and stronger resilience in the face of failure (Campbell, 2019).

Interestingly, an article by Rock, Davis and Jones (2013) proposes that individuals could be easily primed to believe and behave according to growth or fixed mindsets. Rock, Davis and Jones argue that many individuals become primed for a fixed mindset, limiting their growth, and learning in future life. However, Rock, Davis and Jones additionally propose that it is possible to reverse this phenomenon, and this proposal is of interest to the practitioner - can we enable people to adopt a growth mindset?

There are three areas of research guiding this suggestion: self-efficacy, belief in free will and willpower.

a) Self-efficacy is self-belief in one's capability and chance of success. It is associated with the willingness to struggle and be challenged by goals and the consequent ability to achieve success.

b) Belief in free will is theoretically similar to the psychological concept of locus of control, which posits that, depending on the degree of the individual's belief in their ability to control the various situations and experiences in their life, they can flourish. Based on 50 years of research, Nowicki and Duke (2016) surmised that individuals have two loci of control. An individual with an internal locus of control believes that one's actions are the leading influencers of life events. An individual with an external locus of control believes that one's life is controlled by external factors beyond one's control. Change recipients with an internal locus of control are similarly more willing to challenge themselves and engage in helpful behaviour, confident that their actions can produce favourable results (Rock, Davis and Jones, 2013).

c) Willpower is understood as an individual's ability to control impulses and engage in gratification delay. Similar to the self-efficacy concept, willpower also influences the individual's willingness to engage in a struggle. Interestingly, research has found that belief in the strength of one's willpower alone can also activate the willingness to face challenges.

Dweck cautions against misunderstanding the application of the growth mindset (Gross-Loh, 2016). Structures supporting the individual employee's ability to reflect and improve on their current strategies must be established to achieve results (Gupta, 2018). Additionally, individuals are required to learn mindset change from role models such as trusted mentors (Diehl, 2020). These requirements align with Lawson and Price's (2003) model of conditions for mindset change.

Considering the application within this research, and as previously discussed in section 2.4, Singapore, is acknowledged as having a culture of excessive competitiveness (Kirby et al., 2010), known as 'kiasuism' (Cheng, 2015) focusing on avoiding failure rather than learning (Cheng and Hong, 2017). This ardent desire to avoid failure, inhibits learning (Hwang, Ang and Francesco, 2002), and impedes innovation in businesses (Chia, 2016). Given these factors indicate that employees in Singapore would not actively engage in growth mindsets (Wanless, 2016), which was a strong consideration during the design phase for the interventions for the integration programme. I believe a gap in the SCARF and growth mindset research has been a cultural nuance.

Is it feasible to change your mindset? Based on Festinger's research (1957) and later cited by Jehle and Miller (2007) in the theory of cognitive dissonance, which suggests that an individual will endeavour to align their behaviour according to their perception of self or otherwise face discomfort, Lawson and

Price (2003) suggest the need for four independent requisite conditions for a lasting mindset change to occur: individuals must:

1. Individuals must understand and accept the need for change.
2. Individuals must be surrounded by reinforcing structures.
3. Individuals must have the required skill set for change.
4. Individuals must see active modelling of change from people they respect.

Each of these conditions makes it easier for the individual to commit to change, which then increases the chance of successful programmes. Therefore, would it be possible for an HR practitioner to build these conditions into the programme design? This challenge will be further explored in Chapter 3.

Social Connection in the Workplace

A high-quality connection is a mutually positive, constructive, energising, dynamic dualistic work interaction (Rosales, 2015). It can also be brief, and individuals need no prior knowledge of each other to experience it.

Experiencing high-quality connections allows the two people involved to feel uplifted and energized. They experience clearer thinking and can act with greater competency, leading to a sensation of flourishing in the workplace as their mindset broadens and allows easier acceptance of new ideas. This concept becomes a matter of interest for the HR Leader as the context could lead to higher individual and, therefore, organisational performance. Within an acquisition process, employees from the other organisation enter and arguably can curate these high-quality connections if they practise them.

Four perspectives explain the benefits of high-quality social connections: exchange, identity, growth and development, and knowledge. The exchange perspective has roots in sociology and social psychology. It posits that valuable intrapersonal resources and rewards are produced and exchanged during high-quality social interactions. Some examples include feelings of trust, social support, and positive emotions (Dutton and Heaphy, 2003). The identity perspective focuses on the meaning co-created in high-quality social relationships, providing psychological safety for individuals, and allowing them to engage more freely in self-expression or to re-craft their work identity. Individuals are less likely to experience cognitive dissonance in the workplace, leading to increased feelings of well-being. The growth and development perspective posits that high-quality connections allow employees to foster personal development and growth through mutually empathetic interactions.

Additionally, by creating a secure context in the workplace, the individual is provided with a sense of security in exploring future opportunities. The knowledge perspective identifies the micro-contexts generated by positive relationships and allows for increased learning opportunities. It is similar to the growth and development perspective in that individuals perceive the availability of a safe space allowing for exploration and experimentation to enable them to expand their pre-existing knowledge base, innovate and contribute fresh ideas.

However, in the event of low-quality social connections, as is often the case in the workplace, and particularly in the uncertainty of an acquisition, the individual perceives a significant drop in their mental and physical health and performance, which may give rise to reduced abilities to focus on work and lead to increased errors and inefficiencies. Such employees become more vulnerable to depression, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion (Rosales, 2016).

2.5.4 Socio-Economic Factors

One of the most established socio-economic frameworks that models change recipients or employees' reactions to organisational change and is therefore essential to an HR Leader in a change programme is by Oreg, Vakola and Armenakis (2011). Oreg, Vakola and Armenakis found that the characteristics of organisational change recipients can be divided into four groups: demographic, personality traits, motivational needs and coping styles.

Figure 2 provides an overarching view of current research on change recipients' reactions towards organisational change. This model organises the various variables into three main groups: antecedents, explicit reactions and change consequences, with arrows showing how each group can directly or indirectly influence the other.

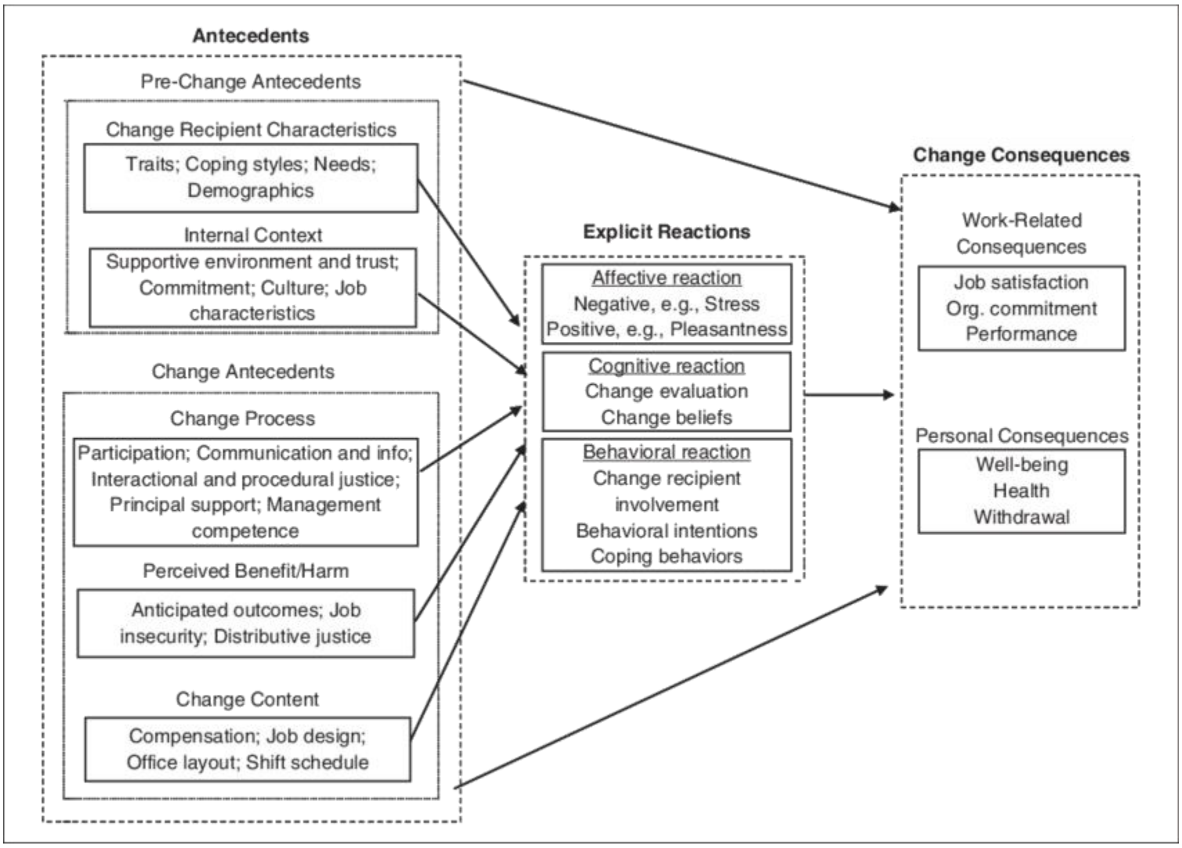


Figure 2: Change recipient reactions to organisational change (Oreg, Vakola and Armenakis, 2011)

In this model, antecedents are the variables that may cause an individual to react. Pre-change antecedents comprise change recipient characteristics, traits, and internal context, such as culture. Change antecedents comprise the change process, such as participation, perceived benefit, or harm, such as anticipated outcomes, and change content, such as compensation. Antecedents give rise to explicit affective, behavioural, and cognitive reactions in individuals but can also directly contribute to work-related and personal change consequences.

This model can, it is argued, be adopted by HR in the decision-making process for organisational change. At the core of its conception, the model assumes that the change recipient is a logical decision-maker who reacts after accounting for their internal resources and environmental cues to maximise their benefits in a given situation. However, the research from other areas described earlier, including psychology and SCN, would suggest that employees react otherwise.

This section presented the knowledge review of an individual's experiences through organisational change and discussed the varied factors for these responses to change. It covered the psychological, SCN and socio-economic factors of response and brought up a few schools of thought for consideration by myself. The common themes, such as identity, will be applied as outlined in the design intervention phase as we manoeuvred through the integration of Fox into the acquiring company.

2.6 The Human Resources Leader in Organisational Change

This concluding section of the knowledge review, which has traversed through the individual and organisational change factors, now focuses on HR and the implications for HR Leadership and the function in delivering organisational objectives. What has been the response and position of the function to date? How has the business world responded?

The focus on organisational objectives can be best summarised by the *Harvard Business Review* (HBR): "It's time to blow up HR and build something new … Here's How" was the cover of HBR in July–August 2015 and the lead article inside was "Why we Love to Hate HR … and what HR Can Do About it".

Why had the function reached this point, and is it feasible to change this narrative?

2.6.1 The Evolution to Date of Human Resources (HR)

When considering the role of HR in transformations and the potentially polarising organisation versus individual perspectives in business transformation and disruption, I commenced with a review of knowledge concerning the evolving role of the HR function and precisely the knowledge surrounding the role of HR in managing change. What does it mean to be a practitioner and to work in HR? Each practitioner will have a different narrative formed by their identity, culture, and experiences.

The name of the HR function has evolved over the years, as has the focus and intention of the work, as will be discussed. My mother was a 'Personnel Manager' for the UK supermarket chain Sainsbury's in the 1980s, where her role was focused on managing 'problems' otherwise known as people. Her responsibilities included scheduling working patterns and hiring and firing employees. When I began my professional HR journey in 1995, the professional accreditation with the HR professional body, the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), focused on four areas: recruitment, development, reward, and employee relations. These alone would now be insufficient for the information age. The evolution of the function over the past 30 years has been exponential – my mother and I both struggle to comprehend the other's differing roles.

Historically, the concept of an HR function began to be formalised early in the 20th century through the inception of what was then called the 'personnel department' founded in 1910 (Kaufman, 2014). There was a combative dynamic in an era before strong employment law protection for employees, and the personnel function was there to solve these 'people problems'. Kaufman (2014) suggests that it transitioned from labour problems (1880–1919) to industrial relations (1920s–50s) to HR's separation from the Industrial Revolution (1960s–80) to the current contemporary HR (1980s to present). At present, the concept of the professional function of HR is constantly evolving with an ever-expanding role. HR was the employee advocate, then business partners, eventually becoming strategic HR managers (Maugans, 2020).

Maugans (2020) segments the evolution of HR into three eras.

The first era developed in the 19th century owing to violent relations between employers and employees, which resulted in the enactment of employment laws whereby HR was tasked with legal compliance and management of industrial relations.

The second era emerged as HR began growing knowledge establishing recruitment, compensation, benefits, and training processes.

The third era saw the HR function extending to include a strategic business partner role.

Maugans (2020) argues that HR evolved due to growing competition for skilled talents, globalisation, growing workforce diversity and the increased impact of technology on businesses. Technology has, in many instances, been the catalyst for disruption.

Alongside the functional design, day-to-day HR practices also sprang from the 19th and early 20th centuries through a management philosophy called 'Taylorism', whereby employees or workers were seen as no different from machines, and the objective of managers and leaders was to maximise the efficiency of these workers through the breakdown of tasks to their most minimal form for maximum worker efficiency (Shook and Rodriguez, 2020). Creativity and, I would suggest, employee centricity was actively discouraged in a workplace environment designed for 'people-machines'. Subsequently, the Industrial Revolution of the 20th century saw organisations shift from an agrarian economy to a manufacturing one. The shift to manufacturing in centralised factories resulted in the formalisation of HR, then known as 'personnel management', whose role was to administer employee hiring, promotion, compensation, and development (Cohen, 2015). Eventually, the advent of human capital arose when the service economy eclipsed manufacturing in the late 20th century. As personnel managers took on new roles to drive business profitability, workers were no longer seen as machines – they, especially the knowledge workers, became capital assets whose returns were to be maximised (Shook and Rodriguez, 2020) and the saying that 'people are our greatest assets' emerged. The function also started to have the word 'Human' in its title.

This shift in perception, from employees as a machine to a human capable of being an asset, pivoted the role of HR. The concept of driving human capital meant a new framework emerged: Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM). The UK-based CIPD defined SHRM as 'managing human resources to provide strategic support of long-term business outcomes and goals' (Ramona and Anca, 2013). CIPD defined SHRM as all about the integration of human resource management (HRM) strategies into corporate strategies, linking people to the organisation. At this point, it was stated that HR no longer managed people alone but was accountable to the top management (Ramona and Anca, 2013). The duality of people and organisational requirements is clearly stated.

The emergence of these more contemporary concepts, such as SHRM, can be traced back to a study by Lawrence (1985) highlighted by Lundy (1994), which discussed how five different HR systems were created from the shift in the dynamics of influence between employers and employees responding to different phases of industrialisation (Lundy, 1994). The craft systems were marked by common interest between the master craftsmen and employees (Lawrence, 1985). The market system through trade expansion resulted in the formation of unions due to the conflicts of reducing labour costs by hiring unskilled labour (Lawrence, 1985). The technical system, marked by machines and automation, drove the conceptualisation of scientific management theories on labour management, training, and management control mechanisms (Lawrence, 1985). The career system was initiated by the development of the electronics industry, whose notable features include defined duties and roles for recruitment linked to a career ladder and long-term employment that saw layoffs as a last resort (Lawrence, 1985). The commitment system established a common interest between employer and employee by changing the dynamic through increasing autonomy (Lawrence, 1985). Each system saw a shift in the employee–employer dynamic when employees became increasingly valued as an essential asset for their knowledge and skills as the industry became more knowledge-driven. With each shift, the role of the HR function also had to shift. I believe that is the point when the function's tensions began to arise.

The evolution of the employee's value proposition was further captured by Morgan and Goldsmith (2017) when they summarised the focus of employers through subsequent industrial revolutions:

> 'Utility' defined the first industrial revolution (circa 1760-1840), which revolved around what employees needed to have in order to work.
>
> 'Productivity' was the focus of the second industrial revolution (circa 1870-1914) based on how workers could work faster and better.
>
> The advent of the knowledge age foresaw 'Engagement' as the focus of the third industrial revolution (since the 1980s), all about making employees happy or satisfied so that they were productive and performed better.

'Awareness about engagement' was highlighted in the Harvard Business Review case study with Sears (HBR,1998), which detailed a direct link between people and profit, triggering an interest in the boardroom about 'people'.

The HR age focuses on 'experience', marking the fourth industrial revolution as HR strives to keep employees happy and create an organisation where people want to show up and contribute their best (Morgan and Goldsmith, 2017). I would suggest, however, that with each shift, as HR practitioners, we have had to add to our existing knowledge and scope rather than stop performing the previous roles.

The role of HR has evolved, shifting from a tactical role to a strategic role, seen from the initial role of being 'personnel managers' serving administrative roles focused on transactional activities such as operational issues and compliance to being called upon to deliver value-based outcomes that impact business goals in SHRM (Claus, 2019). This evolution was inevitable due to the shift to knowledge-driven employees and outsourcing administrative functions to external vendors (Ramona and Anca, 2013). The innovation of strategic HR distinguishes itself from its archaic personnel management role, where the innovation gap was left unfilled, and problem-solving was typically left to consultants, not HR specialists or personnel managers (Guest, 1991).

In today's context, Taylorism and human capital thinking are still prevalent. They are predominantly found in areas such as managing employees through job descriptions and performance management into narrow tasks and responsibilities, with workplaces typically organised around vertical hierarchies. Although these ways of working may have been effective in the past and still exist in more traditional cultures, the transition to a knowledge and increasingly technology-driven economy requires a new emphasis on areas such as communication and collaboration (Shook and Rodriguez, 2020). Increasingly, communication with employees is becoming essential in identifying the employees' motivation and engagement so as to maintain and retain the workforce. The concept of talent management becomes paramount ahead of SHRM as employers look to fulfil business objectives and manage their talent pool to do so (Claus, 2019).

As the context continues to evolve, so will HR. However, as a function, is HR perceived to be delivering successfully?

Despite the earlier evidence of decades of research and development, there remains a view that, generally, HR does not deliver, and that transformation is still required as a profession. In 'Why We Love to Hate HR…and What HR Can Do About It?', Capelli (2015) argued that HR lacks vision, commercial acumen, and strategic ability. There was a movement circa 2016 when the dialogue shifted in the HR community to discuss how to transform the function by taking a consumer and digital orientation. Using artificial intelligence (AI) and marketing tools to create what became the lexicon of 'employee experience', the focus of literature became how to deliver this. The experience construct had a physical rather than a psychological dimension – the office environment, furniture and noise levels combined with a consumer marketing journey approach with the communications touchpoints at the various stages of the employee lifecycle. It was also a top-down approach, with the organisation cascading to the person rather than the alternative.

HR trends then shifted to analytics, using data to predict outcomes such as employee tenure, performance, and potential, with domain expertise led by Google, which, as a business built around data, inverted this for application in their HR strategy. Forbes, which in 2017 advised the business community that employee experience was the focus for HR, shifted in 2018 with an article entitled 'Why Data Is HR's Most Important Asset' in which Marr (2018) stated 'there is the issue that HR is traditionally seen as very people-orientated, and not so much about numbers and data'. As a function, HR is now broad but deemed ineffective based on the literature.

If I consider the balance between people and organisational requirements - the golden (red in an Asian context) thread of my research - the HR literature is clear. A review of the most recent knowledge since 2015 demonstrates, for example, that, on the continuum between people centricity and organisational centricity, the weighting is towards organisational responsibilities, and indeed, the literature is predominately generated from a management perspective. A constructively critical voice in the development of the HR profession, for example, has been Professor David Ulrich. Author of over 30 books and countless articles, he has been recognised by Fast Company in 2005 and Business Week in 2001 as the most influential voice in HR academia, and his work firmly posits HR as an organisational value creator. An interview with him will be presented in Chapter 4.

I believe this has become the fundamental challenge for the HR function: to securely hold the duality of an inherently people-orientated role while delivering commercially savvy, data-driven solutions and transformation that drive business growth. This insight, therefore, guided my intention to approach this particular research from an HR Leadership and employee-centric perspective on how HR practitioners can best guide employees through complex transformations and deliver organisational priorities - if this ambition is indeed achievable.

2.6.2 The Human Resource Competency Study (HRCS)

Since 1987, the Human Resource Competency Study (HRCS) has gathered data on HR professional competencies every four to five years. Co-sponsored by Ross Executive Education at the University of Michigan and The RBL Group, founded by Professor Ulrich, the survey is widely utilised to determine HR competency frameworks and the function's role and organisational design.

In 2015, RBL (2015) published Round Seven of the Human Resources Competency Study (HRCS), an updated series of nine domains that they argued are essential competencies if HR practitioners are to succeed. Data was gathered in collaboration with 22 global HR associations from 32,000 respondents in 1,200 businesses. Either business results or the organisations themselves were measured with a six-item scale (profitability, employee productivity, development of new products, customer satisfaction, attraction of new employees, and regulatory compliance). The research objective was to determine which of the nine HR competence domains impacted business performance most. A new sphere - Paradox Navigator competency (RBL, 2015) - seemed to have the most robust relationship with business performance. The RBL Group’s study defined this new competency as the ability to navigate the many embedded tensions in business operations (e.g., a long-term versus short-term focus, centralised versus decentralised operations and an internal versus external focus). Ulrich proposed that HR professionals constantly wrestle with these embedded tensions that must be resolved in some circumstances and cultivated in others to help the business move forward. The ability of the modern practitioner to navigate these many embedded tensions consequently becomes one of the central challenges for modern HR professionals.

The HRCS topic was exceptionally pertinent to this research, and I was optimistic to see what they had hoped would become a meaningful discussion within the HR community. One observation I had while reviewing the research was that the Paradox Navigator (RBL, 2015) primarily focused on business operations and pure business results as opposed to the people and business dimensions. Only one dimension, 'Effectively manages the tensions between individual employee needs and collective organisational goals, resonated with my problem. However, this broader discussion did not happen, and I was curious to understand why not.

There was also a question guiding the research of being able to hold these dual perspectives. The term 'paradox', adopted by Ulrich, suggested irreconcilable, and competing interests. A paradox that appears in today's management thinking is rooted in ancient philosophy. In Chinese philosophy, the yin-yang concept views the world as holistic, in which all phenomena are 'shaped by the integration of two opposite cosmic energies, namely yin and yang'. In a 2012 article by Fang in *Management and Organisation Review,* Yin represents female energy, and Yang represents male energy. Both forces operate independently and inter-dependently, shaping all universal phenomena and generating constant change.

From a Western perspective, the Merriam-Webster (2023) online dictionary reveals a Western-centric history of the concept of paradox:

> Ancient Greeks were aware that a paradox could take people outside their usual way of thinking. They combined the prefix 'para' ('beyond' or 'outside of') with the verb 'dokein' ('to think'), forming 'paradoxes, an adjective meaning 'contrary to expectation'. Latin speakers picked up the world and used it to create their noun 'paradoxum', which English speakers borrowed during the 1500s to create the term paradox.

In management thinking, concepts of paradox are applied with terms such as polarity, flexible leadership, duality, dialectic, competing values, dichotomies, competing demands and ambidexterity. These concepts have also been applied to broader commercial fields such as finance, marketing, technology, and strategy within the HR literature. However, I had identified a knowledge gap – namely, how to approach paradoxical scenarios that I wished to pursue with my research.

This integration of paradoxes is increasingly becoming a broader organisational management requirement (Pina e Cunha et al., 2023), with managers being invited to embrace the concept with an 'and-all' approach (Berti, 2021) and to adopt a mindset of willingness to accept opposing ideas as the norm. Beyond the scope of this research are the broader organisational constructs required to enable managers to perform their roles. From necessity, while of interest to me as a researcher, as the focus of the research is on the HR function, I have not explored this phenomenon in depth.

In 2021, Round Eight of the HRCS was published with data collected from 28,000 participants and 1,000 organisations with a similar research methodology as previously described. The current HR model, as of 2021, is presented below in Figure 3:

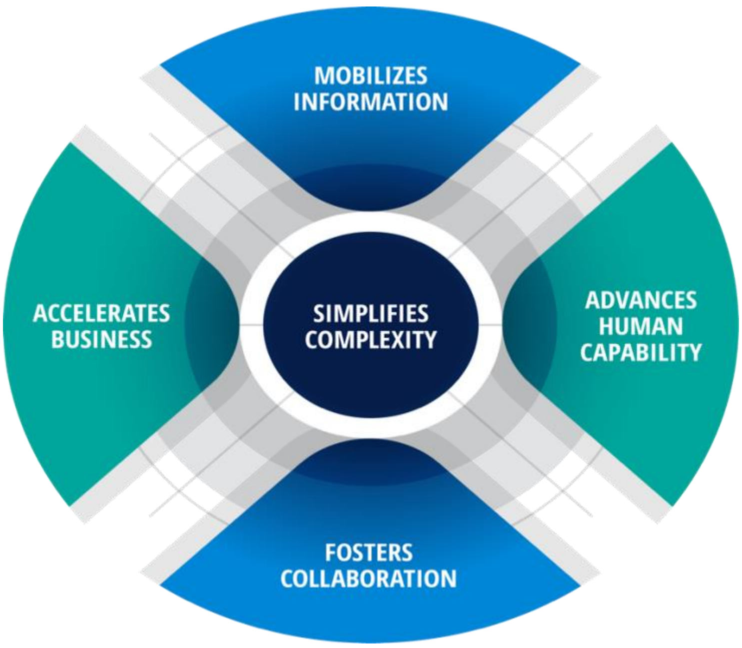


Figure 3: Round 8 of the HRCS (Wright and Ulrich, 2021)

Of note is that the outcome of the previous seven rounds of research reflected HR ‘roles’ with the resulting language using an adjective and a noun (e.g., Trusted Advisor, Paradox Navigator, Strategic Contributor) have disappeared. In this round, and according to Wright and Ulrich (2021), because of the heightened expectations created by the COVID-19 Pandemic, the updated model focuses on HR actions exemplified by verbs and nouns (e.g., Accelerates Business, Advances Human Capability).

In considering the impact of HR on business results, the data suggests that the competencies of individual HR professionals have a minor impact on business results (3.5%) relative to the impact of the HR department (48.2%) and the business capabilities (48.3%) as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: HR Impact on Business Results (Wright and Ulrich, 2021)

HR Impact on Business Results	***Business Results (N=1013)**
HR Competencies	3.5%
HR Function	48.2%
Business Capabilities	48.3%

This research suggests that the individual HR competencies (practitioners) do not have a substantial direct impact on business results but instead a solid indirect impact on the business through how HR function characteristics build business capabilities that, in turn, do have direct solid effects on results. The RBL group has characterised this consistent finding as ‘individuals can be champions, but teams win championships’ Wright and Ulrich (2021).

The research derived a number of potential implications for the HR Leader: because their contribution as an individual is limited, their role has evolved to focus on the functional structures and capabilities with outcomes that drive business results.

A summary of the evolution of the model is depicted below in Figure 4. The evolution reflects the changing demands on the function, as explained by how the operating context has evolved over the past 30 years. Priorities evolve, and the model expands and contracts from one iteration to the next with the expectation that components are absorbed into other categories and, therefore, do not need a specific label. For example, culture appeared in 1997 and disappeared in 2002, whereas stewardship of culture has not disappeared in the practitioner world – it has simply become an implicit requirement as more has been added. Indeed, the model would be unwieldy if all the components remained. I consider the changing requirements to be an excellent representation of the challenges the modern practitioner faces: of how, within four years, the demands of the role shift and continuously expand.

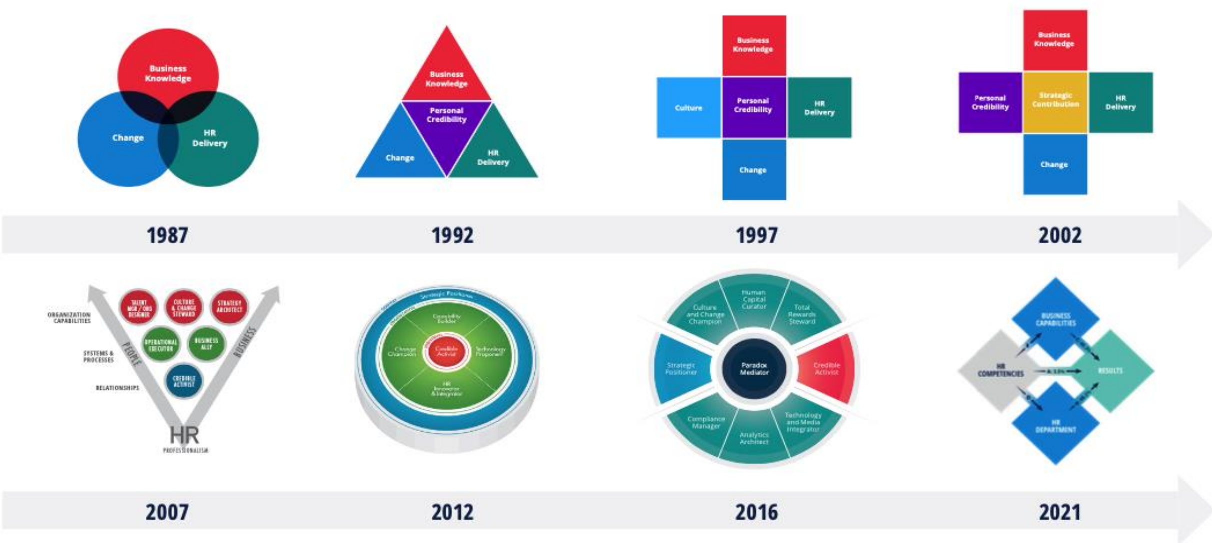


Figure 4: The Thirty-Year Evolution of the HRCS (Wright and Ulrich, 2021)

Nevertheless, when I consider the model and the most recent iteration, I cannot help but wonder: "What happened to the people element? Has the practice area fully integrated the people dimension to the extent that it no longer needs to be specifically named?"

2.6.3 What is next for HR?

HR issues are increasingly concerning for external investors as part of a firm's valuation (Bassi, Creelman and Lambert, 2014). Today, HR has firmly shifted towards outside-in thinking, as promoted by Ulrich, whereby HR also has to both serve key external stakeholders and respond to business conditions. This shift in thinking implies that HR professionals must also be adept in business processes to converse on financials, operations, products, and customers in order to sustain the company's market value by creating the correct type of organisation (Ulrich et al., 2012). HR Leaders are needed to participate in strategy discussions to deliver competitive advantage for companies by providing recommendations and insight on capability (culture, process, systems), talent (people, workforce, human capital) and leadership (Ulrich, 2017).

The advent of technology, as discussed, has sparked a new digital disruption called the 'gig economy' (also referred to as sharing economy, contingent work, agile talent, or alternate forms of employment). With work accomplished by an increasingly contingent talent portfolio, the challenge for future HR practitioners is whether they can be agile in leading change through policies, culture and programmes previously designed for full-time workers (Horney, 2016). HR needs to reinvent its talent management further to adapt to the changing portfolio of the workforce and to design innovative and customisable solutions through design thinking to develop meaningful experiences for workers (Claus, 2019). Talent management is an increasingly complex concept, drawing its application from concepts beyond HR through fields such as marketing (emphasis on employer branding), operations management (matching talent demand and supply), management science (yield curves) and global management (globally integrated approach) (Claus, 2019). This increased complexity calls for HR to wear ever-increasing diverse hats in managing future HR processes. The dawn of the flexible working arrangement (FWA) also gave rise to new fields of study within HR, such as the effects of national culture on FWA, whereby research shows that different national cultures have different effects on FWA practices (Peretz, Fried and Levi, 2018). Research is pending on the impact of the hybrid working model stimulated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Digitalisation opened doors for professionals in HR to leverage data created from technologies to support HRM and business solutions (Heuvel and Bondarouk, 2017). HR could now find out how to be ‘strategic’ through HR decision science, later popularised as HR analytics, by enhancing decisions about people similar to how marketing decision science and finance decision science are made (Boudreau and Ramstad, 2005). Popularised use of analytics is through HR predictive analytics (HRPA) to analyse patterns in HR metrics such as performance, engagement and turnover through models proven to help optimise business performance and contain HR-related costs (Mishra, Lama and Pal, 2016). In the future, it is believed that no single decision will be made without statistical data support and that HR analytics will continue to drive value creation (Heuvel and Bondarouk, 2017). The evolution of data collection and sense-making for analytics inevitably gives rise to the next frontier: AI.

With the future revolving around reducing engagement to individual levels and employee experience, businesses cannot achieve those outcomes without employing the best AI has to offer (Ahmed, 2020). A data-driven approach to HR cannot be understated. Analytics and AI are a boat HR cannot afford to miss (Heuvel and Bondarouk, 2017). However, HR will increasingly have to deal with data privacy and protection issues for analytics (Heuvel and Bondarouk, 2017), and AI can be criticised not as a one-size-fits-all solution to HR as the ‘human’ aspect of HR because it lacks empathy and emotional sensing, arguably rendering it more as a tool to enhance HR tasks (Ahmed, 2020). Humans can sense emotions, whereas AI processes data – this will not change in the near future (Ahmed, 2020). For this reason, I do not fear AI in HR at present. However, it must be acknowledged that this may change with AI’s rapid advances and evolution.

Globalisation has brought about increased competition among businesses. M&A is increasingly prevalent to increase a business’s competitive edge, which means that successful management of an M&A will continue to be a requirement for HR. As discussed in previous sections, a critical factor for the failure of M&A is believed to be the neglect of HR's role in facilitating M&A because the success of M&A largely depended on the effective use of people (Vazirani, 2012). One of the critical HR roles in M&A is to ensure the integration of organisational culture among the merging organisations because organisational culture is a factor that either makes or breaks M&A (Febriani and Yancey, 2019). Four HR approaches have been suggested to integrate culture during M&A: preservation, absorption, symbiosis, and transformation (Marks and Mirvis, 2011).

Febriani and Yancey (2019) found that the transformational approach, which integrated the merging companies' best practices, created the most success in managing organisational culture change, while the preservation approach led to the least successful changes. These approaches can, therefore, be adopted in leading potential organisational culture change and are the basis of how the acquiring company integration was designed.

2.6.4 HR and COVID-19

The COVID-19 crisis has dealt HR practitioners with another new set of challenges. As the situation evolved, so did the practices of HR as our organisations dealt with redundancies, protecting employees' health, and deploying appropriate real-time strategies in the workforce to support workers (Volini, Schwartz and Denny, 2020).

COVID-19 also placed the value of HR into the spotlight in areas of managing employee sentiment, ensuring the integration of well-being policies, bridging connections between organisational leaders, workers, and teams, and reimagining the way work is done (Volini, Schwartz and Denny, 2020). Shifts towards remote work environments caused by lockdowns and continuing post-COVID-19 around the world brought attention to the importance of talent management as HR dealt with a portfolio of alternating work arrangements, given that the work environment had been drastically altered (Carnevale and Hatak, 2020).

The need for HR to become even more agile was reinforced in the COVID-19 environment, whereby HR had to introduce more strategic remote work policies (Li, Ghosh and Nachmias, 2020). Another notable trend seen during COVID-19 was a shift towards HR development (HRD) as e-learning, self-learning and online learning became more prevalent, and people were taking more time to develop their skills in times of uncertainty, calling upon more focus for HR in developing learning opportunities for professionals (Li, Ghosh and Nachmias, 2020).

The impact of the pandemic has been to increase the role of HR, to now include HR being the champion of vaccination drives among employees (Sinha and Jain, 2022) as well as mental health and well-being. Preparation by HR can reduce anxiety across an organisation in crisis (Vardarlier, 2016), yet the function struggles to balance employee care with accountability (Ulrich and Nielsen, 2020).

I agree that, overall, COVID-19 has brought the spotlight upon the management of HR, with an emphasis on talent management, agile leadership and organisational development, thereby further calling on HR to step up to be adept in the technological front as technology becomes widely used for remote working (Volini, Schwartz and Denny, 2020). I would suggest, however, that this requirement for technical competency created yet another skills requirement for which, as a function, HR was typically unprepared given the core competencies previously required.

2.6.5 Change Management Interventions and HR Contribution

Change management continually renews an organisation’s direction, structure, and capabilities to serve the ever-changing needs of external and internal customers (Moran and Brightman, 2001). For the above reasons, successful change management is critical in an evolving and highly competitive globalised business community. Nevertheless, it is astonishing that the reported failure rate for change programmes is still around 70 % (Balogun et al., 2015). The poor success rate is suggested to be caused by a lack of a valid framework to manage and implement organisational change caused by the array of contradictory and confusing theories towards change management (Burnes, 2004). HR has been pivotal in facilitating change management since the conceptualisation of strategic HR, with scholars proposing HR departments as ‘change agents’ advocating continuous transformation (Ulrich, 1997). There are two significant perspectives to change: the rational planning perspective (Burnes, 2004) and the emergent or processual approach (Hayes, 2022) that HR will typically adopt based on the way they are taught to HR practitioners.

The approach to change developed in the 1950s attempts to explain the change process, emphasising how organisations transition from unsatisfactory to desired (Elrod and Tippett, 2002). The notable model for planned change is the three-step model by Lewin: unfreezing, moving, and refreezing (Elrod and Tippett, 2002). The model acknowledges that organisations have to discard old processes and culture before adopting novel approaches (Bamford and Forrester, 2003). Given that the model was adopted as a general framework to understand organisational change, it has been criticised as being broad.

Consequently, another four-phase model of planned change of splitting process into exploration, planning, action, and integration, derived by Bullock and Batten (1985), after reviewing comprehensively more than 30 models of planned change, is established as a more appropriate model for most change situations (Burnes, 2004). The planned change model has come under heavy criticism recently due to several factors. First, the approach emphasises incremental change, which makes it unsuitable for rapid transformation such as M&A or a pandemic. Second, operating under constant conditions is a vital assumption; however, the modern fast-changing environments from digital transformation weaken the theory. Last, planned change presumes that all stakeholders are willing and interested in participating in change that ignores the people, organisational politics, and conflicts (Burnes, 1996), and this is certainly not the case in an enforced change such as being the employee of an acquired organisation.

In the light of criticisms towards the 'planned change model', the 'emergent approach to change' gained ground because the approach is centred around change readiness and facilitating change rather than proposing specific pre-planned steps for any change project (Burnes, 1996). While the emergent approach has no universal rules, some scholars offer more practical guidance for tackling emergent change.

Figure 5 compares Kanter's 'Ten Commandments for Executing Change' (Kanter et al., 1992), Kotter's 'Eight-Stage Process for Successful Organisational Transformation' (2012), and Luecke's 'Seven Steps' (2003). A criticism of the emergent approach is its lack of coherence because it consists of disparate models that tend to be more united in their scepticism of the planned approach than an agreed alternative. However, Burnes (1996) posits that if an organisation is in a dynamic, unpredictable environment in which it must constantly adapt, the emerging approach would be more suitable because it applies to all contexts (Burnes, 1996). The emerging approach would be more applicable to the acquiring company because it had already been subject to disruption by emergent technology, with fresh players, including Netflix, entering the market. The different models listed under the planned and emergent change approaches offer the most notable interventions to tackling change management that HR practitioners are taught.

Kanter *et al.*'s Ten Commandments for Executing Change (1992)	Kotter's Eight-Stage Process for Successful Organisational Transformation (1996)	Luecke's Seven Steps (2003)
1) Analyse the organisation and its need for change		1) Mobilise energy and commitment through joint identification of business problems and their solutions
2) Create a vision and a common direction	3) Developing a vision and strategy	2) Develop a shared vision of how to organise and manage for competitiveness
3) Separate from the past		
4) Create a sense of urgency	1) Establishing a sense of urgency	
5) Support a strong leader role		3) Identify the leadership
6) Line up political sponsorship	2) Creating a guiding coalition	
7) Craft an implementation plan		
8) Develop enabling structures	5) Empowering broad-based action	
9) Communicate, involve people and be honest	4) Communicating the change vision	
10) Reinforce and institutionalise change	8) Anchoring new approaches in the culture	6) Institutionalise success through formal policies, systems, and structures
	6) Generating short-term wins	
	7) Consolidating gains and producing more change	
		4) Focus on results, not on activities
		5) Start change at the periphery, then let it spread to other units without pushing it from the top
		7) Monitor and adjust strategies in response to problems in the change process

Figure 5: A comparison of three models of change (By, 2005)

HR's role in change management has been called upon by scholars such as Ulrich (1997), who have long suggested that HR professionals should become change agents and build organisational capacity for change (Ulrich, 1997). The role of HR in facilitating change can be modelled along dimensions of content and process as well as on the continuum of proactivity and reactivity.

Figure 6 shows a typology of four HR functional roles proposed by Alfes, Truss and Gill (2010 that prescribes four HR roles: Change Driver, Change Focused, HR Focused, and Responsive (Alfes, Truss and Gill, 2010).

- Change Drivers are involved in all aspects of the change programme through the deployment of all possible HR interventions.
- Responsive HR departments neither deploy nor involve themselves in change.
- HR-focused departments are proactive in support but largely reactive in driving change.
- Change-focused HR is active in supporting change but not engaged in developing HR initiatives to embed change.

A study by Alfes, Truss and Gill (2010) explored these typologies of HR and found that while the Change Driver approach is effective in theory, empirical evidence suggests that it is not always the case in practice (Ogilvie and Stork, 2003). I would also question the model given the gap of a people element. Given that most changes fail due to people's resistance to change, drove the need for this research.

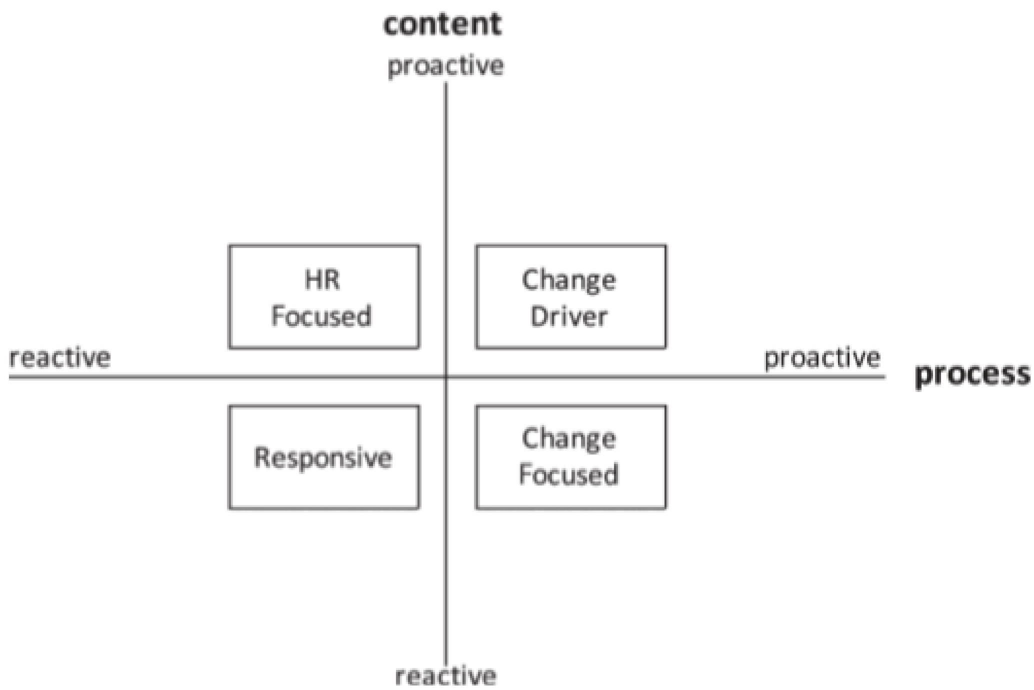


Figure 6: A typology of HR functional roles during change (Alfes, Truss and Gill, 2010)

Change management is also influenced by other factors, such as change in organisational culture and employees' attitudes towards change, as described in previous sections. The awareness of cultural differences among organisations and planning for necessary adaptation in order to reach a unifying culture are significant factors for the successful integrative process of firms undergoing mergers (Pezzillo Iacono, 2012). Therefore, such cultural due diligence by HR to identify the proactive logic of change management is needed to increase opportunities for the success of mergers (Pezzillo Iacono, 2012). To be successful, Armenakis and Harris (2009) argued that employees must embrace the implementation of organisational change. However, failure to fulfil change promises makes such successful change efforts rare (Armenakis and Harris, 2009). A critical psychological mechanism to study employees' attitudes to change relative to how employees experience their working lives to achieve desirable work-unit outcomes and overcome resistance to change is the employee's Commitment to Change (C2C) (Jaros, 2010).

In a later study of organisational change by Clardy (2013), Clardy highlighted how the number of distinctive surface strategies managing specific organisational change could be reduced to a core set of change management fundamentals identified as the IMPROVE model in Table 2 (Clardy, 2013). The model integrates organisational process, employee motivation and interventions for change – three dynamic, vital elements to any change – to provide practitioners with a generic blueprint to effectively deal with change management projects (Clardy, 2013). Leaders of change can adopt a number of methods to measure each of the seven phases under IMPROVE: by addressing the functional prerequisites of IMPROVE, one's chance of bringing about successful change should be much improved (Clardy, 2013). The effectiveness of the IMPROVE model is not validated by research. However, it should be perused for change management initiatives because it seeks to improve on pre-existing models, which Clardy (2013) criticises for being unstructured and non-generic, suggesting that IMPROVE is diverse in its application.

I would suggest that, based on previous sections, a phase on preparing employees for change and building their resilience to do so would be beneficial as I believe that phase is missing.

Table 2: The IMPROVE model for managing change (Clardy, 2013)

FUNCTIONAL REQUIREMENTS	ACTIVITIES	STATUS CHECK
Increasing the organization's capacity for change	Educate employees about organizational conditions. Increase employee confidence in dealing with change.	The workforce has a capacity and readiness for change.
Management approval for change	Identify organizational performance problems or opportunities. Make the business case for change.	The change agent has the authority and support to proceed with the change initiative.
Preparing direction and leadership for the change process	People selected to be facilitators, agents, advocates, and champions Project leader preparation Project planning	There are leaders who can play an effective role in implementing the change and there is an implementation plan.
Raising employee motivation for the change	Employee participation in planning and preparation for change An effective roll-out or announcement	Employees have a sufficient level of understanding of the need for change and the motivation to carry it out.
Operationalizing the change	An intervention plan as a set of actions or events designed to produce desired changes	An intervention best suited to bring about the needed changes has been adopted and implemented.
Validating that the change process has been successful	Change initiative is evaluated focusing on this question: To what extent did the initiative produce the desired outcomes?	The change project has been evaluated in terms of whether and to what extent it worked.
Embedding the change into the organization	Formal human resource policies and procedures Management and supervisory practice Other system supports	Policies, procedures, and systems are in place to support and maintain the new kinds of behaviors.

2.6.6 HR and Trust

As described earlier, the role of HR practitioner is most frequently viewed from the framework of Ulrich (1997), who first divided the HR function into four roles: 'Administrative Expert, Change Agent, Employee Champion and Strategic Partner'. From this model, one may safely assume that contemporary corporate HR Leaders must be administrative bureaucrats and strategic business partners. However, this may not be the case in all organisations because the full spectrum of HR functions also includes day-to-day operational procedures, and while these mundane work processes are essential, they cannot be regarded as influential or strategic (Caldwell, 2002). However, my experience as a practitioner is that these essential tasks typically take up a high proportion of time among HR teams.

With such a broad spectrum of requirements on HR, as detailed in the previous section, capacity and capability becomes pertinent: Do HR Leaders typically play a strategic or operational role? The results are minimal if the research is limited to my geographical location. However, research by Chiu and Selmer (2011), analysing the strategic roles of HR in Hong Kong's context, reported that HR Leadership is not perceived to fulfil its strategic partnership role.

The common criticisms here of HR Leaders failing in their strategic role are due to the perceived functional preference for standard process over developing new strategic capability, HR Leaders' unfamiliarity with predicting and adapting to changing business trends, their lack of business and financial 'savviness' and, lastly, poor communication between HR Leaders and business leaders to link HR to business strategy (Njemanze, 2016; Botter, Rosa and Lima, 2018). However, it was noted that the strategic role of HR cannot be understated because HR has to align the organisational talent to business needs, with research showing that the strategic role of HR is strengthened when an organisation is in alignment with the business strategy and places emphasis on strategic HR development (Alagaraja, 2013a; Lee, Park and Baker, 2018; Mitsakis, 2019; Hirudayaraj and Matić, 2021).

To enhance the strategic role of HR, HR must continue to evolve beyond an operational role, learn the language of business, co-create organisational strategy to anticipate business conditions and build HR practices to respond to change (Ulrich, 2016). To make this happen, HR (Leaders) must demonstrate all the new HR competencies to create market value for the organisation. Undoubtedly, HR still has a more significant opportunity to deliver real impact (Ulrich, 2017).

As a practitioner, reviewing the knowledge on this topic demonstrates the gap that I seek to fill. HR needs to be adequately resourced by an organisation in order to fulfil the operational requirements, and only then can the strategic role be undertaken. The research demonstrates what HR has to do but does not adequately discuss the required organisational context.

As the fourth industrial revolution brought about the emphasis on employee experience, HR Leaders now must adopt not only a strategic mindset in navigating the field of talent management but also adopt and deploy notable new skill sets, such as design thinking and agile leadership in managing the HR function (Claus, 2019). The focus on talent management is a growing imperative for the function and, therefore, the HR Leader (Pagan-Castaño et al., 2022; Kaliannan et al., 2023)

Design thinking involves creative problem-solving and adopting design principles to the way people work (Kolko, 2015; Rösch, Tiberius and Kraus, 2023). Adopting design thinking within the function would enable the HR Leader to understand employee experience and redesign it with employee solutions that are compelling and simple (Bersin, 2016; Panneerselvam and Balaraman, 2022).

The requirement for agile leadership stems from the need for HR to respond quickly and effectively to the ever-changing business environment to manage an increasingly flatter and network-based organisation that empowers employees with greater control over their work (Claus, 2019). Agile, a concept originally designed to manage IT projects, has been transferred to managing HR in a technologically dominant society. The call for HR to be strategically agile, flexible and adaptive yet purposeful in managing HR has been researched and confirmed to be a positive trait in allowing organisations to handle challenges in the dynamic environment, with the hallmark of strategic agility being able to turn difficulties into opportunities (Doz, 2020; Ambituuni, Azizsafaei and Keegan, 2021; Mathew et al., 2023). How we build the capacity and capability to deliver on so many fronts create a challenge for the modern

HR Leader, and the current HR education resources and approaches do not adequately provide for this challenge.

HR Leaders are now better understood to play a pivotal role in the change management process, facilitating the alignment between strategy and human performance (Deshler, 2016) and focusing on adapting behaviour, particularly tough-to-change embedded behaviours. Indeed, findings show that change is better fostered through positive leadership (e.g. transactional and transformational) rather than negative leadership (e.g. aversive and laissez-faire), which actively inhibits employee change behaviour (Bligh, Kohles and Yan, 2018). I believe it is essential that HR Leaders apply this knowledge while proactively developing business leaders to adopt positive leadership styles (Bligh, Kohles and Yan, 2018). The risk of a negative leadership style, which may meet the needs of short-term demand but negatively impede innovation and change in the long term (Bligh, Kohles and Yan, 2018; Caniëls and Hatak, 2022) is extremely high and indeed is what has been experienced during this research exercise.

In such change processes, having a leadership team united in their support for change and a cohesive approach to the change process is critical to the programme's success, with studies showing how transformational leadership that encourages employee participation leads to more successful change outcomes (Fischer et al., 2009). Studies also highlight that the degree to which employees embrace organisational change largely depends on their trust in management through a variable associated with organisational justice (Fischer et al., 2009; Woike and Hafenbrädl, 2020).

These studies on organisational justice combined with the previously described research on change means that HR Leaders must, therefore, build trust amongst employees and coach other Leaders to exhibit the right leadership style to lead change. The qualities of successful managers in successful change management have been studied extensively and identified as follows: 'communicating with direct reports about change, demonstrating support for change, coaching employees through the change process, identifying and managing resistance, engaging, and providing support to project teams' (Creasy and Anantatmula, 2013). These are areas HR Leaders can explore in approaching change management by learning from successful change (Creasy and Anantatmula, 2013; Caniëls, Chiocchio and van Loon, 2019; Zhang et al., 2022), but I would propose that as a function, HR Leaders first need to build the skills sets in their HR teams.

M&A has often been described as threatening to individuals, heightening loss of security and vulnerability, as described in the previous section of psychological experience. Building and maintaining trust is crucial to successfully implementing M&A (Finkelstein and Cooper, 2016; Bansal, 2016; 2020) and arguably a priority for an HR Leader. In order for HR Leaders to be able to do so, they must be personally trusted (Longenecker and Fink, 2015a; 2015b)

Therefore, this concept of trust in HR and the HR Leader becomes central to this research - whether it is a feasible or even an appropriate aspiration of HR Leaders that employees and leaders should trust the function and trust in them as the HR Leader. Trust is a broad concept that, for the purposes of this research, has been specifically narrowed to examine the theme of trust of HR and the trust granted by leaders and employees towards the HR function specifically. The focus of trust within these parameters best align to the purpose, aims and objectives of the research as the broader topic of trust merits stand-alone research.

In October 2022, the HBR published an online article entitled 'How HR Lost Employees' Trust – and How to Get it Back' (Grenny, 2022). Based on the survey results of 993 employees, the selection of which was undisclosed, the findings are sobering for the HR Leader:

> Just 1 in 4 survey respondents say their HR Leader was widely trusted as one who cared about the needs of employees. In addition, only 9% believed that their HR Leader would proactively advocate on their behalf, and 37% said that their HR Leader was more concerned with advocating

> for the organisation, causing them to hesitate to speak with HR about sensitive issues.

While it is not feasible to determine the validity of the research (indeed, there are a number of similar questionable survey results available online), I believe it captures a likely widespread sentiment and, therefore, the inherent challenge faced by the profession. HBR is a journal widely read by organisational leaders; therefore, the article will resonate.

> HR is a management function of an organisation that pays it a salary: Is trust for the HR function and HR Leader a Utopian fantasy?

The professional identity of the HR Leader may hold a significant key, according to research commissioned by the CIPD, which identified that 69% of respondents identified more with the organisation than the HR profession (Hope-Hailey, Searle and Dietz, 2012). Hope-Hailey, Searle and Dietz did not question whether the respondents identified with the organisation's employees.

That HR practitioners do not prioritise the practitioner’s identity, the CIPD proposes, is an outcome of the pressure for practitioners to be business partners, this identity suggesting that business needs are prioritised even when ethical decisions are required. In this context, HR practitioners face the same challenge as other professionals in organisations, whereby the sense of professional identity becomes so interwoven with the organisation that they lose the benefit of their professions and ethical lapses occur (Gunz and Gunz, 2007). If HR practitioners see business partnering as their fundamental identity rather than as HR people or employee advocacy, it is indeed unsurprising that employees experience HR in that context. This finding correlates with the previous section on identity and the need for individuals to adopt new identities during change. Arguably, this, therefore, commences with HR.

Bansal (2016) found that cultural convergence, employees’ perceptions of HR initiatives’ effectiveness, and communication were significant determinants of trust among employees. So, to build trust, the HR Leader must first ensure that the HR practices of the organisations are fair. The advice suggests that cross-cultural training must be conducted to converge cultures, and transparent, accountable communication must be relayed to employees (Bansal, 2016; 2020). Stahl, Hwee Chua and Pablo (2006) reinforced the role HR initiatives play in establishing trust, particularly having HR policies and practices that are fair, transparent and geared towards 'high commitment', offering financial incentives to employees deserving of retention, and providing adequate support for employees negatively affected by takeover (Stahl, Chua and Pablo, 2012; Chen et al., 2022). Additionally, this study further echoed the importance of a 'culture-compatible' strategy because cultural differences critical to M&A success should not be neglected as they often are.

Sachsenmaier and Guo (2019) found that trust development is fostered through economic and emotional factors and proposed the following three-stage trust development theory for companies integrating employees with different organisational or national cultures:

- The first stage involves establishing trust through economic factors such as financial performance because cooperation is predicated primarily on calculation.
- The second stage improves trust through mutual understanding and reliability.
- The third stage builds a trust foundation through familiarity and emotional bonding.

The scholars also established that trust must be managed right after M&A occurs by embracing positive dynamics through fostering transparent communication and identification of advantages for various parties (Chen et al., 2022; Tian et al., 2021; Sachsenmaier and Guo, 2019).

To foster trust through communication, two studies (Boies, Fiset and Gill, 2015; Thomas, Zolin and Hartman, 2009) found that the quality of information conveyed was of more importance to co-workers and supervisors, while the quantity of information was of higher importance to top management. Another study by Innocenti, Pilati and Peluso (2011) revealed that employees' trust in management is crucial for successfully implementing HR practices. This study found that the role of managers in facilitating HR processes cannot be discounted and that management actions should be consistent with HR processes. It was unsurprising, therefore, that inconsistent behaviour may compromise trust and result in negative employee attitudes towards HR practices.

Trust is an essential consideration in change management (Hayfron, Baafi and Asante, 2023), increasing employee tolerance in uncertain times and moments of ambiguity as employees trust that the organisation will do their best for them. Trust requires a level of vulnerability from employees, and while trust is necessary for engagement, it is clearly a separate concept.

While there is considerable research into the components of building trust by employees in leaders and organisations and data that suggest that trust decreases the larger the organisation (Hope-Hailey, Searle and Dietz, 2012), there is more limited knowledge available in terms of building trust in the HR function and even less on how the HR Leader can simultaneously build trust with both the organisation and its employees. This theme is central to the research and represents the research's distinct offering.

The employee experience of the workplace, alongside the dynamics of employees and leaders, impacts the trust quotient, and HR practices and policies have been proven to be among the critical areas for building trust (Wang et al., 2022; Goergen et al., 2021; Dietz and Den Hartog, 2006; Blunsdon and Reed, 2003; Whitener, 2001; Robinson and Rousseau, 1994). Employees experience these practices as the manifestation of the organisation's intentions towards people. Therefore, they need to be designed and applied and to be perceived to be fair and to build trust (Kähkönen et al., 2021; Gustafsson et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2020; Searle et al., 2011; Wright et al., 2005). I believe that demonstrating the organisation's intention towards people to be fair and trustworthy is a mandate for HR.

There is also a view that the function and HR practitioners must demonstrate trust in employees. One example quoted is how HR interacts with people and shares information, which is equally important in building trust (Saks, 2022;

Holland, Cooper and Sheehan, 2017; Tzafrir, 2005). As a practitioner, however, I would comment that this information sharing is one area of potential tension because, as in change processes, HR cannot always share what they know. The asymmetry of communication is a requirement. It is unrealistic to rely on sharing information to build trust.

'Trust arrives on foot but leaves on horseback', this Dutch proverb indicates how trust is hard won and easily lost, and the evidence demonstrates this for HR:

- Pertinent to the topic of this research, the involvement of HR in a poorly implemented change process destroyed employee trust (Worrall et al., 2011)
- The unmet need for HR is to 'make sense' of events for employees in times of change and redundancies (Martocchio, 2009) and to help shift employee attitudes.
- The unilateral approach of many HR practices has a negative approach on employee relations (Mather, 2011)
- The perception of HR as a control function seemed to be imposing inappropriate control and policing the organisation (Legge, 2020)

Regarding the HR Leader, one study concluded that employees observe the behaviour and attitudes of the HR Leadership team and conclude the importance of trust in the organisation (Hope-Hailey, Searle and Dietz, 2012). The study did not, however, examine whether the HR function and organisation were seen as the same entity.

This knowledge review, in summary, demonstrates the challenge faced by HR, particularly in times of restructuring and redundancies of being able to communicate with transparency and maintain a level of trust with the organisations in those challenging times. However, there was much less emphasis in the research for HR practitioners on achieving this and holding this duality.

What then differentiates between those HR Leaders who perform well or fail?

Research around the topic of the personal attributes of HR Leaders has been relatively limited, with most research opportunities more concentrated on the broader function rather than the leader. Three researchers (Kafetzopoulos, 2023; Longenecker and Fink, 2022) provided a lens to explore the HR Leader, identifying four cornerstones for foundations of exceptional HR Leadership: 'business acumen, trust, expertise and culture'. Building on the Ulrich model with the addition of trust and culture, this lens is similarly anchored from the organisational viewpoint, driving the requirement for holistic and commercial perspectives. The research methodology was incorporated into an award mechanism that ran for over 20 years, the core nomination criteria being that the HR Leader had to demonstrate exceptional HR innovation and strategic partnerships while having a powerful impact on business strategy execution and bottom-line performance. Observations were based on site visits to over 70 US-based manufacturing and service industries, with interviews conducted with key stakeholders.

This research does not consider differing business contexts - for example, the different skill sets required of the HR Leader in transformative times versus business as usual, the impact of a well-resourced versus a sub-resourced function, or international variances. However, the foundational requirements are logical - concluding with the need for business managers with expertise in HR, which therefore continued to reinforce the messaging for function Leaders to be business partners.

In 2020, Longenecker et al. published research into why senior HR Leaders are terminated. The findings reinforced their prior published criteria as successful, with examples showing leaders had not demonstrated the identified four cornerstones that ultimately led to a dismissal. As a practitioner, I would suggest that there are other factors to be considered, principally the resources provided to an HR Leader – in environments where the team is understaffed or not provided with the requisite tools (e.g., technology) or where the board or senior leadership team dynamics make success impossible.

2.7 My Reflections on the role of HR and HR Leadership

The role of HR and HR Leaders has become complex and varied, even before the additional factors of M&A, transformation, or unique events such as COVID-19 are added to the mix. A critical insight from the literature review revealed how distinct all the separate knowledge fields are that can impact the work of the HR Leader at this time of writing without a prominent integrated model that HR can practically apply. This identified opportunity and gap allows this research to add to the knowledge and broader HR practice. Currently, it is beholden on the HR practitioner to demonstrate personal proactivity in demonstrating the relevance of other practice areas beyond HR, capturing, and applying the knowledge and skills learned. I aspire to trigger discourse, debate, and progress throughout this research. The area of trust has become the most contentious. My aspiration for the HR function is that it collectively arrives at a juncture where HR can cease defending its role in organisations and focus instead on delivering the objectives of the work at hand. The reviewed literature demonstrates that HR still has a challenge to achieve this.

As I review the prior literature and broader knowledge regarding potential areas for evolution, I consider the possibility that HR initiatives could be more deftly balanced between people and organisations to deliver the programme outcomes and maintain trust with employees. This research will endeavour to do so in one specific organisation to create practical applications beyond that time. Reflecting the need to be iterative and current, the knowledge on physical and emotional well-being outlined earlier has continued to impact my professional practice beyond the research during COVID-19 times and in February 2023 for employees impacted by the earthquake in Turkey.

Even in a world of technology, advances and roles evolve, and employees are vital to organisational success. Recent CEO research by Longenecker and Wittmer (2023) advocates that the workforce is the most critical resource: Leaders at all levels must lead effectively and with empathy, leaders must practice 360° two-way communication with honesty and transparency, equip the workforce for success and leverage technology, trust and empower the workforce, and invest more time reinforcing and celebrating victories. All of these require connections, communications, and people-centric practices – which I would argue is the mandate for HR.

From the position of a practitioner-researcher, there is an opportunity for me to develop a unique contribution to the HR knowledge that is beyond conceptual, anchored to the reality of being an HR leader during a change event of the type that many HR practitioners will experience during their careers.

The unique voice that this research can offer to the HR knowledge is by applying this knowledge in real-time by creating a pragmatic approach that HR Leaders and their teams can localise to their personal context in delivering transformations that value both the employee and the organisational dimensions.

A consideration remains regarding the inherent lack of trust in the HR function from both the broader organisation and employees, as demonstrated by the knowledge review. While this may not apply to all organisations, the theme remains, as does the practical considerations that some of the recommendations to build trust – for example, transparency on topics – are not always feasible due to legal or professional considerations. Nevertheless, I maintain that there is an opportunity to create value for organisations by endeavouring to do so. As a practitioner, I have delivered tangible business results in this manner, and while challenging to achieve, this remains my ambition. Chapter Three will set out how I intended to do so.

Chapter 3 will discuss the selected methodology of the research together with the purpose, aims and objectives of the research. Following this I will present the research design, data collection phases and data analysis while considering the ethics and limitations of the research.

3 Methodology

3.1 Methodology

3.1.1 Introduction

This thesis addresses the evolution of the role of the HR function and the HR Leader, situated in the context of a significant organisational transformation to traverse organisational and people requirements.

The overall research approach is summarised in Figure 7 and will be detailed further in this chapter, which will discuss:

1. The development of and rationale for the methodological framework selected to undertake this research.
2. The unique positioning of my role and the inherent possibilities and limitations are created as a result.
3. Ethical considerations.

3.2 Rationale for the methodological framework

3.2.1 Purpose

The overall purpose of this research is:

> *To contribute to the Human Resources knowledge and practices of HR professionals.*

3.2.2 Aims

The aim of the research was defined as:

> *To explore, evaluate and re-envision the role of HR Leader practitioners in facilitating transformations while providing targeted support to employees experiencing the change.*

To meet the aim of the research project, I examined if and how the Fox HR function and I, in a dual role as the Insider-Researcher and a Fox HR Leader, could traverse the needs of employees experiencing uncertainty and change alongside the organisational HR priorities of a post-acquisition integration process. As discussed, the names assigned to the organisations were random and no meaning should be assigned to the choices. The knowledge review demonstrated the body of siloed knowledge from both the organisational perspective and the individual. However, there was little evidence of how an HR practitioner, such as myself, can practically integrate both within a real-time deliverable.

The aim was intended to be achieved by identifying and confronting some of the more difficult problems in this specific transformation and getting real-time results into the hands of the HR teams, business leaders and employees, who could then apply the research findings. It is acknowledged upfront that, as a consequence of this aim, these issues outlined in this thesis will potentially intertwine. Applying real-time findings in the business while undertaking the research within an extensive HR programme was predictably unruly. However, I did not consider this particularly onerous, which is not atypical of the practitioner experience, where, in my experience, wearing multiple hats on the same day is a typical requirement of the HR leader’s role.

In creating this research, which was grounded in time and space (Rittel and Weber, 2006), centred on a wicked problem:

I was not seeking to provide a conclusive answer and had no hypotheses to test; this research would be an exploration.

Brown (2010) defines this approach as ‘a search for an optimal outcome’, and while I acknowledged the possibility of an objective reality, I knew that there could be more than one reality, even when applied to the same experience (a post-acquisition integration). The outcomes would be most likely open-ended as I explored the critical ways that the role of HR and HR Leadership could further evolve to better deliver transformations in a wicked context by examining:

How individual employees experienced the major organisational transformation of the integration of Fox into the acquiring company.

How could the HR function best evolve standard change management interventions to support leaders and employees during these programmes and deliver organisational goals?

For a reflective learning opportunity, examine my secondary role as the HR Leader in the programme and what my function could learn to do differently to better meet our key stakeholders' requirements.

Through these examinations, I explored the golden thread of this research: the duality of the HR practitioner role, traversing the dimensions of employee needs and organisational objectives.

3.2.3 Research Approach

My approach to the research project is mapped out in Figure 7 to demonstrate how the research purpose, aims, and objectives drove the knowledge review to inform the research methodology.

The data collection was achieved through three phases with the participants. All the data was consolidated, and thematic analysis was performed as an iterative process driving the findings and recommendations of this research.

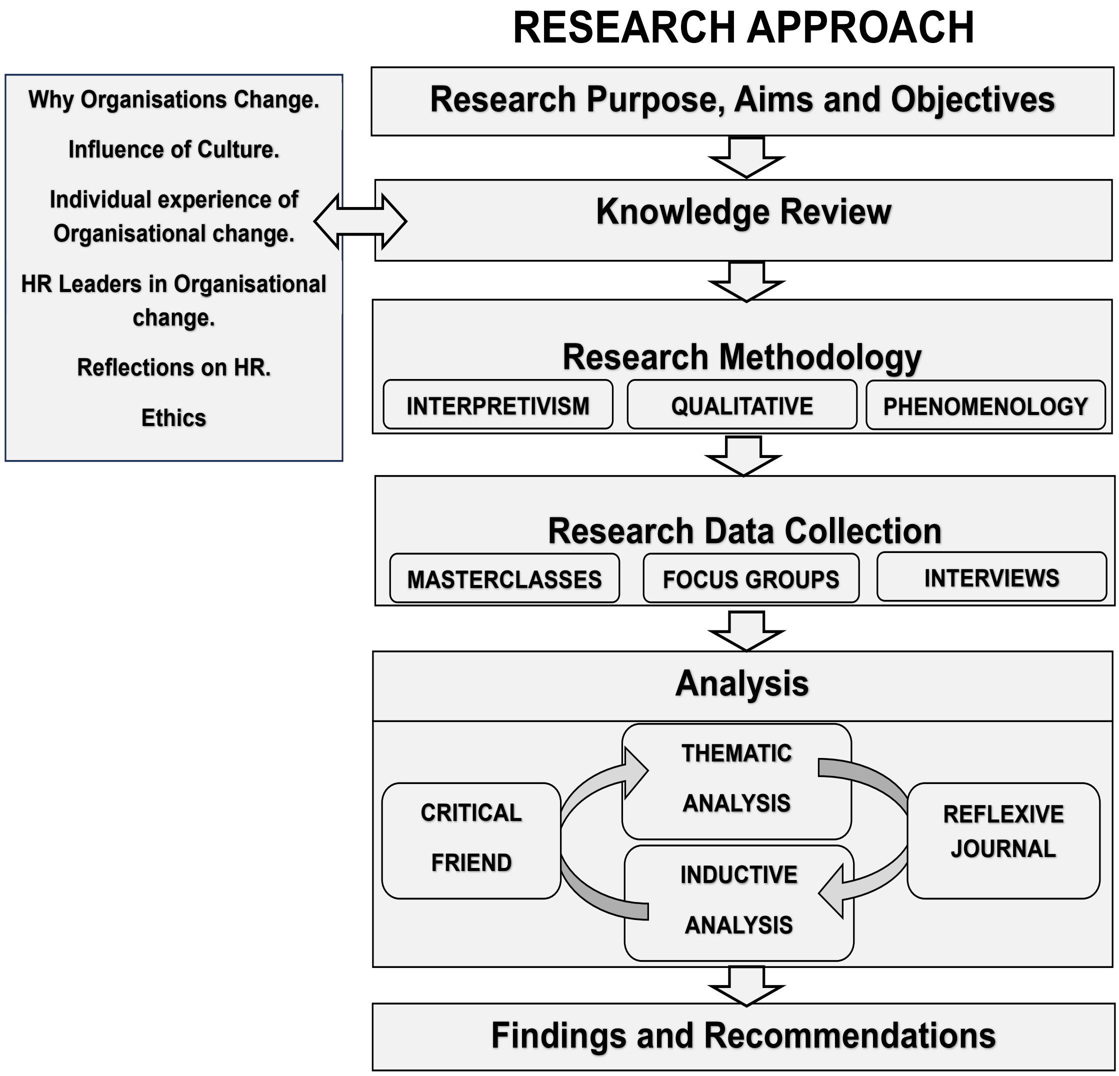


Figure 7: Research Approach

3.2.4 Objectives

The following research objectives were defined to meet the purpose and aims of the research:

- *Utilise the learnings from the knowledge review to create bespoke training interventions for employees to enable them to thrive during the integration.*
- *Conduct interviews with leaders and focus groups with other employees.*
- *Seek external peer (HR Leader) perspectives through interviews.*
- *Conduct an interview with a leading HR scholar.*
- *Develop a practitioner outcome that can be shared with my wider professional practice community.*

The research approach was intentionally developed in real-time rather than being a static approach. This best reflects the reality of the HR practitioner experience. It was essential that the approach be dynamic and evolve, incorporate live metrics and feedback from employees and be flexible enough to accommodate any pivots in the transformation strategy, including the dates set for the organisational design to be finalised and completed.

3.2.5 Research Methodology - Theoretical Perspectives

As detailed in the previous chapter, the current knowledge in organisational transformation and specifically the HR domain typically emphasises the organisation's priorities and the HR leader's requirement to deliver them. The research was, therefore, looking to explore the individual lived experience as guided by the exploration of psychology and applied social cognitive neuroscience alongside the broader business and HR knowledge. The knowledge review indicated this had been an under-researched area to date. Gathering and hearing the voices of employees, leaders and HR peers was core to the Research. Having the opportunity to do so in the middle of an integration programme enabled the research outcomes to make a distinct contribution to the organisational integration.

As the intention, therefore, was to create understanding from multiple views rather than an explanation, this signposted my ontological and epistemological assumptions. However, I first considered the worldviews typically adopted in research (Creswell, 2014). These include Crotty (1998), who summarised how, as humans, we construct meanings by interpreting our experiences, shaped by our personal stories, cultures and experiences, and that as researchers, we are then able to generate rather than discover meaning from our interactions with people.

3.2.5.1 Research Paradigm and Dimension: Interpretivism and Qualitative

I then further considered research paradigms that typically exist in international Human Resource Management (IHR), noting how much of the prior research in my specific field is typically undertaken to orient my approach. As indicated in Table 3, positivism and interpretivism are the two primary paradigms within research specific to IHR (Bonache and Festing, 2020).

Table 3: Research Paradigms in IHRM (Bonache and Festing, 2020, p.101)

Study dimension	Positivism		Interpretivism
	Quantitative	Qualitative	
Goals and basic assumptions			
Goal of the study	Explanation		Understanding
Ontological and epistemological assumption	Objective world that can be represented by concepts and propositions		We live in multiple, socially constructed views of social reality
How to study IHRM issues			
Research method	Quantitative and (positivist) qualitative methodologies, hybrid approach (mixed methods)		Preference for qualitative methodology
Constructing research questions	Gap-spotting		Problematisation
Researcher's role	Be detached, objective and value-free		Develop rapport and empathy
Sampling procedures	Statistical sampling: Probabilistic and non-probabilistic	Theoretical sampling	Theoretical and opportunistic sampling
Data collection techniques	Surveys, experiments, secondary data analysis, quantitatively coded documents	Interviews, participant observation, archival data, focus groups, ethnography document	
Constructing theory and (key) theoretical contribution	Theory testing Adding (independent, moderating and mediating) variables	Theory-building and/or theory elaboration (Positivist) grounded theory and analytic induction	Theory generation Identifying missing factors in existing literature, making the initial puzzle less surprising and more of a 'normal' or 'natural' event
The importance of context in theory construction	Context as an independent/control variable Often Decontextualisation	Context as a limitation	Theory of context generation
Quality indicators of data analysis	Converging explanation		Multiplicity of perspectives
Evaluation criteria	Validity and reliability		Rigour of the study as measured by alternative quality standards

With the research dimension selected as interpretivism, a qualitative study was determined to explore best the ‘individual lived experience’ within a given situation (Stake, 2010) rather than looking to understand the relationships with variables that would have indicated that a quantitative approach would be optimal (Creswell, 2014).

Turning next to ‘the set of common beliefs and agreements shared between scientists about how problems should be “understood and addressed”, Kuhn, 1962 p.45, I noted that research paradigms mostly add value by adopting theoretical perspectives that are congruent with my epistemology and therefore, it was necessary, to reflect upon my own beliefs.

My professional belief is that the Human Resources practice needs to be anchored on the human beings that inhabit organisations. With the volume of prior knowledge focusing on the organisational perspective, there was a unique opportunity to add to that knowledge by capturing employees' voices and sharing their experiences, which would require a fit-for-purpose method of enquiry to do so.

3.2.5.2 Phenomenology

The methodological approach has, therefore, been significantly influenced by phenomenology (Smith, Jarman and Osborn, 1999):

> “Phenomenology, being interested in the world as experienced by human beings, with all the complexity involved in real life situations and with all the nuances of the contexts in which they occur” Jackson and Cox (2020)

With origins and principles in philosophy (Gallagher and Zahavi, 2008), the distinct categories of the philosophy of phenomenology have resulted in a variety of research approaches available (Vagle, 2018) as summarised in Table 4.

3.2.5.3 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

I proposed to explore whether it would be feasible to access the lived experience of employees, leaders, and HR practitioners and to connect this back to existing knowledge in order to shed light and add to the knowledge. Every voice captured would, therefore, be unique, representing their lived experience. These experiences were not intended to be tested or validated but simply to provide real-time insight into a complex scenario and ultimately to add to the HR leader's knowledge through the research's identified themes.

Additionally, I had a personal sense of curiosity about the experience of employees and other HR peers. Therefore, I wanted to undertake a reflective opportunity of how this impacts their HR practice areas. As I consider the research methodologies available (Table 4), I noted the options available to me.

The emphasis created by inductive analysis, an example of which is Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), focussing on the lived experience and first-hand accounts and my positioning as an inside researcher suggested that it would be well suited to guide the exploration of this research and had personal resonance with my principles as an HR practitioner.

I also noted that interpretivism is a rare perspective in the area of IHRM research (Bonache and Festing, 2020), which, created a more significant opportunity for me to make a distinct contribution in my domain area.

While acknowledging and cognizant of criticism of IPA (Paley, 2017), this research aimed not to test a hypothesis but to connect the research findings back to the existing knowledge (Smith et al., 2009).

Table 4: Comparisons of typical phenomenological research methodologies (Jackson and Cox, 2020, p.76)

	Phenomenological psychology method	Interpretative phenomenological analysis	Heuristic research	Conceptual encounter
Theoretical underpinning/ associations	Transcendental phenomenology, Idiography	Idiography, Phenomenology, Hermeneutics, Symbolic Interactionism	Phenomenology, Idiography, Humanism, Constructivism	Phenomenological psychology, Humanism, Idiography, Interactionism
Main proponents	Giorgi and Giorgi (2013)	Smith et al. (2009)	Moustakas (1994)	de Rivera (1981)
Dimensions of differences				
Role of the researcher	Bracketing foreknowledge, comparing accounts, establishing a general structure of the phenomenon	Micro-analysing and interpreting with reflexivity the convergence and divergence in accounts to interpret the meaning of experiences	Researcher as an instrument for data collection, self-inquiry as well as the inquiry into the phenomenon	Gatekeeper of concept development, foreknowledge of researcher is included in the dialogue and analysis
Main purpose	The integrated picture (essence) of the phenomenon	A picture of similarity and variability of human experience	Personal change of the researcher and essence of the phenomenon	Elucidation of the structure that exists within psychological events
Role of theory	Theoretical assumptions bracketed Only description is offered	Theoretical propositions are explored and compared with existing literature alongside emerged themes at the final stage	Theoretical propositions are secondary to creating synthesis that could be seen as theory	Concept is gradually developed and can be seen as a theoretical proposition
Balance of text and visual means	Analysis of the observations or text	Analysis of text and own memos – other data collection methods are encouraged but not often used	Any means of data collection, creative approach to final synthesis	Concept can appear as a map or an 'elegant' model

3.2.5.4 The application of the research approach

The research would be positioned in a single time-bound case (a sizeable corporate acquisition). Therefore, the generalisability of any theme's comparison would be limited only to data collected during the event. However, as a research practitioner, I would interpret this data and make links based on my prior experience, experience of the specific event, and existing literature. Therefore, while acknowledging the limitations of my approach, I assessed this to be the optimal methodology to deliver the specific research objectives.

I simultaneously have the roles of:

- An employee who is experiencing the change.
- The HR leader that is responsible for delivering the change.
- The Insider-Researcher.

The triad of roles allowed me to fully commit to the ontological and epistemological demands of inductive analysis and “to think and dwell” (Giorgi et al., 2017, p. 83) within the framework.

This approach would require me to interpret the accounts of the people to:

> “Gain a deep understanding of individual’s perceptions … gaining insights into other people’s motivations and actions and cutting through the clutter of assumptions and conventional wisdom … exposing limitations in current thinking … developing widened and alternative perspectives” (Costley, Elliott and Gibbs, 2010, p. 87).

The premise of interpretivism is that the world is interpreted through the classification schemas of the mind (May and Williams, 1996). Reality is different, dealing as it does with the actions of the individual ideographic. I was seeking the ‘insider view’ Blaikie (2000, p. 115) to understand people’s reality and interpret with reflexivity how this can shape the HR role, to align with the learnings from the knowledge review, which demonstrates that while the human brain responds to change in the same physiological manner, how we interpret the change will further depend on our beliefs, mindsets, and life experiences.
Therefore, because each human mind will create its unique reality, Phenomenology requires us to challenge our prevailing understanding and experience to allow new meanings to emerge, unadulterated by our preconceptions and using tools to reduce our bias.

In this context, the key is gaining the subject's subjective experience by putting myself, as the researcher, in the place of the other employees. As an employee experiencing the change, I would be in a position to do so. Hence, phenomenology became an exploration of the prevailing cultural understandings via the employee’s personal experience because this inductive approach seeks to articulate individual reality. Building on Heidegger's (1962) phenomenological concepts of the workplace and how, through his notion of circumspection, the work experience can be described and understood in this manner.

Therefore, based on the above considerations and my worldview, being that ‘basic set of beliefs that guide action’ (Guba, 1990, p.17), I concluded that:

> T*he overarching philosophical orientation of the research would be based on the human experience (phenomenological) and interpretivism.*

Nevertheless, it is acknowledged that it could have been feasible to approach the research opportunity using different methodologies. However, rather than take a purely organisational or purely employee perspective, I am also endeavouring to investigate the multiple, unique views of people, seeking to understand their conceptualisation, needs and reactions to the events happening to them in a way that will also shed new light on this topic within the HR practice area (Nicolini, 2013) and ultimately inform HRs evolving role.

3.2.5.5 The Research approach challenges.

The choice of research approach created the possibility of conflicts:

- I was uniquely positioned as an insider researcher due to my HR leader role.
- The research was designed to operate in parallel with the overall integration programme that I was leading as the HR leader.
- From an HR perspective, I was responsible for the overall organisational design of the integrated organisation, delivering synergy savings and managing the over-arching HR process to enable this to happen.
- The employee experience and HR initiatives were examined in the context of the integration and in response to the initiatives I designed and implemented.

As such, the examination provided real-time feedback on HR. The potential conflict of interests was carefully considered in the ethical review process undertaken at the proposal stage and discussed with my supervisor.

The choice of research approach additionally created the possibility of a large and unwieldy outcome:

- There were 1300 Asia-based employees at the time of the acquisition that, based on the knowledge review, would each have narratives and lenses based on their brain physiology and the culture in which they were raised.
- The geographical footprint of the Research encapsulates cultural differences, including:
    - Monarchies (Middle East).
    - Communism (China, Vietnam).
    - Developed economies (Australia, New Zealand, Japan, and Singapore).
    - Emerging economies with young demographics (Indonesia and the Philippines).
    - Geographies with a complex relationship with Mainland China (Taiwan and Hong Kong).
    - Muslim-dominated cultures (Malaysia and Indonesia).

It was recognised that the 1300 employee perceptions would each differ, and I proposed to both acknowledge and utilise the experience of others and myself during the transformation.

3.2.5.6 The Research approach's wicked problem

These choices of research approach determined the golden thread of this research:

To inform how the HR function needed to evolve, to support the differing employee perceptions while also endeavouring to deliver the organisational priorities. The Paradox-Navigator in action.

The context of this research, set in the broader landscape of the knowledge review, clarified that this was indeed a multi-nuanced, ‘wicked problem’. I then determined the research method in order to fulfil the purpose, aims and objectives.

3.2.6 Selection of Qualitative Research

Holding the duality of employee and organisational perspectives supports the inference from the broad landscape of prior knowledge as outlined in the previous chapter. By considering the methods utilised in these research fields and specifically within HR, I could consider the most appropriate positioning in my research context. As outlined in 3.2.5, my decision based on my worldview was to adopt a broad phenomenological interpretivist position, recognising that the participants' lived experiences would be a valid way of knowing how they experience organisational change.

Qualitative research was ultimately selected to support the purpose, aims and objectives for reasons outlined as follows.

> Qualitative Research has been defined as “any type of research that produces findings not arrived at by statistical procedures or other means of quantification” (Strauss and Corbin 1990, p. 10–11).
>
> Locke and Golden-Biddle (2004) also take the position that qualitative research usually occurs on the grounds in which the research subjects work, as is the case here in my research domain, my workplace.
>
> Qualitative research frequently utilises techniques that include statistics and findings, which are subsequently communicated in a non-

> quantitative style. The essence of qualitative analysis is primarily based on induction, stressing the formulation or explanation of theory instead of purer theoretical testing (Bitektine, 2008).

Arguably, the intention for inductive qualitative analysis is firstly to appreciate the individual perspectives of the target group studied and then subsequently to share this interpretation with academic peers. Additionally, one of the aims of this research was to share this interpretation with an HR practitioner cohort.

Unlike more conventional quantitative analysis, the inductive qualitative analysis method involves deductive approaches in how subjects are evaluated to determine whether there is alignment or divergence with my hypothesis or view. In inductive qualitative analysis, the role of the researcher and the subjects are, to some degree, transposed. Instead of forcing my perspective on the subjects, I rely on them to share their unique perspectives, which shape the research. I determined that this method best fits the research's purpose, objectives and aims (Bryman, 2012).

I observe here that the most significant HR competency model has been conducted by the RBL Group (RBL) in regular five-year intervals since 1987, as described earlier in the knowledge review. RBL uses a predominately quantitative research methodology, yielding data from over 125,000 survey respondents and participation from most of the leading HR Associations in the world.

I was not seeking to replicate or replace this research but instead extend one particular finding. My area of interest was in the ‘Paradox Navigator’ domain as defined by the RBL research in 2016. I considered it appropriate to use a qualitative approach to go deeper and explore this concept in the context of transformation and to add the specific perspective of employees, which, in my view, is absent in the prior RBL research undertaken.

3.2.7 Why?

Qualitative research approaches have been deemed suitable within organisational contexts as they support the following:

> *Creating Opportunities for New Research Questions.*

As previously discussed, factors such as globalisation, workforce demographic changes, technology and digitalisation, and the advent of social networking and remote working are transforming organisations, work processes, and interpersonal relationships in the workplace. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the forced working-from-home patterns for many employees has been an undeniable catalyst for changes HR has been required to lead.

HR practitioners seek to understand why and how these changing patterns can implicate individual behaviours in organisations. As Rousseau and Fried (2001) stated: ‘Research is a product of its time’.

In their review of organisational behaviour research since World War II, Goodman and Whetten (1998) observed that the researchers’ focus shifts depending upon the pressing issues of the day:

> Individual productivity research dominated in the aftermath of the war, focusing on rebuilding civilian economies.
>
> Over time, workers became more skilled, affluent, and educated. With this change, research topics shifted to reflect the rise of team structures and growing concern over the quality of work-life balance and employee engagement.

Over time, the meaning of various constructs and the factors giving rise to them can change, and it is essential to acknowledge that our constructs can change over time, i.e. the meaning of the organisational terms can shift, often unannounced – e.g. ‘engagement’.

As I reflect on the events of 2020 and the emerging trends of 2023 and beyond, these comments from over twenty years ago still resonate with the shift of working patterns today. Indeed, the development of new theories will likely result from inductive qualitative analysis, which is best placed to articulate the changes impacting organisations by its very construct. I further note that many influential theories in organisational behaviour that inform HR practice have remained unaltered since the 1960s and 1970s (Suddaby, Hardy, and Huy, 2011). I would propose that new theories built by qualitative analysis and interpreted within a practitioner domain, such as this research, should be more broadly considered.

3.2.8 Influences

A researcher may opt to apply qualitative techniques based on the intended and sustained use of the findings. Qualitative analysis manages influence through two strands:

> Firstly, it is simpler to convey results to organisational populations such as business leaders due to its focus on comprehending the world perspectives of target groups. However, this simplicity of conveyance would change according to the qualitative technique employed.
>
> Secondly, inductive qualitative analysis has been shown to be conceivably influential in terms of intellectual expertise. An example of this level of influence is that three-quarters of papers awarded the Best Paper Award by the Academy of Management Journal (AMJ) were qualitative (Bansal and Corley 2011).

Possible explanations for the influence of qualitative papers are partially due to the richness of accounts conveyed in their data (Pollock and Bono, 2013) and insights gained about how individuals behave in organisations. However, the scarcity of qualitative analyses in prominent business, HR and psychology books leaves its possible influence in this field an observable problem.

My objective was to investigate HR Leadership practice within a turbulent time of change, a context that included employees and management and I, therefore, concluded qualitative research to be an appropriate approach.

As a qualitative researcher, I collected stories to guide and shape new considerations for my HR practice and other practitioners.

As a researcher, was my role to become an HR storyteller?

I first hesitated to use the term 'storyteller' within the context of academic research until I recalled researcher Professor Brene Brown's (2010) opinion that 'stories are data with soul'. I, therefore, approached this ontological approach with a storyteller mindset, intent on capturing the individual narratives to weave into a robust HR outcome.

As I then moved to the conceptual design of the research, I paid specific attention to how best to build a level of rigour into the interpretivist qualitative design, specifically considering how to build a data structure for codes, themes, and the resulting dimensions. I considered Gioia et al. (2013) and then sought specific examples of this approach with HR research within specific organisations, Harsch and Festing (2019, 2020), and Muratbekova-Touron et al. (2018), which guided my direction.

3.2.9 Situation

This research was designed to operate parallel with the overall integration programme I was appointed to lead as an HR professional. From a broader organisational perspective, I was responsible for the overall organisational design of the integrated organisation, delivering the financial headcount savings and managing the over-arching process to enable this.

The examination of the employee experience and HR initiatives will, therefore, be in response to the context of the situation and the initiatives I was designing and implementing. As such, the examination would provide me with real-time feedback on the effectiveness of the HR functions outputs to enable me to modify initiatives in real-time to deliver better. The potential conflict of interest will be discussed further in the ethics section.

3.3 Research Design - Data Collection

3.3.1 A Phased Approach

As a practitioner-researcher who was simultaneously the HR functional leader and the lead of the integration programme, I potentially had access to the entire employee population, which can be categorised as follows:

1. The Executive Team
2. The HR team
3. All employees across multiple countries in Asia Pacific and the Middle East
4. External HR Leaders from other industries and outside my network.
5. HR Scholars

Data Collection:

The data was collected over three phases:

Phase One – Masterclasses

Employee Toolkit:

Masterclass design, delivery, and evaluation.

Phase Two – Focus Groups

Internal Voices of Employees:

Focus Group Discussions.

Phase Three – Interviews

Internal Leaders and Outside in HR Perspective:

In-depth interviews of Internal Leaders, HR Leaders, and HR scholar.

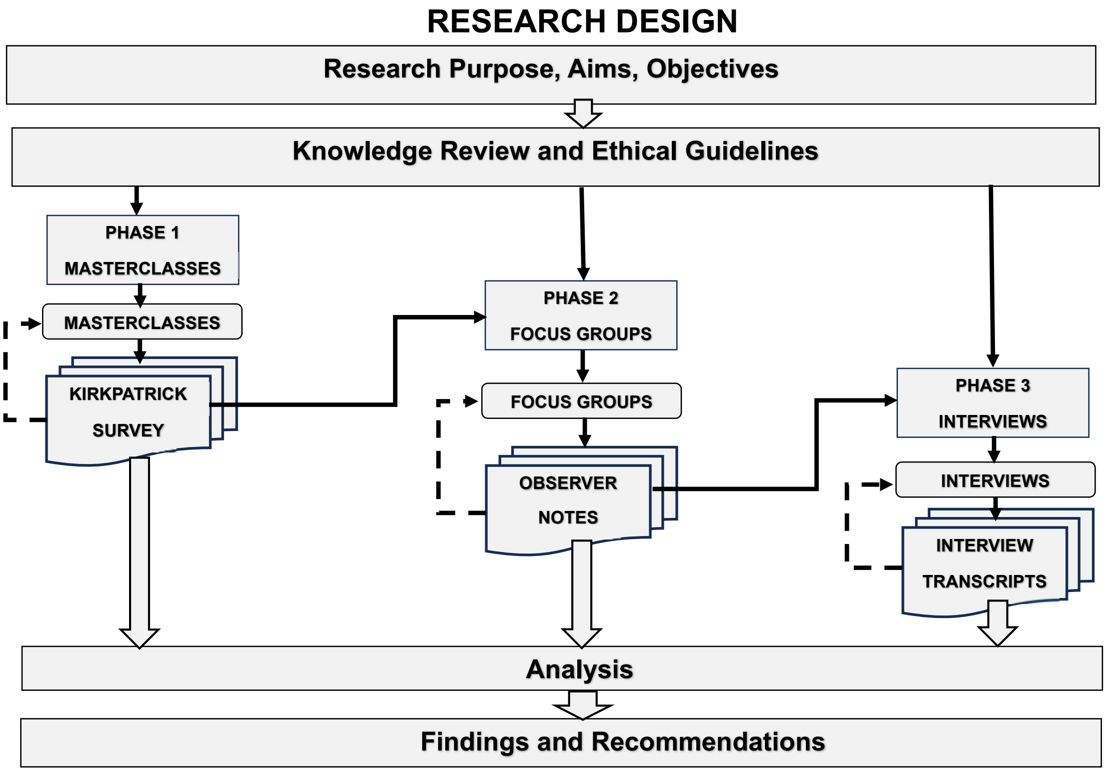


Figure 8: Research Design

The first phase of Masterclasses was designed to follow an iterative process with rolling phases of data collection, with the collected data from each phase informing the design of the subsequent phases, as shown in Figure 8. This iterative approach of analysis and interpretation allowed me to determine in real-time if any evolving changes to the differing intervention approaches were required.

The collected data from the three phases provided the sources of data for Thematic Analysis (TA) to gain the perspectives of employees impacted by the transformation in order to determine the impact of the HR interventions.

Using multiple data sources from the three phases allowed triangulation (Yin, 2003; Stake, 2010) of the data to identify both convergence and divergence of findings.

Multiple data sources were to be collected and thematically analysed to gain the perspectives of employees impacted by the transformation to determine the impact of the HR interventions. The multiple data sources will allow triangulation (Yin, 2003; Stake, 2010) of the data to identify both convergence and divergence of findings, following an iterative process with rolling phases of data collection, analysis, and interpretation to determine if any evolving changes to the intervention approaches are required.

3.3.2 Phase One: Employee Masterclass

Masterclasses for the context of this research are defined as a series of employee training sessions deploying content to cover topics including change management, resilience, and well-being.

The design of the Masterclass session was based upon the prior knowledge review, which proposed that when individuals understand the physiological response to change and have learnt coping mechanisms, they are better able to manage their stress responses and improve their experience of change. As part of the evaluation process, each iteration of the Masterclass was analysed for learnings to evolve the design for the next Masterclass delivery.

For managers and leaders, the knowledge review indicates that managing themselves and leading others is critical in times of change. Therefore, enabling employees to optimally manage and lead would be a strategic imperative of the integration programme. Indeed, I anticipated this to be an example of where people and organisational requirements could coexist. As part of the evolved offering of HR, I intended to deliver three streams of Masterclasses to:

1. Equip employees to learn change management skills based on knowledge from the business literature, HR domain and the emerging fields of coaching and social cognitive neuroscience.
2. Enhance their resilience and well-being on a personal level.
3. Develop capability levels of the HR team around this newer area of change management and integrate it into their core HR activities

Leaders in the business would be invited to attend some Masterclasses, and the application of digital apps was to be open to any employee who wished to attend. The Masterclasses would run in English in person or via conference call technology – Zoom to allow for geographical limitations.

Attendance was optional, which was an important consideration. Given my role as the HR leader, I could have mandated attendance, but I did not want ‘hostage’ attendees, and I was curious to understand the level of interest.

3.3.2.1 Design of the Masterclass Series

The literature concurs that effective training or development depends on knowing what is required - for the individual, the function, and the organisation. This Training Needs Analysis (TNA) aimed to define the differences between the actual and desired situations and then rank and prioritise the training (Rothwell and Kazanas, 2004).

The TNA, therefore, consists of collecting, analysing, and comparing concrete (measurable) data representing a system's actual 'performance' with its desired 'performance', including the objectives, outputs, or variables in terms of actions. The TNA is performed with the overall goal of identifying, as accurately as possible, the specific needs of the clientele to be affected by the activities of an educational or training system' (LaPointe 1992, p99).

It is suggested that the TNA must be carried out before training activities are organised since it improves the success likelihood of those activities. The analysis ensures synergy among individual learning needs and the requirement for effectiveness and strategic organisational development (Potter, 2003).

MacGehee and Thayer (1961) provided a three-tiered approach for needs analysis, looking at the organisational or business plan objectives, the knowledge, skills, and abilities required by roles, and how individuals map against these. The design and content of the resulting programmes are ultimately designed to fill the identified gaps.

In this context, the objectives were based on the available HR data demonstrating limited capability and experience within the organisation in managing self and leading others through change.

The business imperative was clear – *keep performance high*. I held this requirement alongside the research aim of providing support to employees.

3.3.2.2 **Evaluation of the Masterclass series**

The Masterclasses were assessed following the Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick (2016) training evaluation model. Although initially developed in 1955, Kirkpatrick's four levels of training evaluation are still the best-known model within the HR domain for analysing and evaluating the results of training and educational programs. The model can theoretically be applied to any style of training, both informal and formal, to determine aptitude based on four levels of criteria. I acknowledge that there are criticisms of Kirkpatrick's model; however, the focus of this research was not to test or design a new evaluation model, and I, therefore, adopted the standard model used in practice by HR.

Applying the Kirkpatrick model to this context:

Level 1 (Reaction) measures how participants immediately react to the training.

Level 2 (Learning) analyses if they genuinely understood the training. A mandatory post-course participant questionnaire was designed to measure these impacts,

Level 3 (Behaviour) considers whether participants are using and applying the learnings, which will be established by a self-reported change in the participant's behaviours over time. The behavioural changes will be discussed in one-to-one meetings and focus groups.

Level 4 results determine if the material positively impacted the organisation as determined by organisational well-being indicators, validated by employees' mental, psychological, or emotional aspects. At an organisational level, these can be measured by metrics, including levels of absenteeism (Danna and Griffin, 1999).

Any level 3 Behavioural changes that the participant has applied or observed were self-reported during the Phase Two interviews and focus groups. The collected data was thematically analysed to identify underlying workplace themes that instigate the application of the learnings together with behavioural changes reported by the participant or observed in others by the participant.

Any recommendations to improve the Masterclasses were adopted and adapted in real-time for the subsequent classes, thereby adopting reflective practices.

The employees benefited by learning and adopting new skills designed to support their transition, and they were able to provide immediate feedback and suggestions to improve these interventions in real-time.

However, these skills did not impact their circumstances – it is important to emphasise that the employees had minimal control and choices in this transformation. The only choice was whether they accepted a role within the new organisation. The corporate brand, roles and employee experience changed, and the transition was unilaterally imposed on employees.

I had anticipated that there would be benefits at the individual, organisational and HR practice levels by determining how the affected employees ‘think, act and feel’ during this programme and for HR to provide the employees with tools and techniques to aid them to thrive during this transition period.

3.3.2.3 Interpretation of the data collected from Phase 1 masterclasses.

To analyse the Masterclass participants’ feedback together with the observational notes from the trainers, Thematic Analysis was selected based on its suitability for qualitatively analysing multiple data sources, including interviews and focus groups (Terry et al., 2017; Flick, 2014) and its applicability to support ground-up inductive analysis and coding (Terry et al., 2017).

3.3.3 Phase Two: Employee Focus Group Discussions

HR conducted three focus groups across North Asia and South-East Asia in order to understand the phenomenological experience of junior employees, selecting markets with the most significant impacts. The impacts were determined by the new business organisational design, using purposive criteria (Mason, 2006) to include the locations facing the most significant impact of the acquisition, e.g. office closure. Each focus group would comprise up to 8 people, all at a peer level, in addition to conversational notes, other observed dimensions, including actor and feelings and personal goals (Spradley, 1980), to increase the depth of the observation.

3.3.3.1 Why Focus Group Discussions

An IDI conducted in a group setting is defined as a ‘Focus Group Discussion’ (FGD). Interaction is generated with an introduced stimulus between a small group of people, who respond and draw on what others in the group have said. The participants typically have similar work or personal profiles. An established tool in consumer research, there are many definitions of a focus group in the literature. However, features like organised discussion (Kitzinger, 1994), collective activity (Powell and Single, 1996), social events (Goss and Leinbach, 1996) and interaction (Kitzinger, 1994) identify the contribution that focus groups make.

Powell and Single (1996) define a focus group as “a group of individuals selected and assembled by researchers to discuss and comment on, from personal experience, the topic that is the subject of the research” (Powell and Single, 1996, p. 499).

The primary purpose of focus group research is to draw upon respondents’ attitudes, feelings, beliefs, experiences, and reactions and are particularly useful when there are power differences between the participants and decision-makers (Morgan and Kreuger, 1993) as there were in this context.

There are benefits to the participants, allowing them to share their views and be involved in limited decision-making processes that affect them (Race et al.,1994). As with the other interviews, I anticipated receiving negative, neutral, and occasional positive feedback on the integration process, which would enable me to address the concerns and issues, where feasible, in real time.

I acknowledge the limitation of the handwritten notes if recording consent is not given and the subjective limitations of these notes providing lower control over the data produced (Morgan and O’Sullivan, 1998) than in Masterclass feedback or one-to-one interviews. It was essential to accommodate the cultural nuances of the distinct locations. The stimulus questions were intended to be similar to the questions asked in the one-to-one interviews, namely:

- Their experience of the integration journey to date.
- Their view on the cultural alignment between the organisations

- How they have applied the learnings from the Masterclasses.
- Suggestions on how HR could best support people during these processes.
- Any other topic they would like to discuss concerning their experience.

I noted in the design process that participant profiles must be relevant to the subject matter and may comprise demographic characteristics and knowledge on the topic of enquiry. FGD may work better with specific profiles of participants, such as those with an extroverted personality preference (Stewart and Shamdasani, 2014). However, I was unable to find any specific research regarding North or South-East Asian cultural nuances for the effectiveness of FGD, which was particularly relevant given the demographic mix of the participants.

FGD aims to encourage participants to respond candidly and provide rich information, but this assumes that they are set up and facilitated in a manner that would inspire trust from all participants. Trust is one of the critical desired outcomes for HR identified in the knowledge review. As a researcher, I was aware that the attempted establishment of trust would bring into sharp significance the tripartite nature of my roles in the organisation: HR Leader, employee, and researcher.

FGDs help evaluate development plans that prepare and manage organisations and their employees for change. Riggio (2018) found that many Organisational Development (OD) teams (a function of HR) use FGD methods to deal with issues. The use of a well-designed FGD method could improve group or organisational resolution of problems. The OD/HR Leader or agent of change, such as I, may act as an FGD moderator and facilitate the creation of data and insight from groups in the organisation.

Such interventions would allow an organisation to consider its practices and issues (Friedlander, 1980). They can be achieved by opening the communication channels and increasing the participation of employees in the organisation in which they work (Monge, Cozzens and Contractor, 1992) via the FGD. FGD-involved employees are more likely to understand critical organisational issues and are more inclined to help the organisation achieve its goals. Indeed, the efficacy of FGD for the successful adoption and execution of any systemic change has been demonstrated by an evaluation of OD processes (Riggio, 2018).

Given that Fox was preparing for momentous change and there were the twin objectives of firstly understanding and then supporting their employee experience of this change, FGD was deemed an appropriate tool. It would enable a more expansive data collection to hear more voices and stories. Additionally, given the Asian nuances of hierarchy and conscious of my seniority as a Senior Vice President, I also determined that for the junior employees, a group setting would provide a greater sense of safety in numbers and, I hoped, increase participation. The recommended number of people per group is usually six to ten (O'Gorman and MacIntosh, 2014). However, some researchers have used up to fifteen people (Goss and Leinbach, 1996) or as few as four (Kitzinger,1994). I was concerned that people would not wish to participate.

Due to their robustness and flexibility, qualitative inductive approaches to organisational research, such as in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (Landy and Conte, 2004; McBride and Schostak, 2004; Spector, 2019) provide rich insight into factors for employee experiences and employee behaviour in organisations. IDIs and FGDs permit an interviewer to ask questions and probe for further information or explanation on any interviewee's response. In quantitative research, where interviewees are limited to fixed response options, this flexibility is not feasible; therefore, IDIs and FGDs were deemed the preferred method for this research.

3.3.3.2 Interpretation of the data collected from Phase Two focus groups.

The group responses and observational notes were to be thematically analysed following the Braun and Clarke (2006) model, capturing the voices of employee experiences across multiple locations as will be described.

3.3.4 Phase Three: In-Depth Interviews

In-depth interviews were conducted with internal leaders of Fox and later externally with HR Leaders and a leading HR academic.

An interview has been described as the social sciences ‘favoured digging tool’ (Kvale, 1996). Interviews may be structured, semi-structured, or unstructured. However, in most cases, these are combined with other forms of data collection. Interviews are versatile and dynamic for qualitative analysis and are therefore known as In-depth Interviews (IDI) (Taylor and Bogdan, 1998). The in-depth interview is ‘repeated face-to-face encounters between the researcher and participants, directed towards understanding informants’ perspectives on their lives, experiences, or situations as expressed in their own words’ (Ehigie and Ehigie, 2015). The IDI is semi-structured and allows for the latent attitudes and feelings of the respondent to be examined in detail. In-depth interviews may be conducted in person, by telephone, via Video Conference (VC) or by electronic mail (email). I intended to perform as many in-person interviews as logistics would allow.

Qualitative interviews were described by Taylor and Bogdan (1998) as unstructured, non-standardised and open-ended. The qualitative interview is generally intended for a dialogue between equals instead of a formal exchange of questions and answers. Contrary to the interviews in quantitative studies that provide subjects with standardised questions and responses, the interviewer has a dual role, not only acting in the role of impersonal data collector but additionally performing the role as the means or tool for data collection. These dual roles are because not only does the interviewer obtain answers from interviewees, but also determines what questions are needed to ask for reliable responses.

It has been established that the interviewer should be highly experienced or qualified because they are expected to establish a relationship with the interviewee and quickly adapt to the personality and mood of the interviewee. Interviewers should know the topic and be able to speak to the interviewee in the latter's language, using vocabulary common in the environment. The interviewer must also know when to explore a response to explain further or broaden an interview topic. Since an interview usually lasts between 20 and 120 minutes, a highly detailed picture is possible to be obtained.

With this criterion in mind, I was able to assess my competence and capability to undertake them. As an HR practitioner, one-to-one meetings and interviews are vital to my work, whether for the recruitment process, talent reviews or internal audit purposes where misconduct has been alleged. I have received training in interview structure and behavioural-based interviewing. I assessed (and confirmed my assessment with my critical friend) that I would be able to meet the required criteria and perform the role of an effective Interviewer.

There are two distinct styles of IDIs available to employ.

The first style is to gather the life history or autobiography of the interviewee. In this technique, the interviewer attempts to capture the outstanding experiences and definitions of these experiences in a person's life. Interviewees present their opinions about their lives in their own words, and the interviewer might ask for certain aspects to be elaborated. The interviewer ensures that the reported life history covers all matters that should be known and attempts to verify that no key facts or events are being distorted or dishonestly given. The distinction between life history and autobiographies is that the interviewer actively seeks the experiences and perspectives of the person and weaves the life history into a finished document.

The second style of IDI, which I ultimately adopted, focuses more on knowledge of events and activities that the interviewer cannot observe directly, in this instance, how the acquisition by the acquiring company is impacting them. The interviewees assume the role of observers in an observed field. Such interviewees are ideally well-informed, articulate, thoughtful, and experts on the organisational phenomena and participants being investigated (Zikmund, 2013). The details provided by such expert interviewees are not merely their subjective opinions but also their expert perceptions of how others should respond in these circumstances (while removing their personal bias from the observation).

In organisational settings, IDIs can be widely used to augment role-related information gathered from employees, managers, or other individuals knowledgeable on enquiry. Information gathered could be applied, as an example to HR purposes, to generate detailed and accurate job descriptions (Levine, Ash, and Bennett, 1980). Information regarding organisational variables such as employee satisfaction and engagement has been obtained using in-depth interviews (Riggio, 2018).

A purposive sampling method was utilised, given the accessibility to the internal employee base to select the participants for semi-structured Interviews. The criterion for inclusion from the selection set of senior-level executives was based upon the higher impact changes to their roles and responsibilities during the acquisition programme, and ten participants were selected.

Semi-structured, narrative-based interviewing, most commonly associated with qualitative research, would be applied (Mason, 2006), providing a flexible and fluid structure with topics to include:

- Their experience of integration journey to date
- Their view on the cultural alignment between the organisations
- How they have applied the learnings from the Masterclasses.
- Suggestions on how HR could best support them as people and leadership (of the organisation) during these processes.
- Any other topic they would like to discuss concerning their experience.

Flexibility was vital, with my dual role of the researcher and HR Leader, being able to respond to the ‘conversation with a purpose’ (Burgess, 1984), which underlies the phenomenological position of this research. Due to the nature of the internal interviews and acquisition, handwritten notes were taken during the conversation to record the discussion, which was collated and anonymised during the write-up.

Within the Third Phase of the research, I then gathered an “outside perspective” by interviewing peer HR leaders. These were identified by creating a list of practitioners in organisations that had undergone significant change and were approached via a well-connected HR head-hunter to determine interest in participation. The interviews were semi-structured to focus on the experience of a significant organisational change and the practitioner’s views on the evolution and future of the HR function. For the external interviews where an audio recording was agreed upon, recordings and handwritten notes were taken during the conversation to record the discussion.

The final voice within phase three would be that of an HR academic. The selection was Professor David Ulrich, given the focus and volume of research he has published on HR capabilities and function. An audio recording was agreed upon, together with handwritten notes, to record the discussion.

3.3.4.1 **Interpretation of the data collected from Phase Three interviews.**

The interview and observational notes (plus transcripts where an audio recording were agreed upon) of the interviews were again thematically analysed following Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six-stage model of Thematic Analysis. In this inductive manner, I focused on the individual experiences of the same reality to identify professional and personal patterns and themes, Braun and Clarke (2006). This analysis of the profoundly personal employee experience of the integration journey and feedback on their experiences regarding the type and effectiveness of HR support would also create suggestions for improvements from HR.

3.4 Research Design – Data Analysis

The following section descried the process undertaken.

3.4.1 Qualitative Data Analysis: Thematic Analysis

The qualitative data analysis was achieved following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-stage model of Thematic Analysis (Table 5) of the collected data:

- Phase 1 Masterclass participants' feedback and observational notes.
- Phase 2 Focus Group's response notes and observational notes.
- Phase 3 Interview transcriptions and observational notes.

Themes were developed that summarise and coalesce the experience of the transition period (DeSantis and Ugarriza, 2000) and their inter-relationships. Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-stage Thematic Analysis, the themes were defined and refined.

The six-stage analysis of Familiarisation of Data, Code, Generate Themes, Review Themes, Define Themes and Report were used to inductively analyse the data through repeated immersion and familiarity with the data with deeper latent codes (Terry et al., 2017). This option is identified as an insider and researcher on a dual-role subjective assessment. Due to the nature of the subjective inductive latent coding, quality assurance will not be based on multiple coders with a statistically calculated inter-coder reliability score (Yardley, 2017). However, it is argued that by focusing on self-reflection, following a systematic TA approach, the greater depth of engagement that is required by inductive latent coding and participating in multiple iterations of the thematic review phase, quality will be assured rather than focusing only on the accuracy of the coding phase (Terry et al., 2017).

3.4.2 Inside researcher

I openly acknowledge the tensions inherent in situating my research within this context where I hold multiple roles as an employee, HR/change leader and researcher, holding the duality of the employee needs while also being tasked by global leadership to implement the notable change that would impact them.

The most significant potential limitation to the research was me. With the establishment of my personal beliefs and the appropriate epistemological and ontological stances, of immediate concern would therefore be the impact of me on the research. I was also experiencing the same phenomenon as the employees and leaders; I was fully inhabiting their world as an inside researcher and an employee. I needed to remain cognisant of the risk of my perspectives unduly shaping the research outcomes:

"Researchers, in continuously interacting with those being researched, inevitably influence and structure research process and their outcomes" (Mruck and Bruer 2003, p. 1.)

3.4.3 Reflective Journal

In adopting this type of research, I, therefore, needed to utilise reflexivity. I would need to acknowledge all of the aspects of myself that would influence how I was undertaking the research.

Therefore, I am choosing to make my own experiences and feelings visible as a recognised part of this research process by creating a Reflective Journal.

Journaling is a strategy often utilised to stimulate reflexivity, examine 'personal assumptions and goals' and clarify "individual belief systems and subjectivities" (Russell and Kelly, 2002, p. 2). As a qualitative researcher, I am concerned by what Denzin and Lincoln (1994, p. 501) refer to as 'the interpretive crisis' and bias in qualitative research, particularly given my multiple roles as HR Leader, employee, researcher, and researcher as the interviewer. Scheurich (2014) proposes that research interviewing can be reconceptualised by making the 'baggage' we bring to the research visible through reflection.

Boden, Kenway, and Epstein (2005) stated that less experienced researchers are often not made aware of the “muddle, confusion, mistakes, obstacles, and errors” (p. 70) that make up the research process and that this is exacerbated when the results of research projects are presented as “a seamless, neat and linear process” (Boden, Kenway, and Epstein, 2005, p. 70).

Given the scale and complexity of the research context and my roles, I proposed that keeping and using a Reflective Journal can make the messiness visible to myself and to my supervisor or critical friend, who can then better guide the outputs.

3.4.4 Critical Friend

Given the constraints of the non-disclosure agreement that I have signed with Fox, which limits what I could share with external parties, I invited the most senior HR practitioner in the internal team to take on the primary role of a critical friend. This person was a consultant hired explicitly for the integration programme; therefore, the typical manager/subordinate relationship was absent. Achinstein and Meyer (1997) claim there is an ‘uneasy marriage’ created by this role because “The traditional dichotomy and hierarchical relationship between friendship and critique makes the notion of critical friends hardly plausible” (p. 5). However, as Watling et al. (1998) and Swaffield (2007) suggest, a critical friend can balance support and challenge appropriately. The relationship promotes productive analysis and where trust, engagement and commitment must be present for the term critical friendship to be accurately applied (Swaffield, 2007). My colleague fulfilled all these requirements and was well-suited for this role.

As an HR practitioner engaged in building the potential of employees, the feedback concept is a trusted component of my HR practice. From a research perspective, the importance of feedback has been explored as a prerequisite to learning, which subsequently introduced the role of the critical friend (Senge, 1992) and later the complexities of the role (MacBeath, 1998). I was, therefore, confident that my friend would give constructive feedback and that I had the emotional maturity to hear it.

According to Costa and Kallick (1993), a critical friend is defined as a trusted person who asks provocative questions, provides data for examination through an alternative lens, and offers critique as a friend. A critical friend becomes invested in the output and context and fully understands the work and the desired outcomes, and consequently, the critical friend can become active in promoting the work. Dean, Matt and Wood (1992) and Ainscow and Southworth (1996) describe the critical friend lens as a fresh pair of eyes for the researcher. Dimmock and Hattie (1996) suggest that introducing another perspective is essential for viewing a situation in a new light. This approach would be critical given the complexity of the research context.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

As a practitioner-researcher, the HR Leader and an employee experiencing the integration, there are multiple considerations for my research, and I am fully cognisant of the potential conflicts.

As a researcher, having completed the Middlesex Online Research Ethics (MORE) process, I was familiar with and agreed to adhere to the Middlesex University research requirements. I prepared and submitted the participant guidance and consent forms and the MORE submission, which was reviewed and approved available in Appendix One.

From a Practitioner perspective, as a Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), I further adhered to the Code of Conduct, which was integral to the MORE submission.

As an Employee, I was bound by an operating code of conduct at Fox and compliance with a series of policies that mandated a standard of ethical behaviour, including confidentiality. I have received and submitted consent from

Fox to conduct this research. I am further bound by a Non-Disclosure Agreement (NDA) from Fox and committed to ensuring that the employee data is dealt with in accordance with The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) 2016/679. Brinkmann and Kvale (2005) advise that when conducting interviews, research ethics are as important as the methodology, and the inside researcher must be aware of the power dynamics at play. All the company, individuals or groups' identifiable names were removed from the write-up in order to protect their anonymity (Costley et al., 2010). I will, however, identify the country of citizenship where appropriate to explore the cultural nuances further.

The research operated as a separate but parallel process to the transformation programme. The latter would occur regardless of the research but not vice versa. The research will provide insight into but not influence the change outcomes and was intended to create additional value for employees. The employees of Fox were in a scenario of enforced change; their consent to the acquisition was not required, sought or even necessary, and neither was their consent to the integration programme. Consent was required for voluntary participation in the focus groups, interviews and development interventions designed to enable the Fox employees to navigate the integration better. Given the vulnerability that some people were experiencing, the communications specified that none of the data would be used or shared with Fox for any reason, especially for role selection purposes, and all data was limited to evaluate how the HR function could best support their needs.

3.6 Limitations of the Research

The overall transformation programme was both broad and deep, with this research running in a parallel track alongside it, adding to the complexity. There were a number of factors relating to the programme that were outside of my control, including the timing of decisions made by the acquiring company global business leaders on organisational design and global communications with employees.

These factors meant that the methodology had to be reactive rather than fixed. The methodology, therefore, was deliberately designed to be flexible, to pivot where necessary and required dynamic real-time modifications.

Given that the research focuses on the individual experience of employees and the contextual role of HR within an interpretive framework, it will be difficult to validate or replicate the data collected. As a practitioner with prior experience in acquisitions, I had anticipated that there would be a range of emotions experienced, ranging from excitement to anxiety and fear, including myself. These themes were explored and developed appropriately and with care and sensitivity for all people involved.

Therefore, I am deliberately limited to describing the experience with a perspective on how my HR team and I evolved our approaches in real time to enable employees and organisations to undertake the transformation.

Participation was entirely voluntary, and there was always an inherent risk that employees may have merely opted out of the process, which would have then limited the data collection.

3.7 Conclusion

In order to achieve the purpose, aims and objectives of the research, a phenomenological worldview has been adopted, delivered through a three-stage qualitative research methodology to be analysed through inductive, thematic interpretation.

The data was gathered across three phases, firstly involving various categories of internal employees and the leaders of Fox. A specific HR initiative was designed for them to build capability and awareness to manage themselves and lead others through the acquisition process.

External perspectives from other senior HR practitioners and an HR academic will add a peer-level perspective. A critical friend was available to interrogate findings and perspectives, together with a Reflective Journal designed to capture the multi-faceted experience of simultaneously being an employee, HR Leader, and researcher through a significant organisational shift.

While the research took place in the situational context of an acquisition, these methods could be applied in the context of any organisational change, focusing as it does on the experience of both employees and the evolving role of HR practitioners tasked with implementing and delivering an organisational mandate. Therefore, this research could be replicated in another environment should an HR Leader be inclined.

Chapter 4 will discuss my research activities presenting the phased approach of the data collection utilised for my research together with detailing each of the phases. The chapter will demonstrate how these datasets were then used as the input data to drive the qualitative thematic analysis and detail the data repository selected with the staged thematic analysis process for analysis.

4 Research Activities

4.1 Introduction

In order to deliver the purposes, aims and objectives of this research and to align with the organisational timelines of the acquisition, the collection of data for this qualitative research project was completed over three phases as described in the previous chapter and summarised in Figure 9:

Phase One:

- Design, delivery, and Evaluation of the Masterclass series.
-

Phase Two

- Face-to-face focus groups with junior employees lasting around one hour.

Phase Three:

- Face-to-face in-depth interviews lasting around one hour with Senior leaders.
- Face-to-face or virtual interviews lasting around one hour with external peer-level HR Leaders.
- Virtual interview with HR scholar Professor Dave Ulrich.

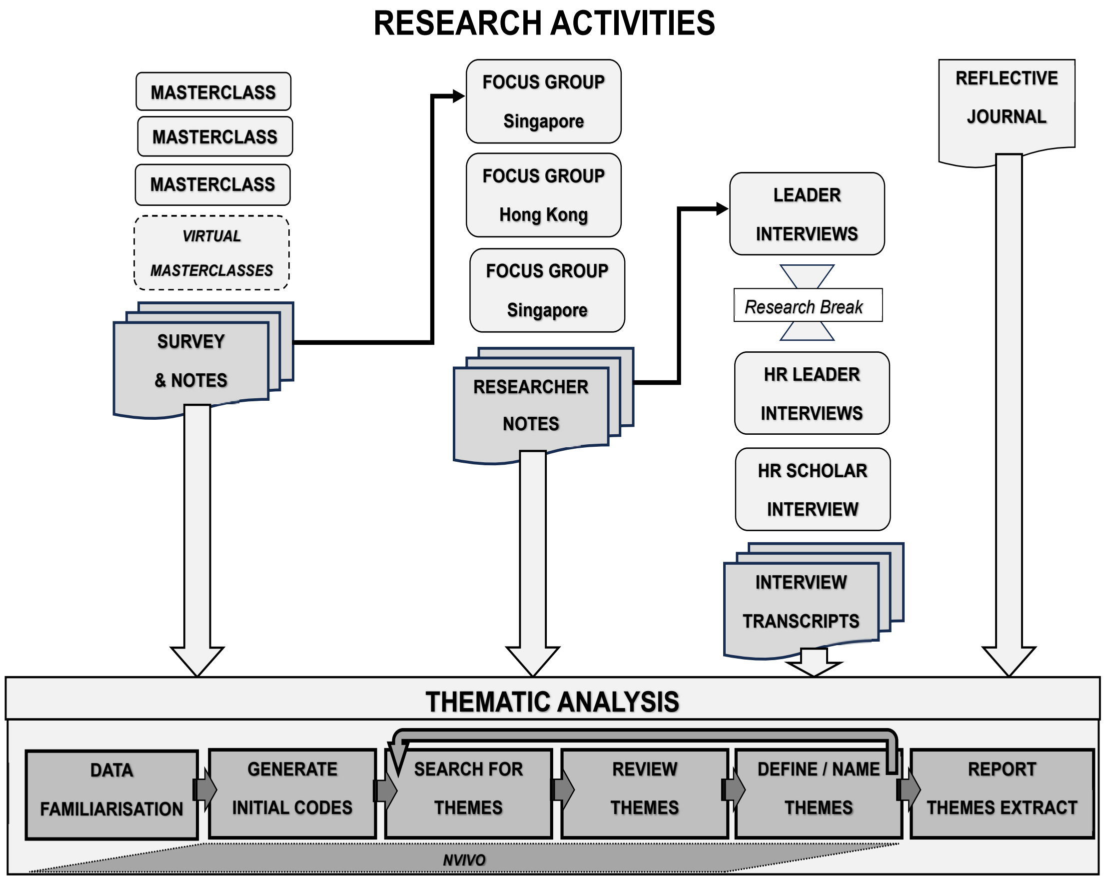


Figure 9: Research Activities

4.1.1 Reflective Journal

Alongside the research activities, a Reflective Journal was created at the commencement of Phase One and completed upon the cessation of Phase Three with the interview of Professor Dave Ulrich. The Reflective Journal will be thoroughly examined in Chapter Seven.

Entries were created in Word format, following key milestones and observations, reflecting the trio of my three roles in the programme: HR Leader, Employee, and Internal-Researcher.

Short summaries of events were captured, highlighting both cognitive and emotional responses to them, with observations of the implications for the role of the HR Leader in critical organisational moments. These were discussed with my Critical Friend.

4.2 Research Activities Overview

The timings of the planned research stages evolved for the following reasons:

1. The acquiring company required the restructuring of the organisation to be completed in six rather than nine months. Therefore, Phases 1 and 2 and the internal Leader interviews of Phase 3 were condensed to occur in a shorter time frame.
2. Subsequent to the acquisition, I moved organisations to join an international hospital group at the end of 2019 in the role of Chief Human Resources Officer.

The practitioner reality of being the CHRO for a hospital group during the COVID-19 Pandemic meant that all Research activities were paused. I made the decision to prioritise my role within healthcare, which provided an opportunity to put my “people” philosophy and findings of this research into practice, as will be later described.

Therefore, the external HR view of Phase Three commenced once the world transitioned from the pandemic to the endemic stage. I then encountered a health issue that required another academic pause. It could be said that I adopted the Growth Mindset in relation to this research as I determined to evolve and still complete this submission rather than quit.

For the avoidance of doubt, out of the scope of this chapter are all the details of the HR activities that the function would typically lead during an integration programme. This category includes communications plans, organisational design, redundancy, providing outplacement and employee assistance programmes and overall headcount planning and costing. While I was delivering these activities during the programme, they will not be detailed because I defined those as ‘HR’s business as usual’, which have all been established by prior research. The activities outlined below are undertaken purely to complete this research.

4.3 Phase One: Masterclasses

The creation of a Masterclass series was a direct consequence of the learnings from the knowledge review, with the objective of deploying that information best to support leaders and managers during a challenging time. As an HR practitioner, I had not previously designed and delivered a programme of this type in this context, nor was something like this to be found in the frequently referenced change models for HR. It is, therefore, specific to the research and was bespoke to the context.

There was a consistent theme from the psychology and applied for social neuroscience knowledge review as outlined in Chapter Two, that change could cause significant resistance, anxiety, and depression in some people, while others would experience the change as less than traumatic. The same phenomenon of this integration programme could create thousands of individual perspectives and reactions to the acquisition based on the individual psychological states of all employees.

For the purposes of this research, the Masterclass was intended for those people who self-reported as having a normal psychological reaction to change. However, within my duty of care as the HR leader, I sought to draw people’s attention and awareness for what change meant to them and how to identify if their response became a concern. Should that be the case, the employee assistance programme that focused on mental well-being and clinical therapy was available to all. I will not be reporting the usage of that service.

As an HR practitioner, as described in Chapter Three, one of my core competency areas is Learning and Development (L&D) as a strategist, designer, and facilitator. I applied this existing skill set using the review of knowledge as part of a bespoke Training Needs Analysis (TNA) process alongside my

Learning & Development leader to design a series of Masterclasses intended to equip individuals and managers to manage themselves and lead others through change. This focus on employee well-being maintained the research golden thread of the HR Leader holding simultaneously the duality of organisational and employee perspectives.

4.3.1 Masterclass Design.

The design process was not a simple one compared to the other programmes I have previously designed and implemented due to the mix of knowledge, self-awareness, and mindset shifts rather than just the typical development of skills. Based on the context and guided by the knowledge review, I determined that the learning outcomes were to be:

1. The participants had developed an understanding of the neuroscience (knowledge) of change.
2. The participants were provided with some practical tools and techniques to build new habits that would support their experience of change.

A combination of knowledge and habit formation differed from the skill acquisition I would typically train, but I adopted a standard design approach. Instructional design principles are a systemic approach to training, the practice of systematically designing, developing, and delivering instructional products and experiences, both digital and physical, consistently, and reliably toward an efficient, effective, appealing, engaging and inspiring acquisition of knowledge (Merrill et al.,1996).

The instructional design process consists of assessing the current state and the learner's needs, defining the instruction's end goal, and creating an ‘intervention’ to assist in the transition of knowledge and skills. The outcome of this instruction may be observable and measured, or it can be completely hidden and assumed (Yanchar, 2016). There are many instructional design models; however, many are based on the model that Florida State University developed with five phases: Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation, and Evaluation (ADDIE).

Gagné (1985) classified the types of learning outcomes by asking how learning might be demonstrated by using verbs to identify what the participant would do differently. To this model, I further applied the model of motivational design created by John Keller while he was researching ways to supplement the learning process with motivation. The model consists of four fundamental areas: Attention, Relevance, Confidence, and Satisfaction (ARCS). The ARCS model is based on Tolman's and Lewin's expectancy-value theory, which presumes that people are motivated to learn if there is value in the knowledge presented (i.e. if it fulfils personal needs) and if there is an optimistic expectation for success (Ely, 1993).

Attention and relevance, according to John Keller's ARCS motivational theory, are essential to learning. The first two critical components for motivating learners, attention, and relevance, can be considered the backbone of the ARCS theory, the latter components relying upon the former. Given the context of the acquisition, I believed there would be a personal need around managing self and others through change that this intervention could fill, and I selected this approach.

A pilot of the Masterclass was first run with the senior leadership team. Based on the evaluation feedback from the participants and reflecting on the real-time learnings anticipated in Chapter Two, as the HR Leader, I re-evaluated the program and pivoted the design. The programme was subsequently designed to be run 'virtually' in order to be accessible to geographically diverse participants; then, the programme was scheduled to run one module a week over two consecutive weeks to make it digestible within the workday.

The structural design of the session was two modules:

The first module on 'Managing self' utilised the thinking from applied neuroscience and psychology as detailed in the knowledge review to introduce to the delegates an understanding of what happens to humans when confronted with change.

A range of materials were incorporated, the use of PowerPoint including an animated digitised brain, complemented by exercises, discussion, and the use of photos as additional stimuli. For the photo-based exercises, I utilised a training tool called ‘Points of You’ (Points, 2017), a series of untitled photos designed to evoke an individual response. The selection of this tool was intended to create an awareness of differing opinions, experiences, and cultural nuances of a single phenomenon. Our interpretation of a photo is utterly subjective and became a tool to demonstrate how the same phenomenon can trigger differing responses, even within a close-knit team or with people from a similar cultural or socio-economic background. The tool's selection was intended to trigger the recognition that not everyone would experience the acquisition in the same way. The event itself is neutral, as the knowledge review demonstrates that the individual assigns a meaning to it.

The second module was based on ‘Leading others’, using the business school and consultant research outlined in the literature review around the importance of communication, to which I added HR content around real-time goal setting to set shorter timeframes with certainty. Real-time goal setting was the alternative to the conventional HR method of setting annual goals, which was not appropriate given that the leaders had no certainty of how the business would be structured and who would be employed in twelve months.

Ongoing interventions dealing with the transformation included modules that aimed to equip employees with change management and coping skills. These included topics on well-being, resilience, nutrition, and communication. I was certified as a Health Coach by the Institute for Integrative Nutrition, so I was able to design the nutrition module deploying this knowledge base.

4.3.2 Masterclass Evaluation.

108 Participants elected to attend the Masterclass and were invited to provide immediately after each session in the form of a paper survey. The survey questionnaire measured participants' reactions to the class and their understanding of the knowledge presented during the training. This questionnaire consisted of open-ended short-answer questions, questions based on a five-point Likert scale, and multiple-choice questions with at least eight options. Based on Kirkpatrick's (2016) training evaluation model, aside from measuring participants' understanding of the materials through the questionnaire, participants' knowledge acquisition and application were later evaluated during the one-to-one interviews and the focus group discussions.

The knowledge review discussed the varied ways individuals experienced organisational change and its impact. Most importantly, how possessing a particular trait (growth mindset) or skillset can significantly influence the employee's experience in the transition process. With this in mind, this study designed a survey to gather feedback from the participants who attended the Masterclass sessions as part of HR's interventions in dealing with the transformation.

As Gupta (2018) suggested, these sessions provided a supporting structure to allow employees to reflect and equip them with change management and coping skills, focusing on developing a growth mindset. The questionnaire measured participants' reactions to the class and their understanding of the knowledge presented during the training. More specifically, the survey questions sought to understand the participants' readiness and ability to shift from a fixed mindset to a growth mindset Dweck (2015). These questions allowed me to understand the impact of building a growth mindset on the participants' self-efficacy, belief in free will and willpower as described by Rhew et al. (2018) and Kutanis et al. (2011).

Furthermore, responses gathered could test Ng's (2018) and Campbell's (2019) hypotheses that individuals with a growth mindset perceive challenges as opportunities, leading to intrinsic motivation for learning and stronger resilience in the face of failure which serve as a pulse check to establish if the Masterclass provided new knowledge to the participants, which could provide further evidence of the propensity for growth, the degree of growth and its motivation. This acquired knowledge could directly influence an employee’s experience during the acquisition, with the potential to apply these results more widely in the broader context of organisational change. Concurrently, it would partly answer a research objective specifically regarding the evolving role that HR could play in organisational transformation to hold both organisational and employee priorities.

4.4 Phase Two: Employee Focus Groups

4.4.1 Focus Group Participants

Three employee focus group discussions were conducted by HR, one in Hong Kong and two in Singapore. Each group consisted of six to 16 employees who signed up for these voluntary sessions and self-selected into groups of similar seniority levels. In Singapore, one individual attending on behalf of others in her team to represent all those employees who were too nervous to attend; however, they wanted their voices to be heard, which highlighted both the South-East Asian nuances of reservation in a group setting as well as potential anxiety in the context of an acquisition.

Purposive criterion sampling selected the participants from markets or teams with the most significant impacts from the new business organisational design, including employees with function changes, office relocations, or both.
Of the 350 employees invited by an all-staff email to be involved in the discussions, 40 participated, giving a participation rate of 11%. I deliberated these numbers when paralleled to the guidelines given by various authors for

achieving optimal saturation in qualitative interviews at doctoral-level studies. Ritchie and Lewis's (2003) assertion is that qualitative samples 'often lie under 50' (p.84), with most of the other authors agreeing that saturation is achieved at a comparatively low level (Guest et al., 2006; Griffin and Hauser, 1993; and Romney et al., 1986), and generally do not need to be greater than 60 participants (Charmaz, 2006; Morse 1994; Creswell, 1998). Morse (2010) suggests that rather than thinking in saturation terms, suggests instead a quota that will allow them to call their research 'finished'. Given this guidance and that in Singapore, one participant was representing her team, I deemed this sufficient for the purposes of this research, given that the findings from the three focus groups were similar, and I did not believe it necessary to request more participants.

4.4.2 Focus Group Discussion

The focus group discussions were centred on the employees' experience, views and suggestions on the HR interventions and support received. Participants were allowed to interact and share their attitudes and beliefs. Handwritten notes were taken. Participants in these groups who had also chosen to attend the Masterclass series also discussed any self-reported change in their behaviours, which provided insight into the effectiveness of the Masterclass series I designed, enabling real-time changes to the design.

Following the general questions about their experience, the participants were then asked what they envisaged were the key benefits of the acquisition, which was using an appreciative enquiry method based on the assumption that the questions we ask tend to focus our attention on a particular direction and that organisations evolve in the direction of the questions they most persistently and passionately ask (Cooperrider and Whitney, 2005).

As described in the knowledge review, the acquisition is strongly influenced by national and organisational culture. Thus, asking such a question also allows the eight scales of Meyer's (2014) culture map, later described by Portman (2018), to be examined. This question helped to create a heightened sense of cultural awareness in the employees pertinent to preventing communication lapses that may otherwise hamper successful Mergers and Acquisitions (M&A) (Vouillemin, 2020).

Participants were asked:

> '*If they had received enough information on the current change status from either the organisation or their manager'*.

If they had not, the follow-up questions sought to find out:

> '*What further information would they prefer to receive and to share their desired timelines?'*.

The purpose of checking in on the employees' knowledge of the change was to address the inevitable uncertainty and attempt to reduce ambiguity in the process; this knowledge and lack of ambiguity not only reduces stress levels but additionally increases their confidence in the organisation's plan for change (Rock, 2009a).

The employees were also asked:

> '*What they saw as the key challenges during the transition phase'*.

Gathering the key challenges employees anticipate during the transition phase is akin to the exploration process in Bullock and Batten's four-phase model (1985) of planned change but does so from the employee experience. Seeking to understand challenges from the employees' point-of-view also arguably demonstrates (Shook and Rodriguez, 2020) that their voice matters. The fact that people and their views matter was a deliberate and recurring theme throughout all the interventions.

Upon identifying the key challenges employees perceived, the employees were then asked to:

> '*Voice suggestions to overcome those issues'*.

These issues were then contextualised into areas that the company could reasonably have a level of control over during the transition period. This question was intended to empower the employees, generate more autonomy, and encourage the employees to feel some level of agency (Rock, 2009a). Responses to this question would also indicate if more employees were adopting a growth or a fixed mindset (Dweck, 2006) following the Masterclass.

In each focus group session, the participants were asked to:

> '*Share three words that reflected their feelings about change at that moment in time'*.

Emotion sensing is a competitive advantage for humans that Artificial Intelligence lacks (Ahmed, 2020); it provided me with a broad spectrum of responses and sharing with others can provoke the relevant cognitive reappraisal methods and may additionally provide a benefit to enhance employee resilience.

Participants were also asked to:

> '*Discuss further support they might require from their manager or the organisation'*.

As Gupta (2018) mentioned, it is necessary to establish structures that support the individual employee's ability to reflect. If the organisation is not a self-organising entity and lacks microstate activities that promote systemic changes (Morgan and O'Sullivan, 1998), then perhaps organisational change is more challenging for employees to experience.

The next question was to determine HR support:

> ‘*What further support the employees might require specifically from HR’*.

Although it may seem similar to the previous questions, asking what support HR can offer gathers data on how the employee group perceives the role of HR.

Lastly, the employees were asked:

> ‘*If there was anything else they wanted to share’*.

Researchers Hwang et al. (2002) state that open feedback-seeking is a type of behaviour that promotes learning. Welcoming feedback and being receptive to opinions can develop a sense of trust and social support (Dutton and Heaphy, 2003). Over time, if high-quality social relationships are established between employees, this could encourage freedom of self-expression, reduce cognitive dissonance related to the workplace and increase feelings of well-being (Wanless, 2016).

4.5 Phase Three: In depth Interviews

4.5.1 Leadership

4.5.1.1 Leader selection

Ten senior employees were interviewed via semi-structured interviews. Six members of the fourteen most senior level executives whom I assessed to be undergoing high-impact change to their roles and responsibilities and four other leaders were invited to be interviewed, all of whom accepted the invitation, with a participation rate of 100%.

4.5.1.2 Leader interview

A semi-structured interview format was developed with reference to the inductive method of qualitative studies by keeping the questions open to prompt participants to share their stories. The opening questions were posed to understand the employees' experiences of the M&A process to date. These questions were followed up to capture their views on how they could be partnered as individuals and leaders during the ongoing transition.

As the interviewer, I first set the expectations of the interview by explaining that I was interested in the unique participant's experience of the M&A transformation journey. Furthermore, I aimed to understand the participant's psychological experience and assess the extent of personal impact on them such as identity loss and grief, which Miscenko and Day (2016) and the Kübler-Ross grief cycle (Zell, 2003) postulated would happen when an individual is threatened by organisational restructuring such as an M&A.

The interview sought to explore the role of HR's function in an M&A, particularly from the participants' perspective, how HR could play a role in facilitating the transition process and equipping employees with the necessary tools to improve their experience of the process.

The elapsed time of the interviews ranged from 30 to 45 minutes, and notes were recorded by hand. None of the leaders would consent to have a recording of the interview; therefore, handwritten notes were taken, capturing key items, and then typed into Word shortly after the interview.

Written informed consent was sought from each participant via a consent form, and an information sheet about the study was provided prior to the interviews as approved in the Middlesex Online Research Ethics process.

4.5.2 HR Leaders

I acknowledge that the HR Leader interview occurred after the acquisition had been completed, and following COVID-19, purposive sampling enabled the selection of participants for one-to-one interviews. These were to be unstructured interviews with senior international HR Leaders external to the organisation. Eight HR Leaders were invited to participate, and five accepted.

4.5.2.1 HR Leaders selection

The selected participants were benchmarked externally as ‘HR thought leaders’ in Asia Pacific. These five HR Leaders were experienced across different fields and geographies and had all led and experienced M&A or other significant changes. The external HR Leaders were informed at the beginning of the interview that they would be asked questions on the evolving role of HR and its function in the organisational transformation to frame the setting of this interview. I also informed participants that the interview would be unstructured as I aimed to understand the participants’ unique stories and experiences. Written informed consent was sought from each participant via a written consent form, and an information sheet was provided to each participant detailing the study prior to the interviews available in Appendix Two.

4.5.2.2 HR Leader Interview

The earlier literature review summarised the evolution of the role of HR into four areas: Traditionally, HR plays a functional role in ensuring the legality and compliance of HR practices to statutory requirements. HR functions have since evolved to include the management of recruitment and employee benefits, undertaking a role as a strategic business partner, and finally, employee experience management (Maugans, 2020).

To understand if this evolution was the accepted and perceived trajectory of HR’s functions in the modern corporate world, I asked the participants:

> *If they felt the role of HR and HR Leaders was evolving and how the role has evolved*.

In addition, it is highlighted in the literature review that national and organisational culture can influence and shape HR policy. As De Cieri et al. (2005a) pointed out, national culture greatly influences the practice of IHRM, reinforcing Hofstede's (1983) study.

To understand this phenomenon, I also asked the participants to share:

> *Their views on HR, particularly in Asia, compared to any experience working in Western culture*.

Furthermore, I also tested the concept of organisational culture (Kotter and Heskett, 2011) when one participant mentioned the issue of gender.

I wanted to understand how HR's role in facilitating M&A determines the success of transition (Vazirani, 2012). The participants were asked to:

> *Share lessons from the successes and failures of organisational transformation that they have experienced*.

In so doing, I could examine the four approaches for integrating organisational culture: preservation, absorption, symbiotic, and transformation (Marks and Mirvis, 2011) for their best practice.

The responses gathered from experienced HR practitioners allowed me, as the researcher, to later infer the role HR could and should play in an M&A to ensure a smooth employee experience and successful integration of organisational culture after understanding the implications for transition, which will be outlined in a later chapter.

Each interview lasted 55 minutes on average - the shortest was 45 minutes, and the longest was 75. These were audio recorded on the otter.ai application (otter-ai, 2017) and transcribed thereafter. The unstructured interview format allowed participants to share their experiences freely, mimicking everyday informal conversations. While this method of inquiry prompted spontaneity, allowing me to probe questions based on the responses given by the interviewee, it also meant that the questions asked differed from participant to participant based on their unique perspectives. Therefore, during the interview, I had to actively listen and redirect conversations to the core topics of interest.

As a Chief HR Officer, I rarely have the opportunity to learn and consider how my peers approach similar issues. There is no playbook for HR, no ‘one way’ of doing anything beyond the legal and fiscal frameworks, so these conversations were genuinely interesting and thought-provoking for me, providing, as they did, the opportunity to examine my thoughts and beliefs. These observations were captured in the Reflective Journal.

4.5.3 HR Scholar

In February 2021, I interviewed Professor Ulrich. The data from the interview is an important consideration, as this was four months before the release of the current RBL HR model.

The interview focused on the skills and role of HR and the concept of HR practitioners as Paradox Navigators. The interview over Zoom was transcribed from the recording via otter.ai (2017).

4.6 The Practitioner Voice

I had the aim to provide practical and robust support to employees and to do so based on the information and models gained from the knowledge review. Here is another paradox for myself as the researcher-practitioner:

> *How best to support employees while gathering the data required for this research, alongside being an employee experiencing the change while still delivering the organisational requirements.*

Would it be feasible to acknowledge that specific priorities may sometimes need to be weighted?

4.6.1 The Insider Researcher-Practitioner

In addition to collecting stories and creating this research, I was clear that one aim outlined in my original research proposal was to provide some practical, helpful assistance to the employees and leaders impacted by the acquisition. Beyond gathering the data, with the duality of the research-practitioner perspective, I also wanted to furnish practical tools for the employees experiencing the transition and, therefore, for the HR function and HR Leaders.

Where the literature review aligned with the purpose of providing tools around the psychological benefit of providing some form of certainty to individuals, there were, of course, limitations. At the time of the deal close in March 2019, aside from a small handful of appointments published to the media, there was no clarity as to the organisational structure and who would have a 'go forward' (still be employed) role. This restriction is a legal requirement that competing companies are not allowed to progress further in these discussions until the deal has been closed.

4.6.2 Creating certainty in an uncertain time

How could HR and the HR Leader provide any certainty to employees when timescales and outcomes were fluid and unknown?

However, I identified one area where certainty could be provided: financial information, which can constitute the defined psychological need around survival and security (Maslow, 1943). I, therefore, published this calculator to all employees in Asia Pacific and the Middle East so that all employees, including myself, could '*do their math'* and therefore know what they would receive if made redundant. This small tactic provided transparency for employees to build trust in the belief that the HR function and leader were also considering their priorities.

4.7 Analysis

The research approach for the focus groups and interviews became broader than had been designed initially, intentionally capturing the many voices and perspectives of individuals to reflect the range of narratives and experiences of the population.

As English was a secondary language for many participants, time was required to carefully read and reflect on the data before the process commenced. First, I needed to interpret the words' meaning and ensure the analysis's precision. For example, one participant used the word “ecosystem”, which, for a native English speaker, has a broad meaning, whereas I understood the participant was referring to the specific context and culture of the organisation.

On the completion of the three phases of data collection, the qualitative analysis was undertaken using Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six-stage model of Thematic Analysis (Table 5) of the collected data.

4.7.1 Data Preparation

The tool selected to assist in being the repository of data and to be utilised for collating the data gathered from the three phases was NVivo (Lumivero, 2019), a data analysis software commonly used in qualitative research.

Different datasets were collated for each data collection phase to be entered into the software. The data preparation into a common data format supported the initial stage of data familiarisation.

4.7.1.1 Phase 1 Masterclass sessions

- The feedback forms were collated from a text, and freeform data was extracted.
- My observational notes were handwritten during the session, later typed into a PowerPoint document, and converted into a PDF for import to NVivo.
- The learnings from the feedback and observational notes were entered into a PowerPoint summary. This process formed the initial data familiarisation, which would later be used to inform the Thematic Analysis of the data.

4.7.1.2 Phase 2 Focus Group sessions

- The group response forms, and my handwritten observational notes were entered into a PowerPoint document and converted into a PDF format for import to NVivo.
- The conversion of handwritten notes to a PowerPoint summary formed the initial data familiarisation and would be used to inform the Thematic Analysis.

4.7.1.3 Phase 3 Interview sessions

- The leaders' interview notes were handwritten during the session and later typed into a Word document.
- The five HR Leaders and one Scholar interview recordings were transcribed using Otter.ai, and the transcription accuracy was verified manually. The verified transcription was copied into a Word document, and my facilitator’s observational notes were annotated into the transcription Word document.
- Each interview transcription Word document was imported into NVivo.

4.7.2 NVivo

Each prepared dataset was imported as data files into the NVivo software to act as a centralised repository of the data, and sub-folders were created to support the research design and the qualitative analysis process as shown in Figure 10.

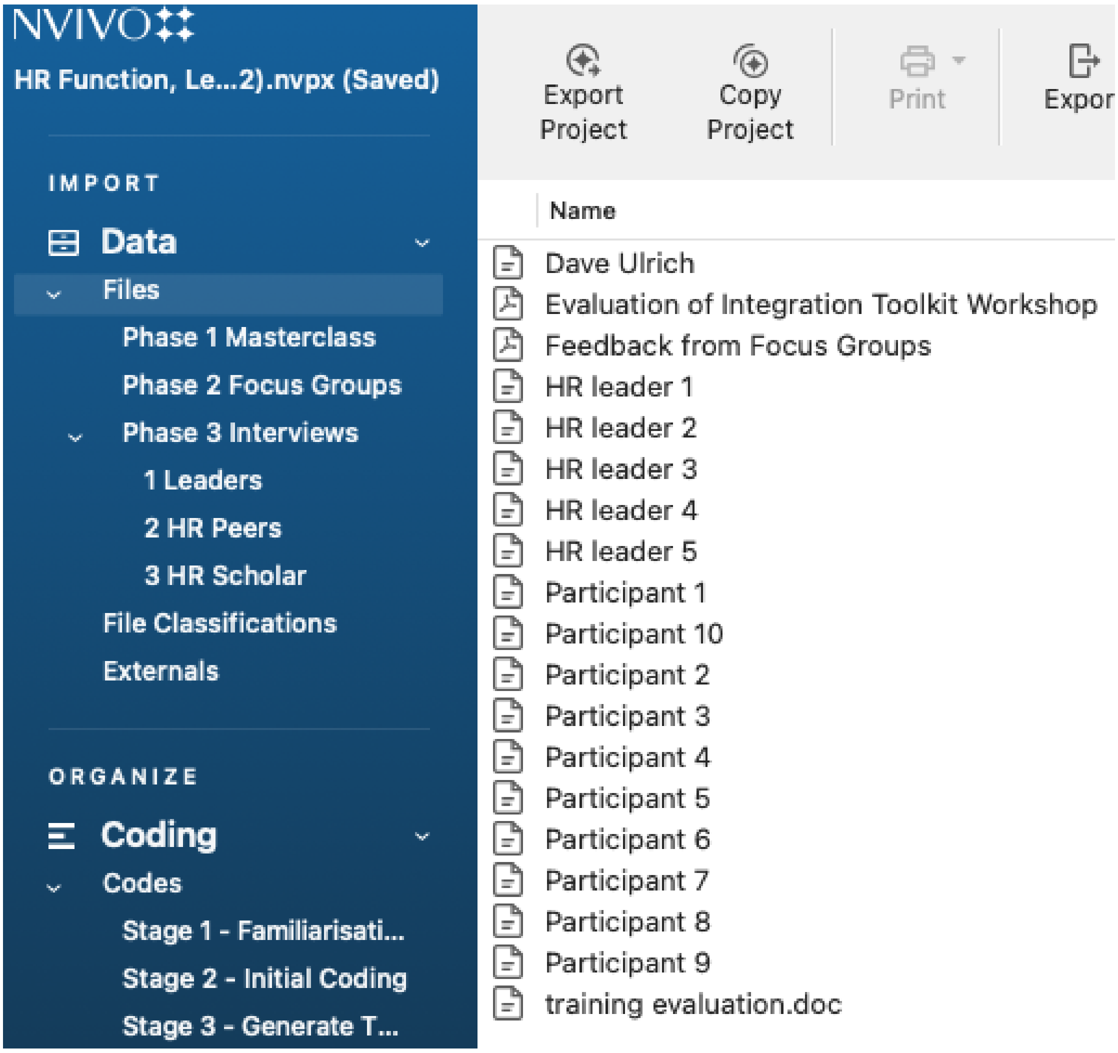


Figure 10: NVIVO data files structure.

4.7.3 Thematic Analysis

Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-stage Thematic Analysis, as shown in Table 5, codes were generated, and themes were refined and redefined.

Table 5: Phases of Thematic Analysis, Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 87)

Stage	Description of the process
1. Familiarizing yourself with your data:	Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.
2. Generating initial codes:	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
3. Searching for themes:	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4. Reviewing themes:	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts: (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis.
5. Defining and naming themes:	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6. Producing the report:	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

4.7.3.1 Stage 1 - Familiarisation of Data

Following the data preparation of the collected data, the individual files were read, and initial notes were made that related to the research aims and objectives or that I deemed relevant to the research at that time.

Where possible, the transcripts were re-read alongside the playing of the recordings to verify the meaning and annotated as per the example in Figure 11.

At this time, I was also able to determine the intonation of the speaker to highlight any emotion that the participant displayed, including anger, frustration, or sarcasm that would not be evident in a transcript.

Where recordings were not available, I revisited my Reflective Journal from that period to determine any other factors that could have influenced the comments. I additionally spoke to my Critical Friend, who verified, for example, on the date of the interviews, what was happening in the organisation in the integration programme that may have impacted the participant's views. As each file was completed, the data file was moved into the NVivo sub-folder 'Stage 1 – Familiarisation of Data' to ensure a complete record of processed data was kept.

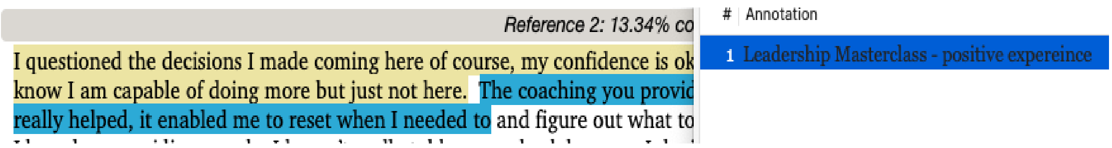


Figure 11: Example of Data Familiarisation

4.7.3.2 Stage 2 - Generation of Initial Codes

When all the collected data had been read and became familiar, the initial coding of the data began using my notes as the impetus for codes and looking for similar data for coding across all the data sets. An example of a visualisation of coding is shown in Figure 12. Sets of coded data were organised into sub-folders under the NVivo folder 'Stage 2 – Initial Coding'.

Figure 12: Example of NVivo coding visualisation.

4.7.3.3 Stage 3 – Searching for Themes

Reviewing all the codes within Folder 'Stage 2', the initial identification of themes from the codes was made. The codes and data were reviewed considering the identified theme, again using my notes for clarity where required, collating similar coding for each theme. Sets of themes were organised into groupings under the NVivo folder 'Stage 3 – Generate Themes' as shown in Figure 13. The identified themes from each phase will be further explored in Chapter Five.

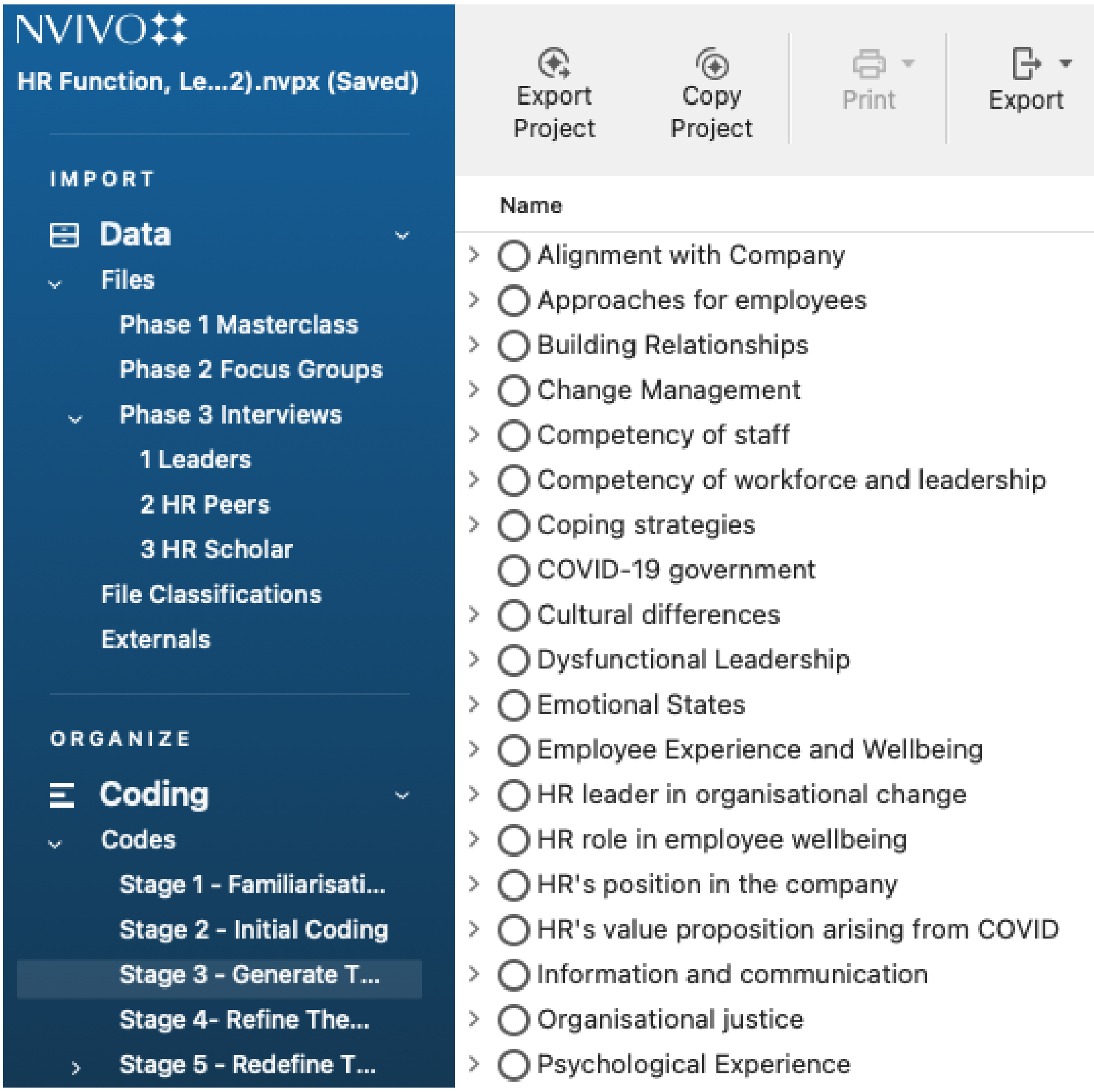


Figure 13: NVivo Stage 3 Themes generation.

4.7.3.4 Stage 4 – Reviewing Themes

With the themes coded, I utilised different tools and visualisations available within NVivo software to perform a review of the themes and highlight any discrepancies in my coding analysis, including Word clouds and Explore Diagrams, as shown in Chapter Five. Changes were made to the data organisation as required, or themes were identified as duplicates or irrelevant as shown in Figure 14.

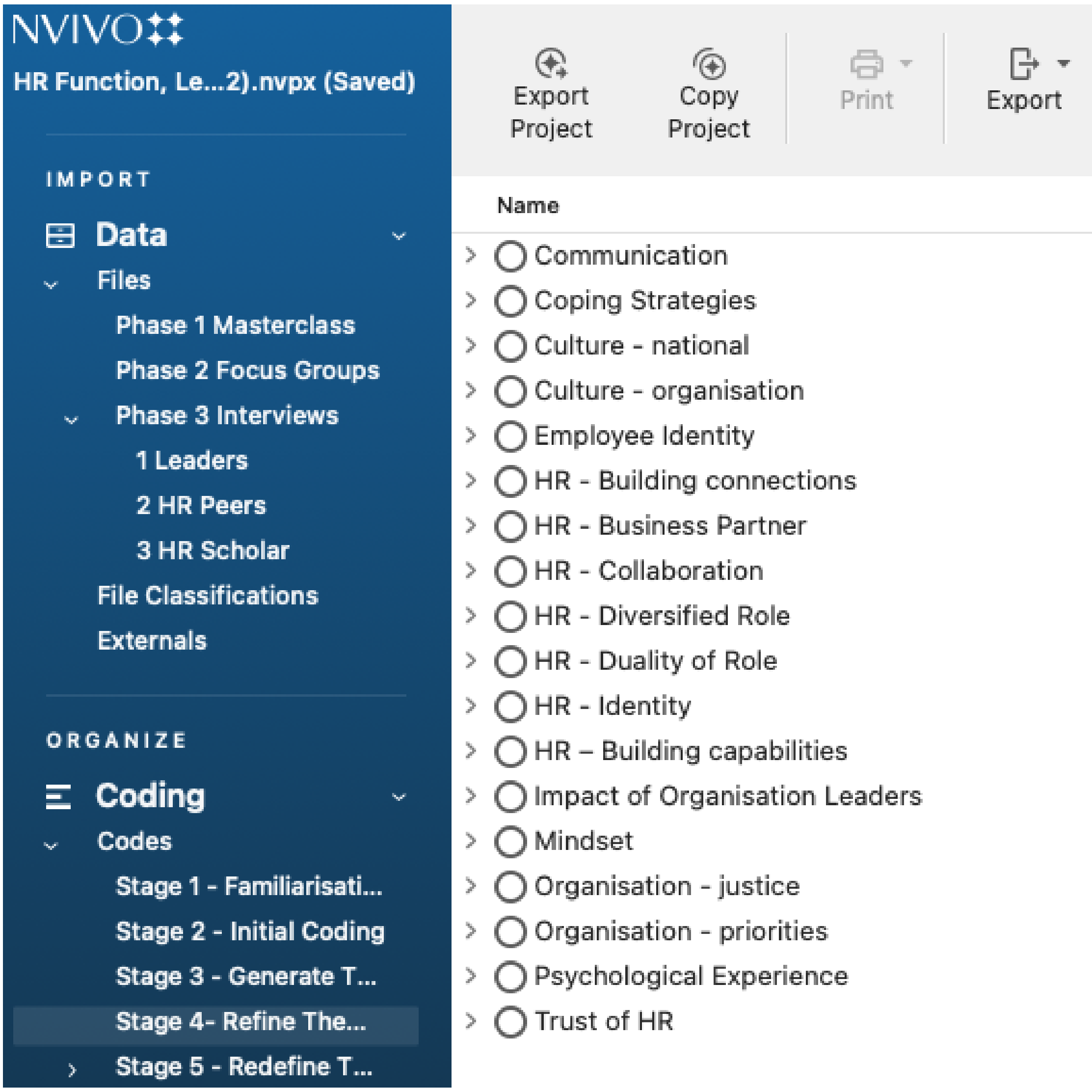


Figure 14: NVivo Stage 4 Themes refine and review.

4.7.3.5 Stage 5 – Defining Themes

After reviewing the themes, I determined to group the revised themes and define their name and clear meanings. The review was an iterative process as I reviewed each defined theme. Each defined theme was allocated a sub-folder created under NVivo ‘‘Stage 5 – Define Themes’, and the refined groupings from Stage 4 were organised into these themes.

An example of the development of the themes throughout the process is shown in Figure 15, a summary table of the complete coding of Stages 1 – 5 Thematic Analysis adapted from NVivo coding tables. The complete summary table is available in Appendix Three. The NVivo coding table of the themes is available in Appendix Four.

Stage 1 - Familiarisation of Data	Stage 2 - Initial Coding	Stage 3 - Generate Themes	Stage 4- Refine Themes	Stage 5 - Redefine Themes
Data-derived Codes	Abolishing hierarchy in company	Alignment with Company	Communication	Communication
Alignment with Company value, culture and vision	acting to fit in to success	Abolishing hierarchy in company	anxiety arising from uncertainty	anxiety arising from uncertainty
Abolishing hierarchy in company	Adaptability of leaders	Acting to fit in	clear directions	clear directions
acting to fit in to success	AI replacing HR for traditional works	Alignment with company culture	Communication strategies	Communication strategies
building an ecosystem for greater collaboration	building an ecosystem for greater collaboration	Clearly defined company goals and vision	Leadership communication	Leadership communication
building relationships	Building Connections	cultural context	Coping Strategies	Culture
Clearly defined company goals and vision	building an ecosystem for greater collaboration	difference in company culture	Coping strategies	Culture - national
cultural context	building relationships	flexibility and agility	Family as support system	Nationality Cultural Differences
difference in company culture	sharing and working as a team	Inculcating purpose and value	Culture - national	Culture - organisation
flexibility and agility	Skills orientated and leveraging ecosystem	Organisational justice	Nationality Cultural Differences	Abolishing hierarchy in company
Importance of alignment with company culture	TRUST and transparency	Racism in workplace and recruitment	Culture - organisation	Acting to fit in
inculcating purpose and value in staff	lack of trust	Sexism in workplace and recruitment	Abolishing hierarchy in company	Alignment with company culture
Organisational justice	building relationships	Peer coaching	Acting to fit in	Clearly defined company goals and vision
Racism in workplace and recruitment	Building Relationships and ecosystems	Redefining work cultures and mindset	Alignment with company culture	Company culture differences
Sexism in workplace and recruitment	building an ecosystem for greater collaboration	Approaches for employees	Clearly defined company goals and vision	cultural context
Redefining work cultures and mindset	building relationships	humanistic approach	Company culture differences	Cutting bad managers
replacing hierarchies with peer coaching	sharing and working as a team	reasons for humanistic approach	cultural context	difference in company culture
sharing and working as a team	Skills orientated and leveraging ecosystem	individualistic approach	Cutting bad managers	Empowering staff
Skills orientated and leveraging ecosystem	building talent pipeline and external brand positioning for recruitment	Building Relationships	difference in company culture	flexibility and agility
Building Relationships and ecosystems	Capabilities of leaders and top management	Building collaboration	Empowering staff	Inculcating purpose and value
TRUST and transparency	Capabilities of leaders and top management (2)	Building relationships	flexibility and agility	Opinions disregarded
lack of trust	Certainty	Skills orientated	Inculcating purpose and value	Redefining work cultures and mindset
Competency of workforce and leadership	Information and communication is key in assuring employees	Team working	Opinions disregarded	Toxicity of the work environment
Adaptability of leaders	anxiety arising from uncertainty	TRUST and transparency	Redefining work cultures and mindset	Verbal abuse and rudeness
Capabilities of leaders and top management	clear directions	lack of trust	Toxicity of the work environment	HR ROLE
Competency of employee	frustration over job security	Change Management	Verbal abuse and rudeness	HR - Building connections

Figure 15: Example of the development of Themes in Stages 1 to 5

4.7.3.6 Stage 6 – Reporting

The themes and findings for each phase and the overall themes will be detailed in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5 will present my research findings at 2 levels. Initially following the 3 phases utilised for data collection then at a second level that presents the analysis at a holistic view level defining the identified key themes.

5 Project Findings

The outputs of the research activities were subsequently collated according to the three Phases of Research and thematically analysed as will be described.

For consistency, the findings will be clustered into three Phases:

1. Masterclass.
2. Focus Groups
3. Interviews - Leadership, HR peers and Professor Ulrich

Subsequently, a second level of analysis will be presented that considers the research in totality, summarises the key themes and guides the recommendations in Chapter Six. The Reflexive Journal will be presented separately in Chapter Seven.

Individual comments have been presented where appropriate from participants while protecting their confidentiality. The reader needs to note that many of the participants were not native English speakers, and their grammar and vocabulary have not been corrected to ensure the authenticity and integrity of the data that is presented for consideration.

5.1 Phase One

5.1.1 The Masterclass Pilot

The pilot programme was designed to apply the core learnings from the knowledge review, bringing awareness of the theories and concepts of human reactions to change. The masterclass was first run as a pilot with Fox 's senior Executive team and was designed specifically for this research.

5.1.2 The Masterclass Pilot participants

Fifteen participants were invited, and subsequently, all attended the Masterclass. This event was run in person and was facilitated by myself. All participants subsequently completed the evaluation survey following the masterclass. The survey combined a five-point Likert scale with further open-text responses in order to generate input data for the thematic analysis. The feedback from the participants was deliberately sought two weeks after the programme had been completed to measure the knowledge transfer and to seek evidence of actual or intended application rather than a simple reaction to the training session.

5.1.3 The Masterclass Pilot findings

For the group of 15 of the most senior leaders in Fox, the importance of selecting their Mindset appeared to resonate with the majority of the participants, stating that knowledge of Mindset was the most valuable benefit gained from participating in the programme.

The following quotes are captured from 15 senior leaders. Individual contributors were not identified, and quotes are anonymised due to confidentiality.

> *The different mindset sets the different result. As a leader in the company, it is crucial to lead the team to face the challenges with a growth mindset, especially for us to face the transaction and market challenges.*

There was also recognition from the Leaders that HR was engaging with them in a unique way, different from the norm:

> *It's pleasant to see HR do something for us.*

Doesn't change the context and you (HR) can't do that. But I can see you are trying to help me, and I see what else I can focus on for now.

Enjoyed it. What else can HR offer me in the next few months?

The data captured as part of the research was able to add immediate insight and application to inform and improve the Masterclass offering prior to the next iteration.

5.1.4 The Masterclass

After evaluating the pilot programme and subsequent edifications based on the feedback received, the masterclass workshop was offered to 150 senior managers and leaders across Asia Pacific and the Middle East. This level reported to the leadership group and, therefore, was defined as the CEO-2 category responsible for the various markets and teams working within those markets.

Compared to the pilot of the programme, a significant design adjustment was made to the original design in terms of delivery to run virtually on Zoom. This decision was based on a consideration of the impact on local teams of having local leaders out of the business. Rather than running in a single event, the content was divided into two-hour blocks that ran at the same time and day of the week over six weeks.

5.1.5 The Masterclass participants

Of the 150 senior managers and leaders who were invited, 104 participants attended. Participants were able to virtually connect with peer-level colleagues in other countries, some of whom they had never previously acquainted. Therefore, while overall, the content was the same as the pilot masterclass, this group of leaders experienced a different learning environment in comparison with the original pilot.

5.1.6 The Masterclass findings

The thematic analysis of the feedback from the Masterclass sessions identified three themes to support the employees through the transition period, as shown in Figure 16.

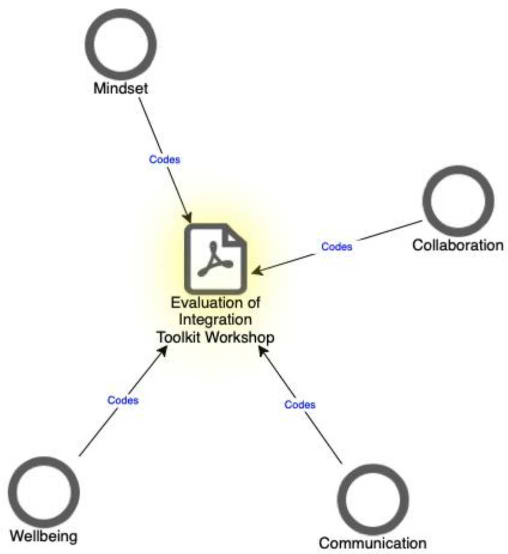


Figure 16: NVivo ‘Explore Diagram’ of Masterclass survey and notes.

Four weeks after the Masterclass sessions, respondents were emailed a survey requesting feedback. The timing was again a deliberate choice as the survey sought to explore the change in behaviour and application of the learnings following the Kirkpatrick (2016) evaluation model.

Due to the volume and range of responses and to best accommodate my learning difficulties, I utilised visual representations, including word clouds and NVivo explore diagrams, as analysis aids to envision the results.

Similar to the senior leadership team, the question was posed as to which learnings had been applied since the training had concluded. The question format had evolved and was posed to capture responses in a free-format response text rather than a selection from predetermined responses.

The following quotes are captured from employees. Individual contributors were not identified, and quotes are anonymised due to confidentiality.

'Growth mindset' and 'Leading with empathy' were the significant learning applications identified:

> *I can choose how I think about this, learn from it.*
>
> *My team in Dubai are feeling worried, I should recognise that instead of sales targets.*

As the masterclass offered a spectrum of topics across applied social cognitive neuroscience, psychology, and change, the question was then posed as to which topics were considered most beneficial to the participants.

As shown in Figure 17, this visual aid highlighted that the Growth Mindset was deemed most beneficial for the participants, the understanding that even with a change scenario outside of their locus of control, their mindset could be chosen.

Figure 17: Which Topics and Tools did you find most useful?

One insight from the Masterclass was the understanding that the experience of people during this time was shared that employees were not alone in their concerns:

> *What I appreciated more is the sharing of thoughts with people from other groups/territories.*

Within the cultural context of Asia Pacific and the Middle East, where there is a clear distinction between employees and leaders, there was a surprised recognition that senior leaders were also experiencing this uncertain time in a similar way and the emerging acknowledgement that despite the leadership titles, the acquisition was a levelling event for all:

> *The insight that I gathered was that my bosses and my colleagues in Singapore were also going thru the same set of experiences that we were going thru here in Manila. That everyone was in the same boat, but at different stages and mindset.*
>
> *What you know for certain may not be what it is.*

The participants were then asked, ‘What other support could HR offer you?’ These themes were identified from the participant responses regarding what the masterclass participants needed from HR during this time:

5.1.6.1 Theme – Communication.

The employees requested unambiguous and honest communications from HR during the acquisition period.

> *Clear and transparent communication from HR during transition to reduce instability amongst employees.*
>
> *Talk to us, HR is in their office and not talking to anyone but the big bosses.*
>
> *Send email each week with anything to share.*

5.1.6.2 Theme – Connection.

The second request was for HR to be more connected with employees during this time and to build personal relationships with employees and to relate to them with them on a more 'human' basis:

> *Having a more personal interaction with us too than a general one given how long this whole process have been going on. Can be hard not to get affected somehow.*
>
> *Ask me how I am, not just department SWB costs.*
>
> *Smile more.*

5.1.6.3 Theme – HR Building People Capabilities

The third identified theme was for HR to collaborate with them during this time to help them build the skills and capabilities that would best establish them for future scenarios and careers.

> *I have training budget can we still spend it?*
>
> *Can you update my resume?*
>
> *If interview for new job, can HR test me?*

There was an additional insight gained that highlighted some recognition of collaboration from HR while appreciating the limits of the HR role:

I don't think there is nothing much left HR can do given that what we really really want to know is beyond HR's control.

I know HR kindly tries to provide us with as much information as possible, though volume of confidential information is far more than usual recently. Please continue providing, that must relieve worries to uncertain future of our status.

The insight captured was that there was some recognition that HR was well-intentioned but indeed limited by the circumstances of the acquisition.

Other requests excluded from the thematic analysis included better food in the staff pantry or IT issues. These were sent to the appropriate function in the organisation for action.

5.2 Phase Two Focus Groups

5.2.1 Focus Group sessions.

As described in Chapter Four, within the organisation, three focus group sessions were designed and conducted in selected office locations, one in Hong Kong and two in Singapore, to obtain data from more junior employees across the business.

5.2.2 Focus Group participants.

An email invitation with participation details was sent to all 300 employees in the two markets, providing a link for individuals to either sign up for a selection of timings or simply turn up on the dates indicated. Spokespersons were invited to be nominated by their peers and, therefore, represented the voices of other employees who did not wish to attend themselves. The total participation was 40 individuals, three of whom self-reported performing an additional role as employee spokespersons. It was reiterated at the start of each focus group that the purpose of the session was for this research and that action would additionally be taken where appropriate.

5.2.3 Focus Group findings.

The thematic analysis of the feedback from the Focus Group sessions identified five themes identified from the more junior employees' feedback, as summarised in Figure 18.

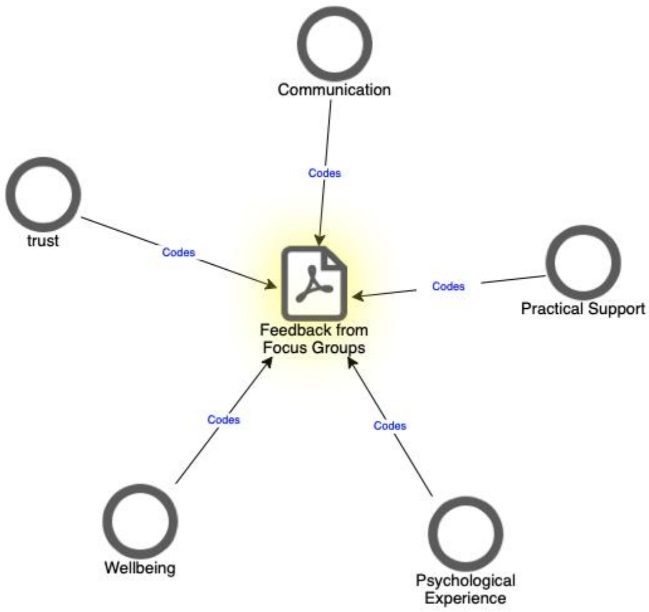


Figure 18: NVivo 'Explore Diagram' of Focus Group feedback and notes.

The findings highlighted that the integration process had taken its toll on the participants, with significant mentions of the impact on health, productivity, engagement, and morale of employees.

I then analysed this data set, compared it to that provided by the Masterclass participants and identified codes. As handwritten notes were taken, keywords were noted, quotes were taken down, and a summary was created on a

PowerPoint document. The data was compared between focus groups to consider any significant geographical differences. Again, quotes are anonymised due to confidentiality.

5.2.3.1 Theme – Psychological Experience.

5.2.3.2 Employee Experience.

The focus groups were asked to describe their feelings and emotions regarding their experiences.

The visual aid representation of the emotional responses in Figure 19 were anticipated based on the learnings from the knowledge review. In analysing this data set, I considered the participants' mindset. I had a discussion with my Critical Friend where I acknowledged that those individuals with a positive experience may not have felt necessary to participate in the focus groups. It was a consideration that people attended primary to raise concerns. However, without making attendance mandatory, it was not possible to confirm.

However, the depth of these descriptors used – with words used such as toxic, atrocious, and disrespectful, suggested that the tone of the engagements with the organisation was not constructive. My Reflective Journal captured my dismay, as will be discussed in Chapter Seven.

Figure 19: 3 words to describe how you are feeling about the integration.

5.2.3.3 Employee Impact.

The focus groups were asked, “What has been the greatest impact on you?” Figure 20 as a visual aid demonstrates a decline in trust towards the organisation, feeling demotivated and impacting general well-being, which were the most frequent responses.

Figure 20: What has been the greatest impact on you?

I do not trust (the company) anymore.

Bosses don't care about us, just themselves.

My health has deteriorated, my sleep is very poor now.

What is Helpful?

In order to understand how HR could support employees during this time frame, a question was posed to determine the employee perspective: "What has helped you during this time?"

While Figure 21 as a indicates a number of the HR interventions that were indeed identified as part of the design of the programme, including coaching, toolkits, and resilience training, the human connections both within the organisation and externally were rated very highly.

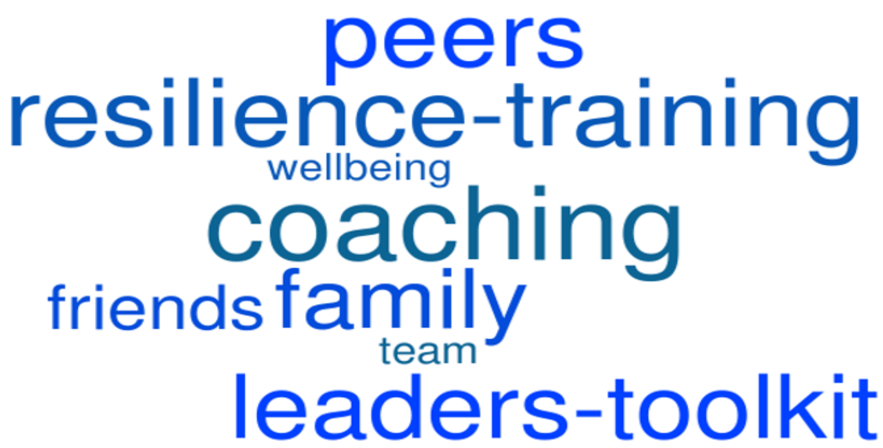


Figure 21: What has helped you during this time?

Training session was good, it helped, but it was just a plaster.

The final open-ended question in each focus group session was designed to ask, ‘Where can HR best support you as you move forward?’.

Analysis of the responses identified three themes:

5.2.3.4 Theme – Communication.

An identified theme identified was Communication with specific action requests as follows that are stated as expressed by the participants:

> *Give us clarity and transparency on what is happening, e.g., interim roles, bonus, reporting lines, budget, approval matrix/process. I don’t know how to do my job now.*
>
> *Communicate even if nothing to communicate – silence is creating rumours which is impacting morale.*
>
> *Be made aware of who is leaving, celebrate, recognise their contribution and ensure there is an opportunity to say farewell to leavers.*

Be more accessible – HR must be someone employees can talk to if they have any questions, e.g., understanding severance calculation.

While communication was an anticipated theme, the employees' requests were not related to the certainty of their future job security but a request for HR to build frequent and constant communication channels with employees.

This insight did not reflect the presumption created by the knowledge review that suggested employees would only require certainty. Instead, the request was for both clarity from and connections with HR.

5.2.3.5 Theme – Coping Strategies

Coping strategies in this context refers to the tools available to employees to enable them to best thrive. A sub theme identified was Employee Support with participant requests to HR as follows:

Provide constructive feedback.

Offer access to outplacement service immediately when notice is served.

Provide cover for those individuals who have left. Existing employees are overly stretched leading to low morale.

Create a policy to guarantee time off for interviews.

Development opportunities to help employability.

The requests related to Employee Support were primarily practical. They reflected that the Mindset approach presented in the workshops provided employees with an approach to focus on areas they could individually control and a path to move forward. My observation noted here is "Provide Agency – where?"

5.2.3.6 Theme – Wellbeing

Employee Wellbeing

The last identified theme from the focus groups was general well-being and a request for well-being knowledge and activities to occur in the offices.

> *Increase wellbeing by arranging various activities in the offices around mental wellbeing and resilience.*
>
> *Give budget to the social committee so that they can arrange fun events.*
>
> *Sporting clubs, can HR arrange some activities?*

One insight gained from the focus groups was that employees asked HR to be alongside them through this integration journey. Where HR is typically positioned as a Business Partner, employees were asking that HR also be their partner and requesting activities beyond the usual HR business partnering.

5.3 Phase Three – Interviews

5.3.1 Leadership Interviews

As described in Chapter Four, ten leaders within the organisation voluntarily agreed to participate in this research programme to share their experiences and views. These leaders were also participants in the pilot masterclass programme, and the interviews were timed for, on average, three weeks after that intervention.

5.3.2 Leadership Interviews participants

In terms of tenure within the organisation, of the ten participants, seven had less than three years of tenure within the organisation, and all had previously worked with multinational organisations. In terms of job types, the roles reflected the range of senior positions, including sales, technology, finance, and creative; all had previously experienced or led significant organisational change. This process was the first experience of being in an acquired organisation for six out of the ten Leaders, and the other four Leaders had previously experienced an acquisition process but on a smaller scale.

The participants were a global team, reflecting the nature of a multinational organisation, as reflected in Figure 22. The participant's nationality was adopted as a factor in the findings' analysis. The determination of nationality reflected the importance of culture highlighted in the knowledge review. It was potentially a pertinent consideration to understand if that factor of nationality or culture shaped the perception and experiences of the individual participant.

These nationality or culture factors were potential impactors on the participants' experiences and, therefore, the findings.

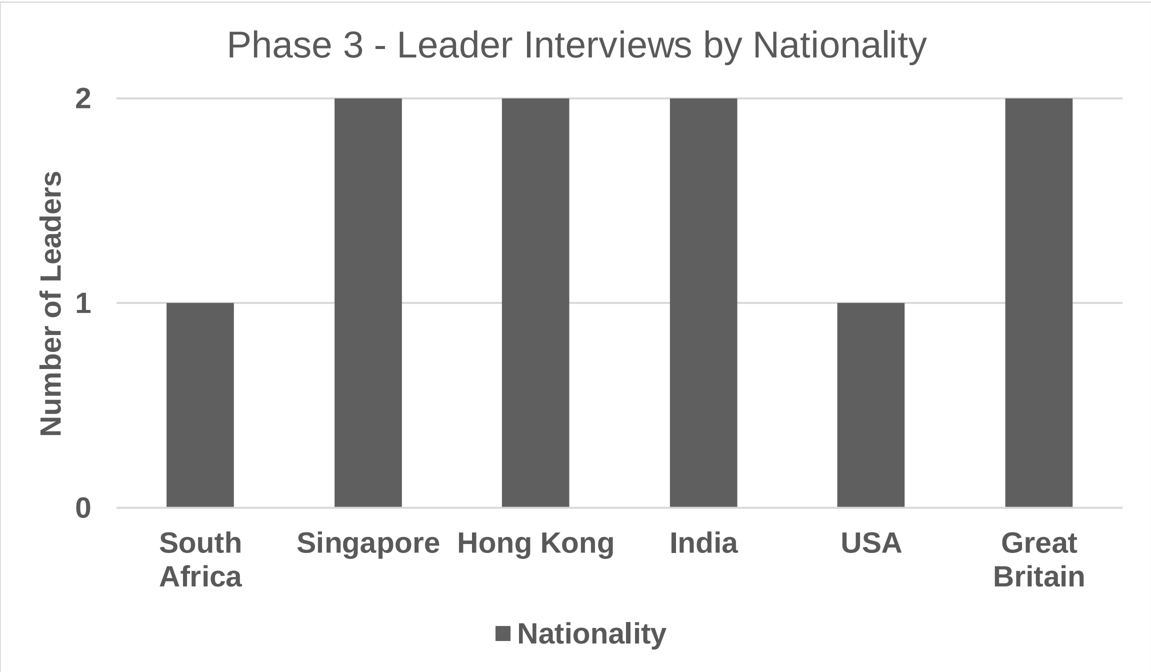


Figure 22: Nationality of participants.

5.3.3 Leadership Interviews findings

5.3.3.1 Theme – Psychological Experience

The findings suggested a comparable experience among the leadership participants regardless of the nationality or cultural factors in terms of the impact on their identity as a leader, of not having certainty for their teams and of not being in control:

> *Most days I don't want to come in and I can feel my mood sink as I walk to the office. Some days it is so quiet in the office you can hear a pin drop; it always has been a fear-based culture but now that is out of hand. Is like the dying days of an empire.*
> *Leadership Participant Eight*

> *It has been many months and is tough waiting to find out what is going to happen. There are lots of rumours flying around about who will have a job and who will leave.*
> *Leadership Participant Two*

Leadership Participant Three had been with the company for nine months and Leadership Participant Four had only joined twelve months previously, and both were fully aware of the potential acquisition at their time of employment.

> *Joined nine months (ago) specifically to work the transformation journey so had few expectations of a longer-term career and was not emotionally invested in either brand.*
> Leadership Participant Three

However, even for these two individuals joining with the knowledge of acquisition, the impact on them as leaders was acute:

> *I try to put a brave face on when I come into the office.*
> Leadership Participant Three

They want to know that they will be looked after.
Leadership Participant Four

5.3.3.2 Theme – Identity

The cultural construct of 'Face' within the Asian Culture had been anticipated. However, all of the leaders reported this loss of face as an impact on their leadership identity, of the personal impact of not having the answers with their teams and not being in control.

Leaders also reported that the personal impact on them was that they now desired to leave and did not foresee future employment with the acquiring company:

> *I have been avoiding coming* ***into*** *the office because I am being asked questions I can't answer, there is no update and I feel useless.*
> *Leadership Participant One*

> *I am ready to go and do something new.*
> Leadership Participant Seven

> *The rumours are out that me and my entire team will go, so they don't see any future (with the acquiring company).*
> *Leadership Participant Eight*

> *What's the point of the leadership team being here right now, we can't lead!*
> Leadership Participant Six

5.3.3.3 Theme – Trust in HR.

Trust emerged as a theme:

The lack of Trust in HR or recognition of the HR activities to encourage building trust.

The semi-structured interview was designed to allow emergent themes and topics to crystallise from the discussions and form narratives. However, if the topic of HR did not naturally occur during the interview, a question was posed towards the end of the one-hour discussion: ‘What are your views on the role of HR during this time?’

As the Reflective Journal data demonstrates, the findings on this specific topic brought to light the area where a likely conflict of interest would arise. In my role of a researcher examining the construct of my own work, making real-time Journal entries in terms of my emotional and cognitive response to the views expressed was essential. While endeavouring to ensure objectivity, this was also intended to compartmentalise the interviewee’s views once the interview was completed.

While it was anticipated from the prior knowledge review that junior people may believe that HR only acted in the interests of the organisation, I had not anticipated that the most senior leaders may also hold the same belief.

Two sub-themes emerged in the construct of trust, which can be exemplified as follows:

Where do HR’s loyalties lay?

> *I didn’t look at the toolkit you provided. it’s a bit gimmicky, isn’t it? We know we are losing jobs, so a few meditation sessions aren’t going to help, no offense but I think it’s a bit fluffy. Are you trying to just look like you care about people? No one here believes that.*
> Leadership Participant Seven

> *People think you are just the whipping boys.*
> Leadership Participant Eight

HR has access to confidential information about the employee.

> *I don't think there is a lot of trust towards HR. If people are struggling, will you hold that against them for the new org design. Are you helping us or the company?*
> Leadership Participant One

> *I don't think people trust you lot (HR) as you know a lot more about them.*
> Leadership Participant Three

However, some leaders acknowledged limited trust and that the activities launched by HR during this period were well-intentioned.

> *It makes people feel like they are still being invested in despite what's happening.*
> Leadership Participant Two

> *We can see that you are trying to help and make this a bit easier on people.*
> Leadership Participant Five

5.3.3.4 Theme – HR Duality – People and Organisation.

The Duality of HR emerged as a theme:

> While the nuance of being part of the management team was recognised, and a specific requirement for the HR team to undertake the difficult situations (redundancies) if required, there was still an ask to bring a more human dimension into the practice area.

In terms of the role of HR and the leadership through this time, there was clear messaging from the Leadership team that HR was there to represent the Leaders representing the organisation and manage the retrenchment meetings and the other difficult events that the leaders may not wish to do themselves:

If we have to let people go will HR do all those? I don't want to do that and that is HR's job.
Leadership Participant 9

Comms and training is important. HR should lead.

Leadership Participant Six

The majority of Leaders were more ambiguous, simply asking the HR team to help the leaders manage their people proactively.

I would like you to do more with the team.
Leadership Participant Five

The findings from the Leadership interviews showed that while cultural nuances were significant, the individual mindset adopted during this acquisition journey was not dependent on nationality, culture, or experience but on how they individually chose to approach the experience. This approach depended more on tenure, brand affiliation, and domain experience. The sense of agency in being able to determine a way forward, as anticipated from the Knowledge review, was an indication of the overall mindset.

5.3.4 HR Leadership Interviews

The knowledge review identified the many challenges experienced by contemporaneous HR Leaders, responsible and accountable for a multitude of activities against the core requirement and general career aspiration of being a 'Business Partner'. The semi-structured interviews enabled the individual voices of the HR leaders to be heard and considered from this perspective.

5.3.5 HR Leader Interview Participants

The interviews with five senior external HR Leaders aimed to capture their experiences and approaches during significant transformations, understand their priorities on the people and organisational continuum during these times and consider where HR had the opportunity to evolve.

The practitioners were all senior female HR Leaders who represented a multitude of industries, nationalities, and international experience, as reflects the typical professional profiles of senior HR Leaders in Asia Pacific working in multinational organisations. Of the five HR participants, two were working in their country of citizenship. The remaining three participants were expatriates who had relocated to Asia, as seen in Figure 23. This factor was pertinent in understanding any potential consideration of national cultures and whether this impacted their professional outlook.

Figure 23: Nationality of the five HR Leaders

The five practitioner voices in this research were from organisations with either Asian or Western-based headquarters. The HR Leaders operating in a Western headquartered organisation had the inference of reporting to an HQ in another geography. In contrast, the Asian headquartered organisations enabled those

HR Leaders to create a scope of work for their role that potentially mapped to their interests and priorities within the region.

5.3.6 HR Leader Interviews Findings

A critical insight from the findings was the level of personalisation that can occur with the HR role. The role of the HR Leader can be more bespoke to both the organisational requirements and the interests of the HR Leader.

Therefore, the five descriptors of the role were distinct and different, representing the phenomenological method selected for this research to explore the lived experience and ontology of the practitioner.

5.3.6.1 Theme – The Role of the HR Leader

In terms of commonality, reflecting the seniority of the group, each HR Leader identified as being a member of the management team of the organisation, having a 'seat at the table' and engaging on matters beyond the traditional scope of HR, such as financial matters, sales, product development and customers. The term 'business partner' was not as frequently utilised in the discussions. However, the inference of the term was apparent in the topics discussed around business operations and commercial strategy.

Many HR Leaders emphasise being a partner to the CEO (by implication, therefore a business partner) and a peer to the finance leader and that the outcome required of the HR Leader role is to be a business driver:

> *I think a good HR Leader is…well, you want one who has got good HR education, experience, potentially as a thought leader, develop strong relationships, <u>trusted relationships</u>, is a trusted advisor, commercial, has strong financial acumen so <u>you want someone who's going to be able to sit at the table or sit with other business leaders and be able to have a point of</u>*

> *view around marketing or around the P&L or around the strategy of the business,* *rather than just sitting there and just saying 'hey, listen this is the structure that I want to design for your function' So I think someone who is a partner to the CEO and finance team, well I think the three of them go hand in hand to actually drive the business forward.*
> HR Leader Five

I noted that HR Leader Five did not reference the relationship with employees as a component of the HR leader role.

> *But you've got a very clear role and responsibility around what you're delivering is service back to the to the organisation. And I feel that that and then, so the business intimacy is there to trust in what you're there to do, are there other understanding of what you're there to do? And so I think that's afforded us a little bit more rite of passage in terms of, you know, being clear that you're there to support the business agenda, while also driving, you know, your own through talent, etc.*
> HR Leader Three

HR Leader Three had a clear position that the purpose of the role is service delivery and providing value to the organisation. There was no reference to employees.

> *You know, we were seen as an administrative, you know, a whole pot of jobs to be done, versus, you know, this is our strategic value to you.*
> HR Leader Three.

> *So, for me, I think HR talent and Asia has been underrated for a long, long time. And I think it's been underrated because it's been applied with a Western lens.*
> HR Leader One

Beyond the scope of the Research, but of interest to me was the inferred cultural inference of why HR talent in Asia is often considered to be inferior to the West.

5.3.6.2 Theme – Organisation

The CEO

Critical to the role of the HR Leader was the role of the CEO or to whom the role reports. This factor had not been identified in the prior knowledge review but was a consistently important theme raised by the HR Leaders, although their experiences varied:

> *So, my CEO is a big fan of specialists, not generalists. So he can see the need for a business partner because you need somebody senior who sits outside of the transactional component, who leverages it like a small team of people that leverage what you know and attaches what we're doing to the business needs, but then execute with a team underneath them.*
> HR Leader One

> *You'll have CEOs that will have their opinion and they'll decide, and an HR team will just execute.*
> HR Leader Five

For one HR Leader in particular, the role went beyond a partnering dynamic with the CEO to protectionism and coaching:

> *So we end up sometimes protecting the CEO, HR taking flak for the CEO, and sometimes we have to shove them out on the stage and go 'No, YOU need to have this conversation!'*
> HR Leader Five

> *That's why I think everything comes back to the CEO. I think there's absolutely a place where HR takes the lead and is the face of that, without a doubt. But I think sometimes CEOs hide behind HR and make us do a lot of the dirty work, do a lot of the communicating that we probably shouldn't do and we go okay fair enough this is in my room and I'll do it. But that actually makes the CEO look a little bit gutless and, you know, that doesn't do that doesn't do their brand any good.*
> HR Leader Five

With reflection of the knowledge review, there was a consistently expressed strong sense that HR continues to have to prove their contribution and standing in the organisation, which was most clearly articulated as follows:

> *Nobody asked finance to prove their value, right? And they should, though, because you usually have about five times as many finance people in any organisation as you do HR, but we always say people is the most important, yet we put more people against the numbers, then we do against people, And you only have to look in the disparity typically between the salary of the HR Leader and the finance leader*
> HR Leader One
>
> *It's the, it's the first function that has to earn their place rather than just assume that place because, you know, you'd, you'd never hire a CFO, for example, or head of finance and question whether or not they should be around that table. But you do with HR still.*
> HR Leader Three
>
> *Yes, let's blow off HR. It's all digital. Until we reach a something like a pandemic, where everyone has turned to HR.*
> HR Leader Three
>
> *If you don't have a CEO who already believes this, you're never gonna have it. Yeah, I mean, that's just a fact of life.*
> HR Leader One

5.3.6.3 Theme – HR as a Contributing Factor

Internal Divisions within the HR Function

> *HR tells everybody else how to behave. And yet we are potentially the most dysfunctional part of the organisation.*
> HR Leader Three

The data reflects the view that if there is a ‘problem with HR’ as the knowledge review suggests, then that may be in some way attributable to us, the practitioners. There was an expressed view by the HR Leaders as to how siloed thinking is developing in the HR function between those who believe that they represent the needs of the business and those who believe their role is to represent the needs of people. The clear preference from four of the five HR

Leaders was not around potentially integrating this paradox but rather shifting all HR to the business partnering mindset.

> *There seems to be a divide in people in HR and how they're working in their departments and functions. And there seems to be one camp that is a lot more a partner in the business, looking more at organisational design and development, and less of the how do we make that happen for individuals and less for altering the context that individuals need to allow any sort of change or just to continue as is. And then there's the other camp who are not meeting the needs of the business at all, and tend to be on the pro people side, and it's all about how the individuals are feeling and less about what needs to be done to change or develop them to meet the needs.*
> HR Leader One
>
> *I actually think that's what HR needs to do. And to actually build that business awareness and understand that. I mean, you talked about communication earlier, the biggest barrier that I see with the people who tend to be more people focused, is that they can't change their messaging when talking to business leaders.*
> HR Leader Two
>
> *The other thing is sorry, and I keep saying is I've met HR people that really aren't interested in the business. They're actually not driven by the success of and, and not be in a bad way. It's just doesn't float their boats.*
> HR Leader Three
>
> *HR for business and people: is that the intersection?*
> HR Leader Five

To articulate the thinking in a different way, the data suggested the nuance of paradoxical thinking that only HR Leader 5 had considered, in a way which interests could be allied.

Reflective of that silo thinking was one outlier voice in the data collection:
Of the Five voices captured in this research, four primarily focused on the role of the HR Leader as a business partner. Only one participant had been considering the opportunity or requirement also to be an employee partner, and this voice, therefore, was a clear distinction to the others:

> *So, I think it's so easy for us to stick to the Dave Ulrich model, yes? I think that the four models need to evolve. So, for example, the digitalisation of HR and the process that is, from the time he wrote it, to now, is very mature. And then we now need to make that human element for the people and then HR to be more human intelligent to predict what people will do. I'm keen on the using AI to predict some human employee behaviours so I think we still need to be careful. I'm still thinking about, I think, more and more as an HR Leader is playing a role being the employee champion or even a social psychologist?"*
> HR Leader Four

HR Leader Four's view on the purpose of the function reinforced the sense of a people-first mindset. The nuance of being a Chinese national has been considered here, as the context of the culture of being the only HR Leader raised in a Communist society may have influenced her underlying belief system:

> *In China, because we had the firstborns after the baby boomer after the war, so, we had a worker that you can get cheaper and the better replacement with more agility and then some of those are on less living working wage employees, people, human beings left behind. Now with Coronavirus, they even wiping out these generations. So, then we say Oh, bye Chinese worker, India has the population they can do the job. So, India's rising. You don't talk to someone in your own country. And everything that was made in China is now in Vietnam, there was a huge population of the young population. People keep being left behind. <u>HR has to change that.</u>*
> HR Leader Four

Here is a clear view that the role and purpose of the HR Leader are to address the broader macro-social context of the worker in organisations. This voice was distinct from the remainder of the HR Leaders in that no reference was made to the business objectives, reflecting the paradoxical thinking proposition that HR can be a business partner, or a people partner but potentially not an integrator for both.

5.3.6.4 Theme – HR Duality – People and Organisation.

HR in Transformations

At differing junctures of the narratives, allowing for an iterative approach to the dialogue, each HR Leader was asked to describe their experience of notable change in their organisation and the approach they undertook.

> *I always go with the context, you know, people when you have to make redundancies or whatever it's got to be to the greater good of the organisation. I mean, no one goes and makes 500 people, have 500 people lose their job for no reason. But it's got to be usually with the higher purpose that you keep the other 6000 employed or 600 employed.*
> HR Leader Three

However, from the same individual was recognition that this approach may have negative implications:

> *And I think that pacing is where I've seen things and are being part of things not going as well as we would have hoped from a transformation. It's the same with acquisitions. You know, you do go hard and fast and just move everyone or do you let it be a painful change program?*
> HR Leader Three

Other HR Leaders recognised where the traditional toolkit was lacking and were considering alternative approaches in significant change programmes beyond a simple communications tool:

> *So, I think that's where HR are going to have to be a bit more creative and innovative and looking at all of those hooks for people from the neuroscience as well about mastery and about belonging and value.*
> HR Leader Two

The traditional approach was more often described as the HR Leader's vehicle to deliver their role requirements:

We were merged with two companies and all of those others; I did those change programs. Yes. And what always invariably happens, it struggles, when we started to go into our big change, what I advocated for was just focusing on excessive communication, okay? Because and so that was my first focus, right, the second focus was on pre planning workflows. And I don't know if this will make, you know, if this makes sense, but what happens and so the leaders had agreed where we should do these things and, in the end, just like all the other change management initiatives, nobody did it. Yeah, nobody.
HR Leader One

The description here arguably suggests that the leaders had not engaged with the process or the outcomes, potentially because, similar to many leaders, they had not been coached and upskilled to manage themselves and lead others through this period.

This particular HR Leader focused on workflow as the way to manage employees through a significant change:

Right. And then what you should start with is to modify the work process, then make the role changes, which impacts the people and then finalize the structure. That never happens. And along that process, you should be communicating. So really a change process. It should start a year before you want to make the change or however long you think it will take you to make the work process changes. And because we don't do that, what happens is companies go in right away and they make the role changes. They do the redundancies. They restructure the structures, but they don't change the actual work. Yeah. And then there's huge turnover, huge dissatisfaction. And every change process tells you, you should do it the other way around. But the rush or the desire to get the savings overrides the sensibility of what should be done and the planning of just doing it.
HR Leader One

The priority of obtaining the business objective of the required financial savings from the restructure resonated with me, reflecting the experience of Fox.

So, it has to start with identification of knowing what your objective is, knowing what roles it will impact and then knowing what work it will impact. And I think organisations don't follow

> *that process. Because if for it to be successful, you have to tell the people who are in the roles that are going to be eliminated, that they're you're going to need their help defining the work processes that should be changed. <u>Because you wouldn't be able to do it</u>. That's one of the problems is there's a lot of helicopter approaches to trying to implement change at a level with the people who are doing that don't understand the workflows that are being done.*
> HR Leader One

Reflecting paradoxical thinking, this same HR Leader was proposing to develop strong business managers:

> *If you're a manager, I've seen the really good ones, they are the ones who can tell. They've built such a relationship of transparency and openness with their employees that when the bad news comes, it's not hard to tell them. Yeah, because they've never lied to them before. They've never, you know, sugar coated anything. They've been completely transparent and open and empathetic and honest, even when it is hard and any good relationship, you know, there's going to be good times and bad, so they built relationships. So that's, that's where it falls down.*
> HR Leader One

It was interesting to see this view reflected in a way that created dissonance with her previously expressed views that you cannot be transparent in trust-based relationships during significant change programs. In addition, was the acknowledgement that when training line managers manifest those above-described behaviours, HR was not a training participant:

> *But no, we didn't put HR in this class.*
> HR Leader One.

As HR Leader One was in full narrative, the opportunity to seek clarity at this juncture and ask, ‘Why not?’ did not arise. It may be that HR was already considered to have expertise in these areas.

Communication was the focus of the activity, alongside the HR deliverables of cost savings and realignment of the organisational design. There was an acknowledgement that these efforts could be improved, and when asked why many HR Leaders do not expand the scope of services during these transformations, the response was:

> *And I think HR people are often under financial pressures, or they just want to get it out. They want to get it done.*
> HR Leader Four.

5.3.6.5 Theme – HR Identity.

The Future of HR and the HR Leader

Reflecting on the knowledge review, the future of HR was described in terms of additional skillsets and responsibilities that the function is adopting. Here, I was able to infer an implicit gap using inductive analysis on the presumed identity or mindset of the function.

> *Social media, data and AI is where we are refocusing the team.*
> HR Leader Two

Reflecting that the interviews were conducted post the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak was the acknowledgement that HR is now being tasked with employee wellbeing:

> *Like, it's been quite fascinating to see all the stuff that landed on our desks and not, well don't get me wrong. <u>It's not the sort of work we want to be doing</u>. But it's quite fascinating in the absence of others it became HRs role. You know, and so I think that's, that's kind of it'll be interesting to me to see where that's, that plays HR, where it where it where it puts us moving forward, as it as a function, you know<u>, health and wellness</u>, you know, all of those sorts of things.*
> HR Leader Three

Reflecting the siloed thinking of HR on this topic was HR Leader Four, whose view was that by focusing on the well-being of employees, the organisation would be in good health:

Now I truly believe that the employee health and well-being is a critical pillar and the elements of the good performance. If somebody is at the best, most energetic focus, able to make quick decisions, judgments, nice, listen to each other wherever <u>your organisation is going to be well</u>, and then you must promote the and look after the house and the well-being to the organisations <u>and not work them too hard</u>.
HR Leader Four

However, at the same time as HR is being asked to take on these additional responsibilities were the observations that HR is also being asked to stay in its clearly defined, more traditional role:

I get told a lot here you know, the way for you to build your success here is 'stay in your lane.
HR Leader Five

The growing importance of HR and expanded role may indeed create tensions with other functions:

My CFO, He told me 'HR now has too much power!'
HR Leader Three

There were considerations expressed around how the function may evolve and, in particular, the future evolution of the HR business partner:

Is there a place for instead of an HR business partner, like an internal coach who's just for development, so that they could help work alongside the line manager or work alongside a team, to be able to look at the skill sets that are needed now and, in the future, and how to create that development there?
HR Leader Two

HR Leaders expressed concerns as to how the CIPD and equivalent professional organisations are not keeping pace with the needs of the rapidly evolving function that the HR Leader experiences:

Like the CIPD they took three years to develop their competency framework for HR 2.0. And the challenge is nobody has three years now. So, it was quickly out of date.
HR Leader Three

You need to truly understand the generation desires through meeting the employee needs and bring out their best.
HR Leader Four

You need someone who's connected to the business and connected to the people.
HR Leader Five

We think about our customers and patients, then we, you know, we look after employees, we look after our communities. And then we obviously we look after our stockholders, right?
HR Leader Three

The general consensus is if you imagine three rings: HR, Learning and Development (L&D) and Organisational Development (OD). OD and L&D used to be smaller than HR, they are gradually increasing size and HR is actually going to get smaller. because a lot of historic HR processes can either be automated or taken over by line managers or just simple self-service from an employee perspective. And so, then that that part of traditional HR will actually get smaller and the OD and L&D functions or skill set will actually get bigger.
HR Leader Two

The recognition that the organisation pays the salary of the HR Leader was poignant for HR Leader One and the requirement for the HR Leader to assess the comfortable trade-off:

So, you have to you have to play a part even if you don't agree with it, because that's the person paying your salary, but my view has always been as you look for an organisation that has minimum 80% of what you value. Yeah. And, and you can see it in other leaders and the 20% is what you can tolerate. And to me, the 20% becomes inclusion. Right? I have left companies where that 80% drops down to 70 and 60.
HR Leader One

Any final piece of advice to other HR Leaders?

Don't work with stupid people!
HR Leader Five

5.4 HR Scholar – Professor Dave Ulrich

Professor Dave Ulrich has shaped professional development through the standard structure of HR teams. Reflecting on my research approach, consistent with a review of prior knowledge through data collection and analysis, to end rather than commence with HR, this interview was the last one conducted.

5.4.1 HR Scholar Interview Participant

A Unique Voice

Distinct from the HR Leaders who are all practitioners, Professor Ulrich's profile offers a unique voice in this research:

1. As a 70-year-old, he reflects a different generation to the HR Leaders in the 40-50 age range.
2. A male: compared to the HR Leaders who all identified as female.
3. US citizen: Only one of the HR Leaders reported US citizenship.
4. US-raised, educated, and professional career has been US centric.
5. A consultant and an academic. Not a practitioner.

For these reasons, the data collected from Professor Ulrich has been separated from that of the HR Leaders and, with his permission, has been directly attributed to him.

5.4.2 HR Scholar Interview Findings

Figure 24: Word Cloud of interview with Professor Ulrich

The focus of the work undertaken by Professor Ulrich reflects his ambition to deliver value to the customers and shareholders of an organisation. Consistent with his published work, the sentiment of the discussion was around positioning HR and the HR Leader as a business function and a business leader, and this was apparent in analysis of the interview as show as a word cloud in Figure 24. His work was grounded in the evolution of the HR function through the four phases identified in his research, which described how the function has moved from being mainly administrative to driving a strategic agenda for the organisation.

All of the following quotes are from Professor Ulrich and therefore, require no identifier.

As he stated, his position is that the challenge remains that:

We're measuring HR in 2021 by what we were doing in 1990.

While the discussion of my Reflective Journal will be considered separately, I believe this is an important consideration to add at this juncture. The Journal noted, however, that I pondered whether this is indeed still the case, that many business leaders and HR Leaders were not active in their careers in 1990, myself included and that perhaps we are instead being measured by what we are contributing now rather than forty years ago so the question was asked Is there not an opportunity here to build for the future rather than from the legacy?

> *I think a lot of people judge HR by its legacy.*

5.4.3 HR Scholar Interview Paradox Navigation

The golden thread of this research has been to explore the premise of traversing duality. Specifically taking a typical HR matter (transformation) and examining it from two different perspectives with the resulting implications for the role of the HR Leader. As described in the Literature Review, Prof. Ulrich defined this as a paradox, which therefore, was a focus of the discussion:

> *Paradox means that there are two things that must be navigated at the same time, in HR, we need to be short-term and long-term. We need to be top-down directive and bottom-up engaged. We need to care about individual people and our success.*

5.4.3.1 Theme – HR Duality – People and Organisation.

The explicit theme of paradox management emerged only from the discussion with Prof. Ulrich. His view requires deft navigation on behalf of the HR Leader to shift from one dimension to another and the ability to do so. This approach requires the HR Leader to be able to intervene in those discussions to correct where one side of the paradox has become over-indexed.

As reported by the HR Leaders, the critical challenge is the paradox between people and profit and how they must lead those tensions within the organisations. How, then, does the HR Leader navigate this with the business?

> *All we care about right now is making our numbers. All we care about is competitiveness, profitability. My job is to bring them back into the middle, to say yes, we should make numbers. But let's come back and begin to care about our people. On the other hand, if I have a business leader or team and all they do is care about people and not numbers, I need to move on the other way. The navigator, a Paradox Navigator, knows when to go one side or the other.*

The HR Leader, therefore, has the opportunity to provide this counterbalance within organisations and to safeguard the diversity within:

> *Our job in HR is to make sure that we have a full dialogue. The navigation of paradox is the essential element of respecting diversity. We respect differences, we discuss them, we talk about honestly and candidly, that's where I think the HR skill becomes so critical.*

It is relevant here to note that this interview took place before the latest round of the RBL research was published and, therefore, before I was aware that Paradox Navigator (RBL, 2015) had been removed from the competency framework. I did not have the opportunity to fully ascertain why this decision had been made.

> *We need to care about individual people and our success; very compelling that HR professionals who could navigate those tensions help their business be more successful.*

> *Well, one other piece of research, we've also done that research with business leaders, people say what makes a good business leader today, authenticity. That's a nice foundation: you need to be authentic, emotional intelligence. That's terrific. You need to be emotionally self-aware, the ability to learn. Also, you got to adjust.*

5.4.3.2 Theme – Trust of HR.

With a trust theme identified, the discussion evolved to how the HR Leader first builds trust, which, from Professor Ulrich's view, firstly rests in the HR business partnering model.

> *Credible activists get you trusted, knowing the business that you engage in a conversation, but navigating paradox, where you are Angela, allows me to help the company succeed. We believe that you've got to be credible.*

I noted that Professor Ulrich did not reference how you build trust with employees, only with the Organisation.

5.5 Second Level Analysis of Phases one to three

The data collection took place over three distinct phases and used differing collection methods in order to gather the various voices of employees, leaders, and HR practitioners engaged in significant transformation journeys. While each stage has been individually considered and thematically analysed, I identified the additional requirement to create a single outcome of these differing perspectives cohesively. This final analysis phase is necessary to offer an informed, thoughtful, and data-driven insight and perspective and a distinct contribution to the evolving role of the HR Leader and function.

5.5.1 Stage 4 - Review Themes

Based on the data collected and the themes identified, I began checking if the themes aligned in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and then that entire data set (Level 2) did so. The coding tables were updated, removing duplication and with consideration to any language implications. The defined themes coding table is presented in Appendix Four.

5.5.2 Stage 5 Define Themes

I utilised inductive analysis to refine the specifics of each theme and, therefore, the overall narrative for the research. I began generating clear definitions and defined names for each defined theme and sub-themes as per stage 5 of Thematic Analysis, confirming these versus the data for each phase.

5.6 Defined Themes

The defined and named themes, identified from Phase 1 to Phase 5 of the Thematic Analysis, are presented as follows. Please note that as the earlier section has contained the relevant quotations from participants, I will not duplicate these in this section but instead provide a summary of the final themes. The seven defined themes presented are:

- Communication
- Culture
- The HR Role
- People
- Identity
- Organisation
- Trust in HR.

5.6.1 Defined theme – Communication

Communication was identified as a consistent theme from the prior knowledge review across the three phases and throughout the data review and refining stages of the Thematic Analysis, as shown in Table 6.
Communication sub-themes were identified, as shown in Figure 25.

Table 6: Communication – Evolution of theme development

Defined Theme	**Sub Themes**	**Initial Themes**
Communication	anxiety from uncertainty	anxiety arising from uncertainty
	clear directions	clear directions
	Communication strategies	frustration over job security
	Leadership communication	lack of direction from the top

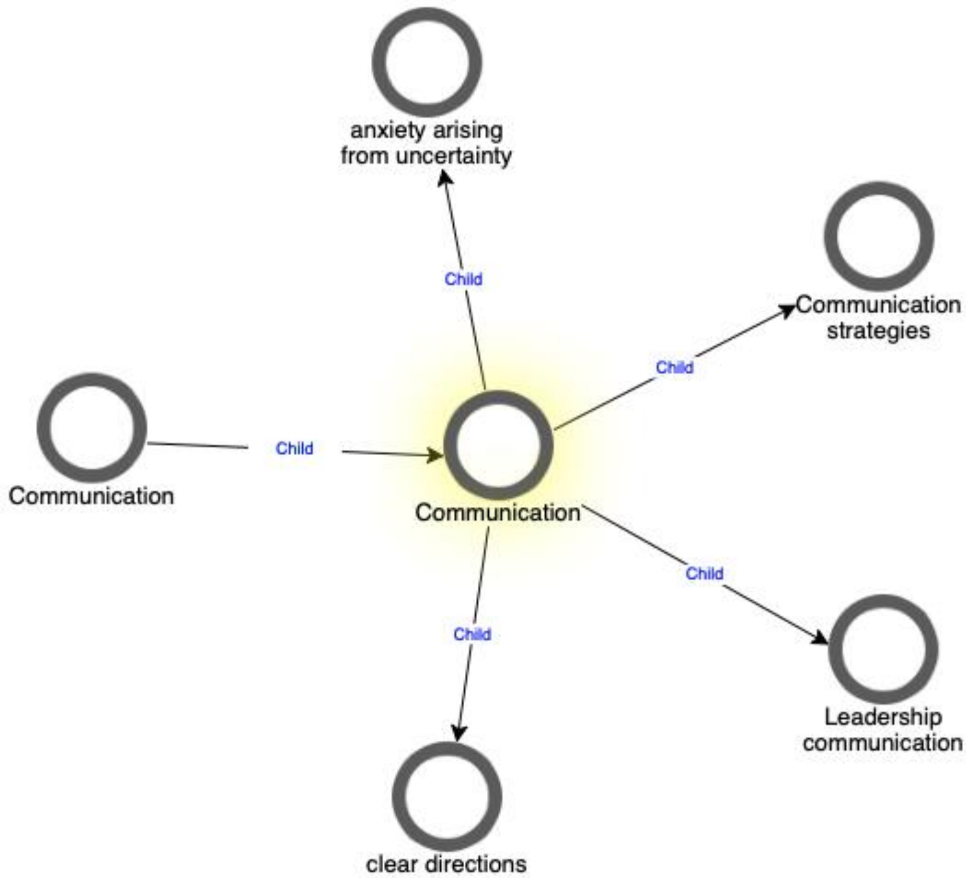


Figure 25: NVivo Explore Diagram of Theme - Communication

Employees reported a requirement for frequent communication. In the absence of solid communication, there is a risk of creating further uncertainty, potentially impacting people's psychological experience. The requirement for structured communication from the organisation was identified both in prior knowledge review and from the data gathered in this research, as reported above in this chapter.

Communication is required on business-as-usual issues, such as how and where decisions are made. It is also required for the transformation activities and timelines.

5.6.2 Defined theme – Culture

Culture, both from a national/country basis and the culture embedded within the organisation, was identified as a consistent theme across the three phases of data and throughout the review and refining stages of the Thematic Analysis, as shown in Table 7. Two subordinate themes were identified under the superordinate theme of Culture, National and Organisational Culture, to distinguish national identity and the culture embedded within the organisation. Organisational Culture's themes were identified, as shown in Figure 26.

Table 7: Culture – Evolution of theme development

Defined Theme	**Sub Themes**	**Initial Themes**
Culture	Culture - national	Nationality Cultural Differences
	Culture - organisation	Abolishing hierarchy in company Acting to fit in Alignment with company culture Clearly defined company goals and vision Company culture differences cultural context Cutting bad managers difference in company culture Empowering staff flexibility and agility Inculcating purpose and value Opinions disregarded Redefining work cultures and mindset Toxicity of the work environment

Verbal abuse and rudeness

5.6.2.1 Sub Theme – Culture of Organisation.

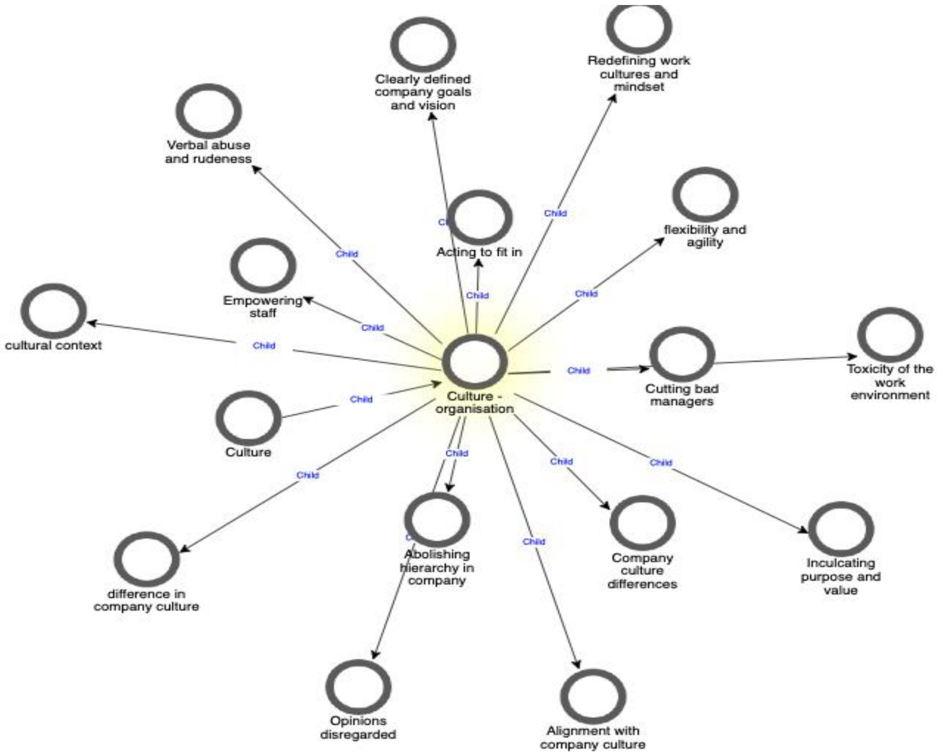


Figure 26: NVivo Explore Diagram of sub-Theme – Culture - Organisation

Organisational culture was reported by participants across the categories of employees, business leaders and HR leaders as a critical consideration in the context of transformation and their experience with the organisation. The negative cultural indicators in the organisation and the alignment of cultural factors with an employee’s sense of purpose have direct implications for the HR leader’s programmes (Warrick, 2017; Schotter, Meyer and Wood, 2021), as will be discussed in Chapter Six.

5.6.2.2 Sub Theme – National Culture

National culture and the requirement to be respectful of cultural norms were explicit in the Leader’s interviews. The language used was “Face”, which has a specific nuance in the Asian context. In my researcher role, I have relabelled this as "National Culture," as considered in Chapter Two's discussion on international cultural variances, including Meyer (2014).

5.6.3 Defined theme – HR Role

The considerations and implications for the HR Leader's role were created by analysing in totality the Voices heard in the Research, considering how the HR Leader can approach their role in this context. Table 8 demonstrates that the HR role, as expected, is a central concept and theme across the three phases of data collection and throughout the review and refining stages of the Thematic Analysis.

Table 8: HR Role – Evolution of theme development

Defined Theme	**Sub Themes**	**Initial Themes**
HR Role	HR - Building connections	building greater collaboration
		Empathy Employee centricity humanistic approach individualistic approach sharing and working as a team Team working
	HR - Business Partner	HR - Business oriented HR as business partners progressive planning and transition into change Stakeholder management
	HR - Collaboration	Building collaboration
	HR - Diversified Role	Administrative HR duties AI replacing HR Clear definition of HR functions covid triggered anxiety prompting reversion of HR roles to employee needs diverse experience and skill set

		Ethical HR person Functional leadership HR being proactive in ensuring sufficient supplies to staff HR Merger of functions and service HR role regressing to admin Outdated skill set Recruitment
	HR - Duality of Role	COVID Support Diverse role of HR Financial role of HR HR - Business partners and employee advocate HR being business oriented instead of employee centric HR exposure to different business functions Justification of HR role and value Legal function of HR Overlapping role of HR
	HR – Building capabilities	Competency of employee Developing employee skills Digitalisation Employee working outside expertise HR future leaders Internal coaches Peer coaching Skill Set Skills orientated Staff work outside expertise

The requirement for HR to be a Business Partner is undisputed by this Research – understanding and delivering organisational requirements. The Employee voice (including Leaders in an employee capacity) also sought connections, communication, and collaboration from HR to help build their capabilities as shown in Figure 27. As a result, the further diversification of the HR role, including new emerging HR skills, including AI, became a clear subtheme.

A golden thread of the research was the subtheme of dualities and the ability to simultaneously hold a people and organisational perspective. How to do so will be discussed in Chapter Six.

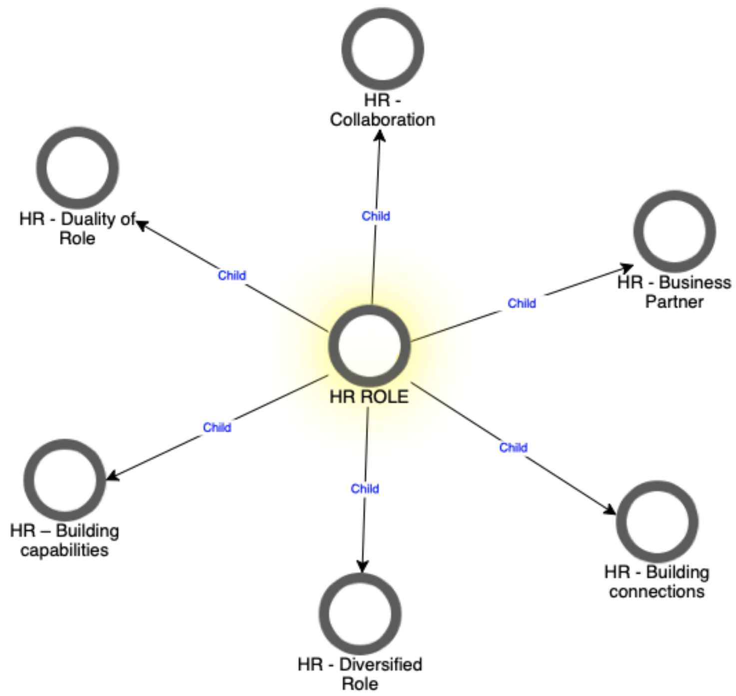


Figure 27: NVivo Explore Diagram of Theme HR Role

5.6.4 Defined theme – Identity

Analysis of the data revealed the theme of identity across the three phases and later stages of the Thematic Analysis, as shown in Table 9.

Table 9: Identity – Evolution of theme development

Defined Theme	Sub Themes	Initial Themes
Identity	Employee Identity	Employee Identity Job loyalty - generations Work Identity loss

HR - Identity	HR - Generalist vs Specialist HR role regressing to admin Justification of HR role and value Redefine HR role - COVID

Two sub-themes were identified that reflect two aspects of this Research. Firstly, the implications for employees, including business leaders, on how organisational change can impact their sense of identity, particularly when feeling disempowered by the context, culture, or organisation. Whilst a change of role or risk of redundancy has many implications, the impact on identity was apparent. I also considered national identity and reflected upon the cultural constructs of status and face in Asia and the potential links between the two but concluded that the theme of identity already encapsulated these nuances.

The identity of HR practitioners is the second dimension of this theme. From the HR leaders' interviews, I heard about the need to justify the function or role and how the role had been forced to change during COVID-19 and its impact on them as individuals as shown in Figure 28. The selected identity of the HR leader, most typically as a Business Leader, was apparent. Identity will be further discussed in Chapter Six.

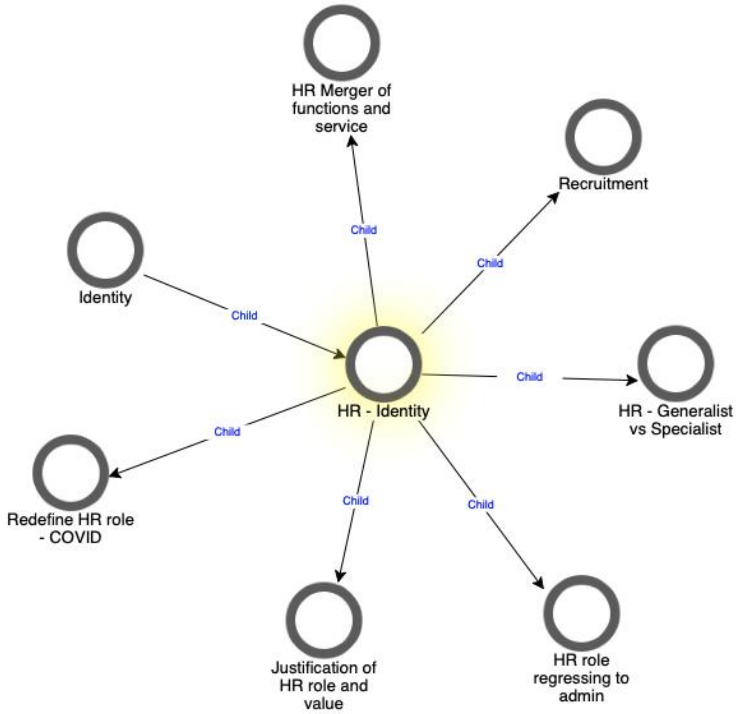


Figure 28: NVivo Explore Diagrams of Theme – HR - Identity

5.6.5 Defined theme – Organisation

The broader context of the Organisation and organisational priorities and how this impacts the role of the HR leader was identified as shown in Figure 29. The role and views of the CEO and organisational leaders, together with their capabilities and the employee’s perception of justice, have a clear impact on the role of the HR leader and how they select their priorities as demonstrated by the data and are apparent across the three phases and later stages of the Thematic Analysis as shown in Table 10.

Table 10: Organisation – Evolution of theme development

Defined Theme	Sub Themes	Initial Themes
Organisation	Impact of Organisation Leaders	Adaptability of leaders

		Capabilities of leaders and top management Leaders' ability to manage crisis Leaders' ability to manage crisis and envisage needs Leaders and managers lacking people skills Positive image leaders (CEO) Stakeholders delegating communication to HR Traditional concept of successful leadership Traits of a good supervisor
	Organisation - justice	Leaders - lack of regard for staff Racism in workplace and recruitment Severance payment Sexism in workplace and recruitment
	Organisation - priorities	Getting buy-in Performance management Successful transformation

The sense of HR prioritisation of organisational priorities was evident from the majority of the HR leaders and the employees' perspectives.

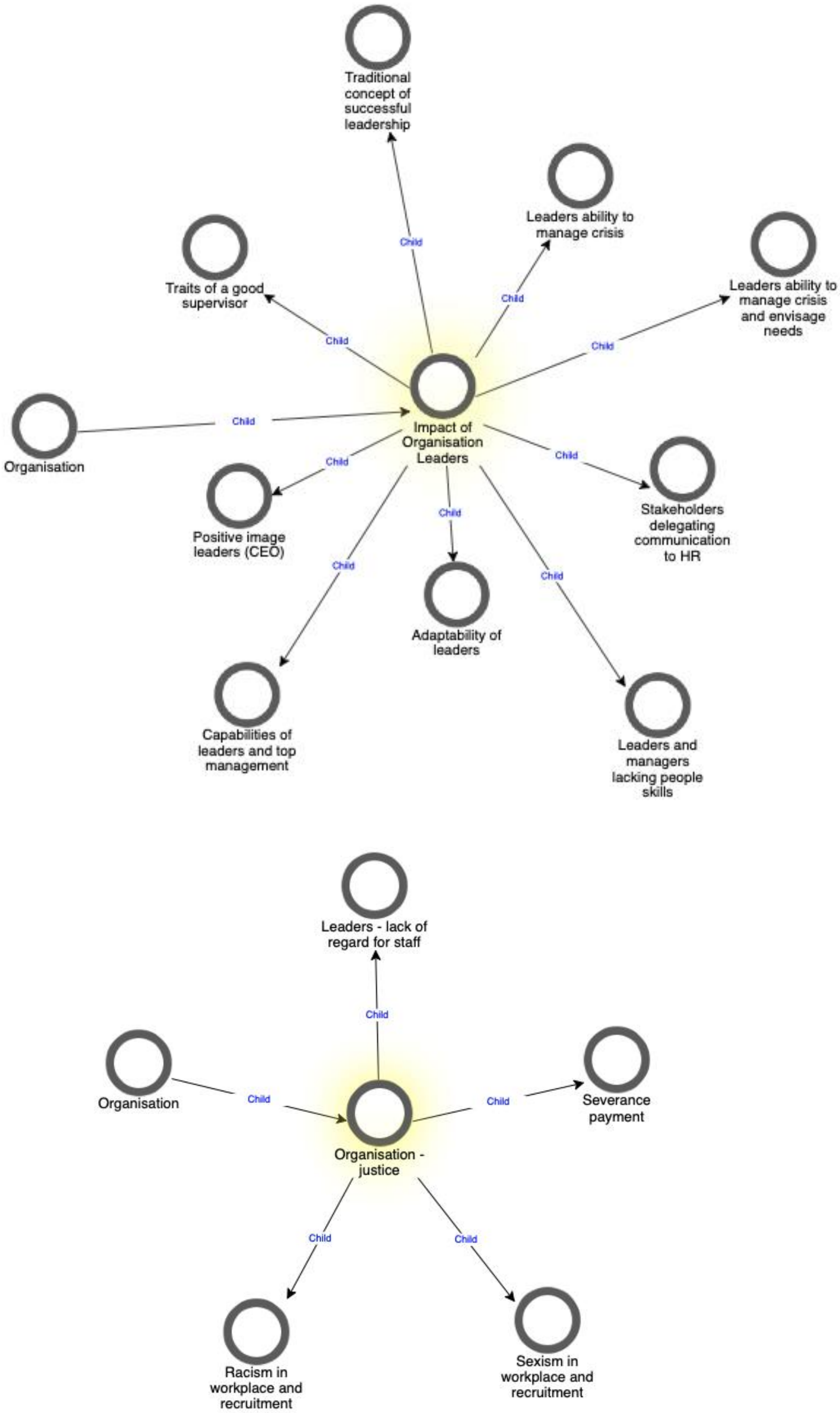


Figure 29: NVivo Explore Diagrams of Theme - Organisation

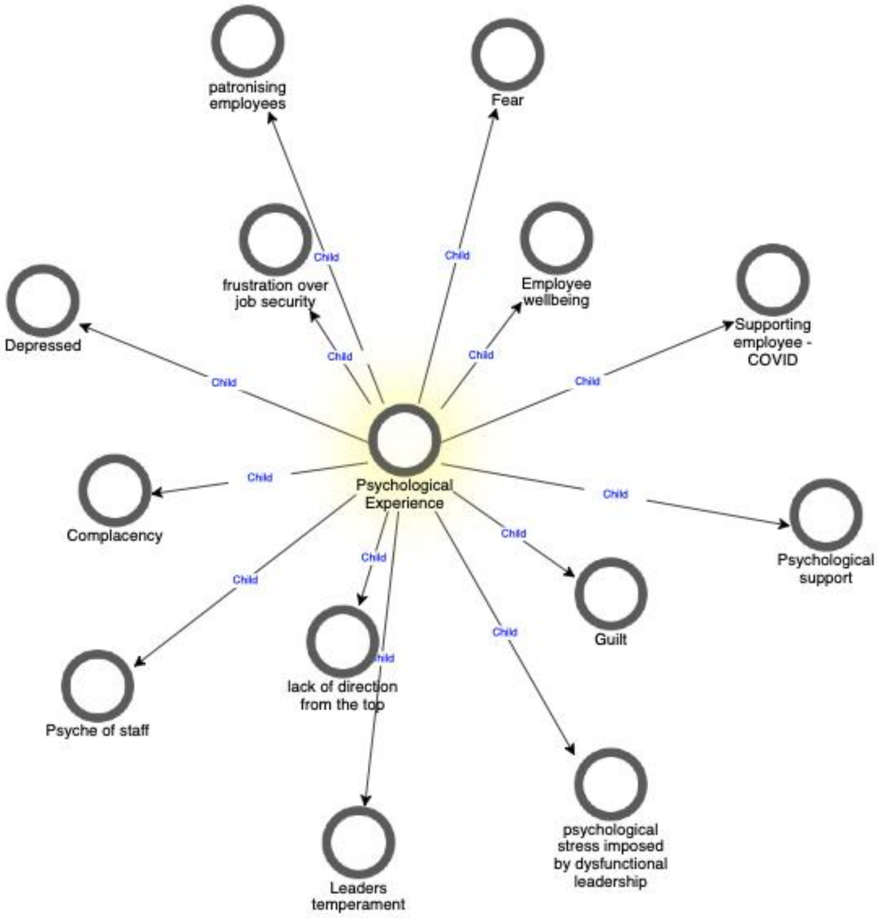
5.6.6 Defined theme – People

Reflecting the Research aim of capturing the voices of the employees and leaders-as-employees, a specific theme has been identified around People to present the expectations from and impact on during organisational transformations. The People's needs emerged early in the data from the three phases and throughout the stages of the Thematic Analysis, as shown in Table 11.

Table 11: People – Evolution of theme development

Defined Theme	Sub Themes	Initial Themes
People	Coping Strategies	Coping strategies Family as support system
	Mindset	Attitudes towards change Resiliency
	Psychological Experience	Complacency Depressed Employee wellbeing Fear frustration over job security Guilt lack of direction from the top Leaders' temperament Patronising employees Psyche of staff psychological stress imposed by dysfunctional leadership Psychological support Supporting employee - COVID

The three sub-themes under People are discussed below:



The psychological impact on employees at all levels during this particular transformation was a significant theme in the data collection, as expressed by the voices of the individual participants. The finding supported the premise from the knowledge review of individualisation. Whilst there were themes, each person was experiencing the process with their unique perspective. The recommendation on individualisation will be explored in Chapter 6.

Participants discussed coping strategies, and it was recognised that family support emerged as a subtheme. Participants noted the importance of the family unit during this time, and there is a link here to National Culture whereby in many Asian households, multiple generations of the family cohabit and pool resources. Therefore, I noted that this may not have been reflected should the research have been conducted in the West.

Adjacent to the coping strategies, Mindset emerged as a significant subtheme, with participants reporting that adopting the Growth Mindset positively impacted their resiliency and attitudes towards Change/Transformation/Integration as shown in Figure 30.

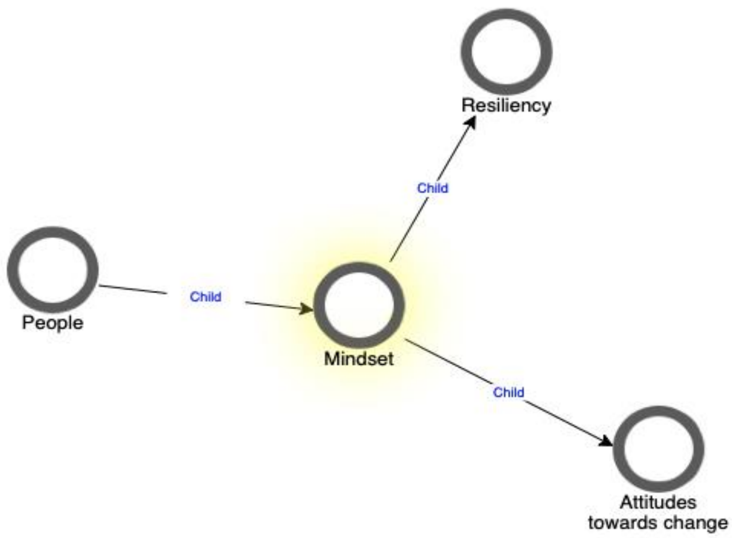


Figure 30: NVivo Explore Diagram of Theme People -

5.6.7 Defined theme – Trust of HR

Trust in HR was identified as a major theme during the data analysis. Consistently through the knowledge review and interviews, the lack of trust in HR was implicitly or explicitly referred to and emerged early in the data familiarisation and was present through the later stages of the Thematic Analysis, as shown in Table 12.

Table 12: Trust of HR – Evolution of theme development

Defined Theme	Sub Themes	Initial Themes
Trust of HR	HR Trust	Business frustrations with HR cost cutting measures removing HR COVID anxiety HR lacking strategic skills HR not included in decision making Importance of functional leadership Lack of strategic skills lack of trust from employees

The Business does not always trust HR, often based on a perceived lack of capabilities. Employees do not trust that HR will protect their interests. HR practitioners do not feel trusted or trusting when they are excluded or have resources cut. These reasons are reflected in Figure 31. The trust of HR will be explored further in Chapter 6.

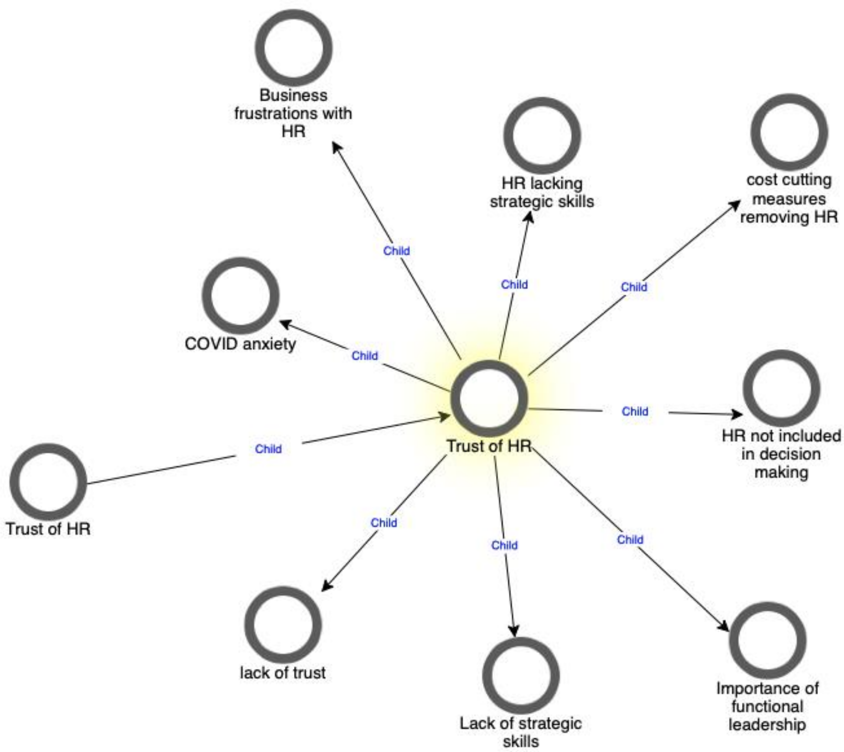


Figure 31: NVivo Explore Diagram of Theme - Trust of HR

5.7 Findings Conclusion

This research has explored the personal experience of organisational transformation through the perspectives and experiences of more than 150 voices of employees, business leaders, HR practitioners and an HR scholar. The data gathered through three phases of data collection included masterclass feedback with facilitator notes, focus groups with observer notes and interviews with the organisation's leaders, external HR leaders and an HR scholar. These data sources were inductively analysed utilising a Thematic Analysis methodology influenced by Mason (2002) and anchored around Braun & Clark (2006).

In Chapter 6, I will discuss the findings, relating the findings to the Research's Purpose, Aims and Objectives and the existing knowledge. Next the chapter will describe the evolution from themes to the creation of a practitioner-based HR framework and then demonstrate an example of me using the framework in a professional capacity within a health setting that was outside of the scope of this research. The Chapter will conclude with the limitations of this Research and recommendations for further research.

6 Recommendations, Contributions, Application and Observations of the Research

6.1 Introduction

As I consider the outcomes of this research, as described earlier in Chapters Four and Five, the majority of the objectives have been achieved. This Chapter will, therefore, primarily focus on the final objective and conclude with a position on the Purpose.

> **Develop a practitioner outcome that can be shared with my wider professional practice community.**

In addition to the findings reflected within this research, the traditional HR activities in this scenario were also delivered. During the integration period, the requisite organisational deliverables including cost savings, reorganisation, and both union and government negotiations. These deliverables were all met and concluded successfully.

It is at this stage, that I consider my "so what?" of the Research. I note here the recent view expressed in the Human Resource Management Review that the Academic-Practitioner Gap (APG) in the profession of Human Resources remains wide (Vosburgh, 2022). The historical perspective of theory and practice in HR suggests divergence and I noted in a 2014 review of HRM research and Practice that this perspective has been amplified by the rise in Business Schools research moving the discourse away from HR practice to theoretical frameworks (DeNisi, Wilson and Biteman, 2014).

Indeed, I have endeavoured to create a scientific basis for a design of an HR practice and to heed the advice that: "Practitioners should look to the scientific literature for guidance on setting up effective workplace systems; scientists should take their cues from practitioners in identifying issues relevant to employee well- being and organizational effectiveness” Ruup and Beal (2007 p. 36).

This, therefore, meant a success criteria of the research was whether the outcomes could be applied by a practitioner, to answer the often asked practitioner question: “So what?”

6.2 Observations of Methodology and Approach

The Methodology enabled a high volume of distinct voices to be captured in the data collection process by different methods. I will commence with my observations of the contributions each method made.

The Masterclass content delivered by HR served as a catalyst, an opportunity to trigger observations and insight from employees that they otherwise may not have been cognizant of. It also enabled HR to put the employee wellbeing agenda at the core of the transformation programme. In other words, rather than simply to describe or report that employees were experiencing a period of uncertainty as a Researcher, HR was able to provide knowledge, tools and resources to better equip individuals to manage themselves and others during this time. The concept of Growth Mindset (Dweck, 2006) was the theory that as a practitioner I found most useful in this context and one that most resonated with participants as the opportunity to reframe and seek out the potential that the transformation could provide in obtaining new skills, experiences or indeed to craft a new career path outside of the organisation. I believe that encouraging that sense of some agency during an event that employees have no control over, it can provide a sense of purpose and was a relevant contribution to the findings. It was a useful opportunity to test the conceptual frameworks real-time. However, this should not be misinterpreted to imply that I diminish or disregard the impact of the transformation, particularly upon long service employees or those whose skill sets were sunsetting.

The leadership interviews by contrast provided an alternative perspective of the construct of paradoxical thinking and duality, a critical theory in this research. These individuals were simultaneously employees at risk and leaders that were expected to continue to perform and ensure that their teams did the same. The contribution to the research was my observation of needing to assess, that in my role as an HR leader, what they needed from me and the function at specific moments in time. In other words, in my interactions with them were they assuming the identity of an employee or a leader and how did I need to pivot in response? These interactions created a space for observation, in that specific moment did I need to be an HR business partner or people partner and how I could ultimately reflect that duality in my resulting model.

Focus groups not only provided the voices of the junior people across the organisation but an insight on the differences of national culture with a contrast between Singapore and Hong Kong. Whilst the participants were a similar demographic as defined by age and seniority, the vocalisation in the focus groups provided observations on communication styles. Reflecting the knowledge review for example, the Hong Kong focus group were more direct in language and tone, in comparison with the Singapore based cohorts. My observation was that the underlying needs and concerns were the same, simply the manner in which they were expressed differed with the Hong Kong cohort being far more direct and assertive. (Meyer, 2014)

As a professional practitioner, the peer level interviews with other HR leaders was the most informative method in terms of the reflections it prompted in terms of this research but also my own day to day practice. Each of us as HR leaders had led significant transformations and yet we had all approached these with a differing mindset and therefore a different approach. The significance of this was the realisation of the direct link between the mindset of the HR leader, the identity we choose to assume on the business to people partner spectrum and therefore the experience that the organisation has. I endeavoured to approach these discussions with curiosity not judgement, to observe and question real time how these other leaders would have approached the projects I had run and to ponder what difference that would have made on the outcomes. It is exceedingly rare as a senior HR practitioner that we get to explore another leaders experience, and I now make it a component of my professional practice to meet other leaders to do so, particularly as I cross industries.

In comparison to the practitioner interviews, the HR Scholar discussion focused on the theoretical model of the competency and skills required of the practitioner and HR. These skills remain the framework for development and indeed I continue to refer to these in developing my own HR teams. The outcome of the research as will be discussed, is to extend the model to consider identity and mindset.

I will therefore now commence with a brief discussion of the Seven identified Themes with resulting recommendations as context for the resulting framework that follows.

The seven named and defined themes presented for discussion together with my recommendation are:

- Communication
- Culture
- The HR Role
- People
- Identity
- Organisation
- Trust in HR.

6.2.1 Discussion of theme – Communication

The requirement for Communication with employees as part of a change programme has been well established by previous research and, indeed, has been included in many change management frameworks over many decades, including Kotter (1992). Successful transformation hinges on the capability of leaders, communication strategies (Haumer et al., 2021) and a collaborative work culture.

This research specifically identified that employees at all levels reported a requirement for frequent communication. The absence of solid communication created a risk of further uncertainty, potentially impacting people's psychological experience. These findings support the prior knowledge about the impact of uncertainty on individuals (Rock, 2009)

The extension of this knowledge by this research is a recommendation for HR leaders to make the Communication process a two-way dialogue. Whilst the recommendation for communicating with employees is well established, as described in Chapter Two, it is orientated around the messaging from the Organisation towards the Employee. HR are advised to share the vision, create a story, and outline the journey to the Employee.
My recommendation is to extend these established communication principles:

Recommendation One:

> **HR Leaders to create bilateral communication channels for the Employees to share their perspectives.**

During this research, it was a significant finding to understand the positive impact on employees of being listened to, whether in the interviews, the focus groups or being asked for opinions and sharing their stories.

6.2.2 Discussion of theme – Culture

As described in the earlier literature review, there are well-established principles on the importance of culture within the specific context of organisations and organisational change. The HR leader can refer to parallel existing knowledge of national cultures, such as Hofstede (1980) and Meyer (2014). However, I observed a potential gap in integrating these for the benefit of the HR Leader.

From the internal organisational participants in this research, it was more often negative connotations of culture that were identified – the use of descriptors such as toxic and disrespectful. I noted that these descriptors were context-specific and considered the findings from the HR Leaders and the full spectrum of organisational culture knowledge to determine how these viewpoints impacted their roles. I believe there is an opportunity to create greater guidance for practitioners to consider the positive and negative connotations of culture and apply these:

Recommendation Two:

> **The HR Leader must fully diagnose and consider both organisational and national cultures when working across borders.**

6.2.3 Discussion of theme – The role of HR

The literature review has detailed the history of the HR function and indicated that it has been carefully researched and iterated by many HR scholars. I have indicated the fast evolution and changing requirements of the HR practitioner and HR function. The velocity of the four phases of HR evolution with the imperative to create value and become a business partner was well-intentioned. I would argue that has been necessary for the survival and organisational standing of the HR function. However, I will position that this necessity has often been at the expense of goodwill from employees.

Appearing briefly in the established competency framework for HR practitioners was the acknowledgement that the practitioner's role involves deftly managing different requirements defined as Paradox Navigation (RBL, 2015)

Recommendation Three:

> **The HR practitioner needs to diagnose and strategically plan based on the diverse needs of both the people and the organisation.**

However, there are many other paradoxes that the HR Leader must contend with daily, including short-term versus long-term objectives:

- Investing in developing people while managing costs.
- Downsizing specific roles while continuing to hire others.
- The requirements of other critical stakeholders: boards, management, investors and how they often conflict.
- Managing culture while building a gig worker economy.

There are many paradoxical areas that the HR Leader needs to navigate. Therefore, in my view, based on the findings of the research, I find that it was premature to remove Paradox Navigation from the HR competency framework.

This research demonstrates that the capabilities required to manage these dualities will not be built or prioritised unless it is explicitly named. As evidenced by the HR Leader interviews, this paradox management dimension is not a consideration in how they approached their work. While the RBL position (RBL, 2021) is that this competency is now inferred, I do not consider that the inference has been fully recognised by HR Leaders, at least not in Asia. I acknowledge that Paradox Navigator (RBL, 2015) recognition and inference may be the case in other geographies. However, these other geographies were outside of the scope of this research.

As evidenced by this research, five HR Leaders, indeed six including myself, have all been tasked with the same organisational requirement: to right-size the organisation through organisational restructuring. Each HR Leader interviewed approached the challenge differently with different HR practices deployed.

6.2.4 Discussion of theme – Trust of HR

Trust as a theoretical framework has been limited to the specific dimension of trust towards the HR function by employees and leaders for the purpose of this research. A deliberate parameter given the complexity and scale of the theory that could merit exploration of the psychological, behavioural and organisational constituents that whilst of interest, would not have met the purpose, aims and objectives of this research.

The literature review and the Thematic Analysis of the data collection identified the risk of a lack of trust towards the HR function from employees and leaders. This research has identified contributing factors, including the capabilities of HR practitioners and the perception of the HR function orientating towards prioritising the organisational priorities over people.

Figure 32: Catbert and HR. Copyright: Adams (2022)

Catbert is a red fictional cat and the 'evil director of *human resources*' in the popular Dilbert series, shown in Figure 32. I acknowledge that the views expressed in the cartoon series mirror many common views of Human Resources and those amplified in the data collection process.

The research findings demonstrated that the construct of trust is critical for the HR Leader to be trusted in the organisation, by employees and by the leaders.

The theory of trust of HR was discussed in the literature review, the focus groups, and the organisational leader interviews and reiterated by Professor Ulrich. Indeed, the lack of trust in the HR team at Fox was clearly articulated by both leaders and employees and was a key observation from the findings. There is scope for future research, for example is lack of trust based on experience of interactions of people with the specific members of the HR team or is it a more general perception of the function?

However, trust was not referenced or inferred by the five senior HR Leaders of large multinational companies in Asia Pacific. The HR Leaders' data was analysed with resulting predominant themes such as respect, equality with the finance function and delivering the business results.

This research has identified a potential gap in the interviewed HR Leaders' knowledge. Either the need for trust was not identified, or there was an implicit understanding that trust already existed. Given the demographic of the HR Leaders, akin to myself, it is probable that their prior professional development has emphasised and prioritised the commercial requirement of their role and that the requirement to consider this has not been considered.

A conclusion from this Research is that:

Recommendation Four:

> **Trust building has to start and be driven by the HR Leader, both with employees and the organisation. It is not sufficient to only build trust with the organisation.**

6.2.5 Discussion of theme – People

The Thematic Analysis of the data collected from employees and leaders demonstrated the psychological impact at all levels of seniority of the participants due to the organisational transformation process.

As described earlier in Chapter 5, these findings aligned with the Literature Review. However, the research highlighted a gap in the HR literature as the research was not apparent in the traditional HR literature but emerged from the research areas of psychology and applied social cognitive neuroscience.

Growth Mindset (Dwek, 2004) resonated most with the participants as a coping tool and support from the family.

I propose that HR Leaders need to consider and accommodate the effects on all employees, both leaders and employees, during restructures:

Recommendation Five:

> **HR leaders need to understand better and appreciate the psychological impact on people from organisational activities. Then, take appropriate action to mitigate where required.**

Within the people theme came the request for HR to collaborate with employees on areas to support their career and personal development. For the HR leader, this can include bespoke interventions from learning and development or coaching to continue to build capabilities.

6.2.6 Discussion of theme – Identity

The sense of self was explored within the Literature Review, specifically the importance of understanding the impact of change on an employee's sense of Identity (Alvesson and Robertson, 2006). The findings of this research from the data gathered at the leadership level have concurred with this. Adjacent to this conclusion is the impact of national cultural nuances and the loss of status and identity. The International HR Leader will need to accommodate these nuances in their practice.

In addition, I have identified an opportunity for further research from a gap in the existing HR Literature:

Recommendation Six:

The exploration of the HR Practitioners' sense of professional Identity.

As will be detailed, I propose that the HR Leaders explore their professional identity, particularly the dimensions of people partner to business partner.

6.2.7 Discussion of theme – Organisation

As discussed in Chapter Two, the organisational requirements and considerations for HR and transformation have been well established. The finding from this research and the recommendation for further research, specifically in relation to HR Leaders managing the duality of people and organisation is:

Recommendation Seven:

The HR leaders needs to diagnose the basis for their relationship with their CEO with resulting implications for the role.

The HR Leader cannot be considered in isolation without due consideration of the role of the CEO. The CEO is a critical stakeholder for the HR Leader, and the CEO agenda becomes the agenda of the HR Leader. With so much ambiguity for the role of the HR Leader, the shaping force becomes the CEO or equivalent.

6.3 Developing A New Framework of Practice for HR Leaders

In Chapter One, I set out:

> The purpose of this research is to contribute to the Human Resources knowledge and practices of HR professionals.

This section sets out the distinct contribution I am making to the practice of HR professionals.

The development of the Framework has been derived from seeking a solution to an identified problem (Ward, House and Hamer, 2009) – a finding of this Research had identified gaps in the HR theory and practitioner domains.

In a practitioner-orientated framework, the problem is articulating how HR Leaders, and their functions can hold both People and Organisational expectations and deliver simultaneously to both, not as a paradox but as a duality.

While considering the framework development theory, I noted that none explicitly related to HR and therefore considered other domain areas. I observed that Ward, House and Hamer (2009) had reviewed and offered a conceptual framework for translating knowledge into action for health applications, which could be utilised as the basis for this HR framework development.

The findings identified the opportunity and, subsequently, a recommendation for the HR Leader to consider five areas with respect to their role and the evolution of that. These recommendations allow for the differing nuances of geography, industry, maturity of the HR function and organisation requirements. Later in this chapter, I will demonstrate the application of the framework and the subsequent refinements made.

This framework has resulted from the themes identified in the earlier findings, with a note that prior frameworks exist around the areas of communication and the evolving HR Role, which, therefore, have been excluded from this framework, as shown in Figure 33. This framework is intended to be adjacent to the communication and HR Role frameworks and assist the HR leader and their team in organisational transformations, HR strategy and implementation planning. This framework can be utilised in differing settings, including industries and across geographies, as will be demonstrated.

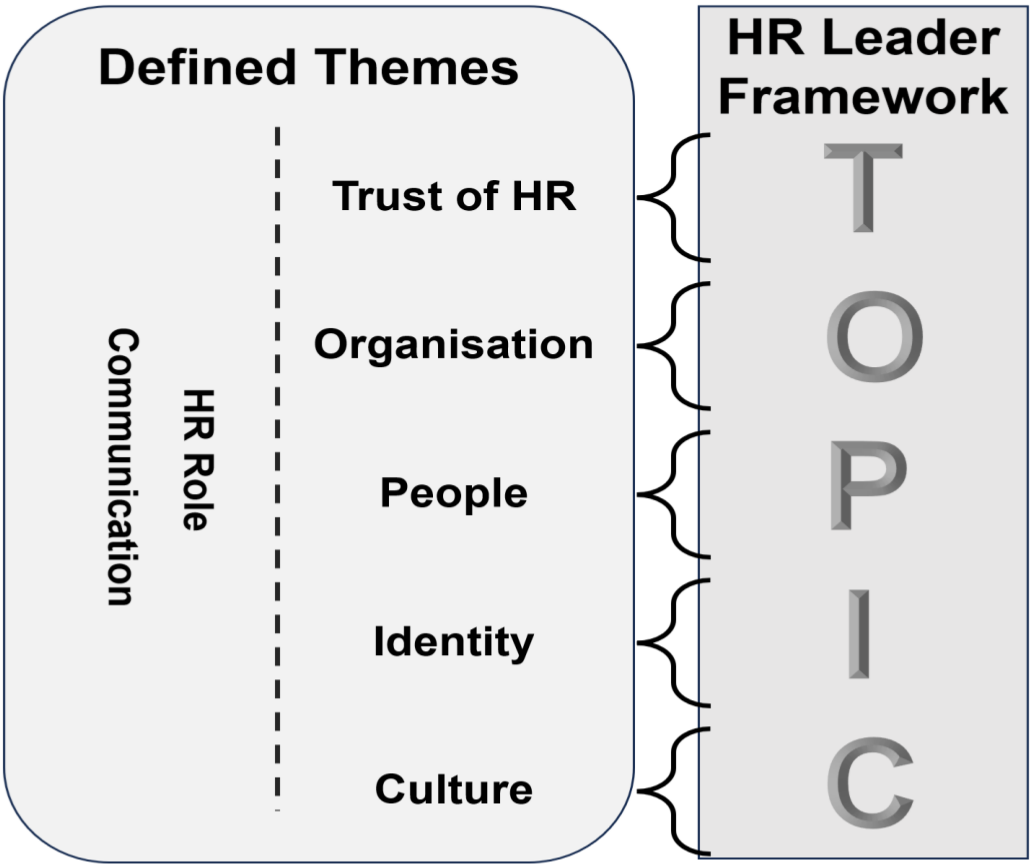


Figure 33: Relationship of Themes to HR Leader framework.

These five domain areas are as follows:

1. **Trust of HR**
2. **Culture – National and Organisational**
3. **Identity of self and the HR team**
4. **People Perspective – Employee experience**
5. **Organisational Obligations**

I have titled the framework as The HR Leader’s TOPIC, as shown in Figure 34.

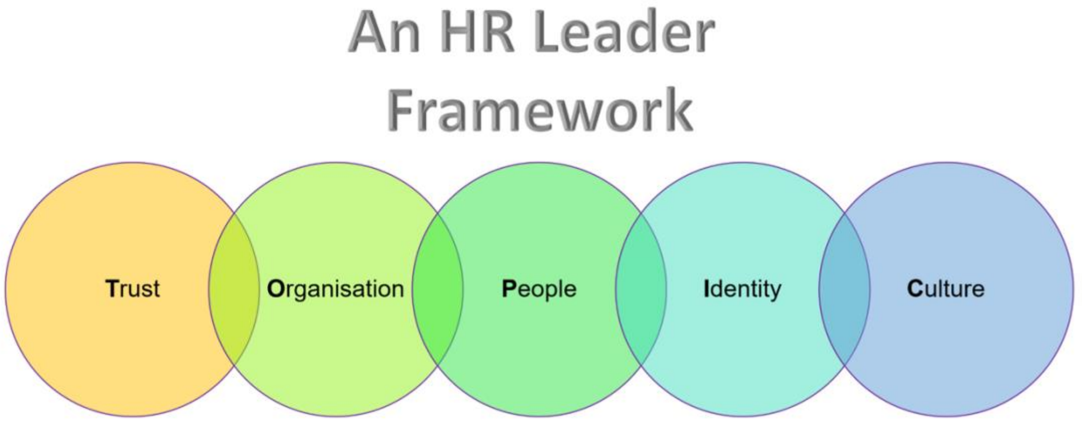


Figure 34: The HR Leader’s TOPIC framework.

6.3.1 Trust of HR

With **TRUST of HR** as a cornerstone theme identified by this research, the HR Leader must be able first to determine the trust levels afforded to them as the leader and their function. This insight will enable the HR leader to diagnose the potential gaps in trust and take appropriate action.

I propose that HR leaders can measure Trust through observation, dialogue, and existing HR tools, including employee engagement surveys, 360s, exit survey data, and interviews. In order to ensure ethical considerations, this data should be gathered anonymously through independent mechanisms so that it is clear that the HR Leader has no access to the raw data.

6.3.2 Organisation

The **Organisational** obligations of the HR Leader have been clearly identified by previous research, as evidenced in the prior literature review. I support the premise that HR must assume a business partnering role to be cognizant of external perspectives and partner with the organisation to build the capabilities and context required to deliver organisational performance.

In addition to the findings, I also recommend that the HR Leader closely considers the role of their CEO as it shapes the role of the HR Leader. How the CEO or business leader manages or sets objectives for the HR Leader also shapes the perception of HR within the organisation. The dynamic established between the CEO and HR Leader and how the function is positioned versus other corporate functions is critical for success.

The HR Leader is recommended to consider in parallel and make observations between the organisational requirements and the people's perspective. This duality is the core recommendation of this research. That HR does not do so as a paradox but as a duality. The Leader needs to set an agenda that impacts the organisation's culture and cohesively determine their HR strategy for delivering the required transformation. They will need to communicate and champion this to the broader management team. I acknowledge that the HR leader will need credibility to do so. However, this research demonstrates that building credibility as a business partner and building credibility with HR are two separate but adjacent paths.

6.3.3 People

PEOPLE's perspectives and needs are essential for successfully delivering the HR mandate in times of organisational transformation. This research has identified many of the requirements for the HR Leader to consider and enable:

- How and where is the HR Leader listening to employees to understand their experience, needs and expectations?
- How far is HR able to personalise the HR practices to account for differences in people?

- When considering a change initiative, how and where is the HR function considering the personal and professional impact on employees?

- Are Leaders equipped to self-regulate in order to manage themselves lead others, and the business?

- Are HR managers able to build connections with employees, and do they know they need to do this?

- Do your employees feel respected?

The linkage between individual emotional and psychological well-being to their performance and, ultimately, the organisational performance has been identified during this research. Therefore, HR leaders are advised to start with employee well-being in order to build an individual performance that contributes to organisational performance, as per Figure 35.

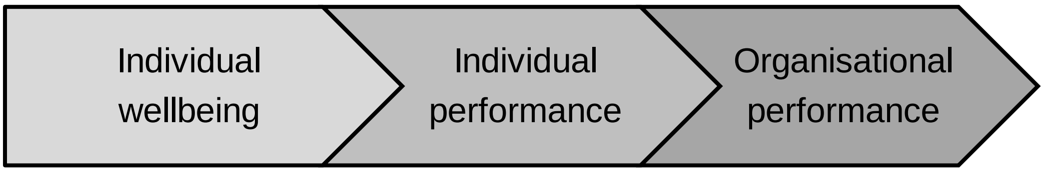


Figure 35 : From Well-being to Organisational performance.

6.3.4 Identity

The individual **IDENTITY** of the HR Leader is fundamental; therefore, a level of self-awareness is required for success.

- Does the HR Leader consider themselves a business partner, a business leader, an advocate for employees and investors, or all of the above?
- Are they operating from a place of certainty and security or feeling under threat?

- Do they believe that the HR function and themselves are respected and valued in the organisation, or are they operating in a state of fear and survival?

As identified in the findings, the theme of identity and emotional experience of the HR Leader is highly significant. A level of personal self-reflection and analysis by the leader is strongly recommended, and they must explore the concept of identity with their team members. This self-reflection will require appropriate data collection in the context in which they operate, and I recommend it be facilitated externally.

6.3.5 Culture

The **CULTURE** of the organisation and the geographies in which the HR leader is operating should be considered for alignment and divergence. In the context of this research, the dissonance between Western-headquartered organisations and Southeast Asian cultural norms was identified as a potential barrier to the successful delivery of the transformation objectives. The HR Leader must carefully consider how best to make reasonable adjustments to deliverables and the manner in which those deliverables are to be delivered to ensure that approaches are culturally sensitive and respectful to the geographies in which the organisation is operating. Interventions must be bespoke and culturally nuanced rather than a blanket approach.

6.4 Application of the Framework

As I consider the application of the framework, I have considered other frameworks available to the HR leader, available in the practitioner orientated publications. I note that with a search criterion from 2020 for recency, a review of journals such as Personnel Review focus upon the continuing requirements of HR building new competencies: These newer competencies included, for example, the domain of people analytics and AI (McCartney, Murphy and Mccarthy, 2021), rather than exploring mindsets and identity of the HR practitioner as I propose.

The Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources is indeed extending the role of strategic HR management to include sustainable HR management, taking the position that the HR role now includes the requirements to develop strategies, goals, activities and management practices which human resource practitioners can then apply to further sustainability outcomes (Kramar, 2022). I note again the need for HR to take on increased accountability in new HR domains and therefore build new knowledge and skillsets.

I further note the development of new HR models in countries where HR has to date been underdeveloped, for example a study of a change initiative in Jordan as published in the journal of European Research on Management & Business Economics, indicated the need for HR practitioners to consider the impact of geographical culture (Alqudah, Carballo-Penela and Ruzo-Sanmartín, 2022). This aligns with the outcome of my research that both cultural and organisational culture should be considered by the HR leader.

Whilst I do not disagree with the above recommendations, my research has demonstrated the opportunity for the individual HR practitioner, to initially consider their mindset, establish and note their identity and then to build the new competencies suggested in the areas above. I therefore plan to add to this body of knowledge through future publications in both academic and practitioner journals. I also plan to develop training materials for practitioner development.

The Human Resource Management Journal in 2022, proposed that HR has a window of opportunity in which to develop psychologically safe workplaces, trust-based employment relationships and socially connected workforces. The journal notes that there is a requirement for HR researchers and Practitioners to align and pilot interventions to create emerging models for practice (Kulik, 2022). I align with this view and would suggest that my proposed framework, is a model which could be applied by practitioners in their workplace, as per an example of application that will be described in the following section.

In this next section, I will demonstrate the application of the T.O.P.I.C framework and how it can be utilised in diverse cultures and industries.

6.4.1 An Example of T.O.P.I.C in Action in a healthcare setting

In support of the findings and recommendations identified, the following example is provided as a short example for the examiners as to how HR practitioners can apply this research. The following example of the application of the proposed framework was performed outside of the scope of the research project and in another professional setting separate from the research context. This application of the framework was within a professional healthcare environment and was not part of any of the research undertaking. Approval was given by the organisation to present these examples of application.

Following the transformation journey that provided the context for this research, I accepted the opportunity to become the Group Chief Human Resources Officer for a premium private healthcare services organisation across Asia and Europe once the organisational deliverables had been achieved. The organisation has around 70,000 employees, and the HR function comprises over 500 HR practitioners.

The applicability of the research recommendations across industries and geographies is as follows:

- Different Industry.
- The geographical footprint includes Asia and extends to Europe and the Balkans — distinct cultures to those examined in the research.

- A service business as opposed to a product.
- The workforce encompasses knowledge workers such as medical clinicians and other workers such as housekeeping, cleaning, and maintenance.

COVID-19 provided the opportunity for the recommendations of this research to be applied in real-time in a manner bespoke to the context and the organisation. With hospital workers at the forefront of the fight against the virus, there was an urgency for the organisation to pivot (transform) in response.

The TOPIC model was applied as follows:

6.4.2 Trust of HR:

A short employee survey was initiated across the organisation to elicit the experience of employees through the pandemic and to ask what initiates and interventions would best support them at this time. Within the survey, employees were asked whether they felt trusted and were trusting of the organisation to create the trust barometer. For the HR function specifically, feedback was gathered from leaders, employees and HR practitioners about their interactions and roles within the organisation.

6.4.3 Organisation:

Employee retention and minimising burnout were the primary ORGANISATIONAL concerns. A shortage of healthcare talent would involve closing wards, which would reduce income for the “for-profit” organisation and reduce their capacity to assist local governments. Changes in some operating protocols would be required, including response to COVID-19 infections in hospitals and rota patterns for the nursing teams.

6.4.4 People:

The Masterclass model was adapted and implemented across thousands of employees in six months. Adaptions included more focus on the science and evidence behind the models, given the clinical expertise of many of the audience. The Masterclass was expanded to include well-being at home knowledge for those corporate workers confined to their homes during lockdown phases, with content sourced from practitioners at a medical university.

The faculty designed content, which was then purposed into training delivered virtually, including:

- *Physiotherapist faculty providing home-based exercises.*
- *Dieticians advising how to eat well and avoid mindless snacking.*
- *In response to the employee survey, HR launched alternative well-being techniques, with content provided by subject matter experts on Meditation, Yoga and Tapping.*

Additionally, HR provided food deliveries to employees when groceries were extremely scarce.

> *HR focused on ensuring the hierarchy of needs, knowledge and care for our people were provided during this critical time.*

All of these elements of employee support had been identified during this research.

Managers were quickly trained and upskilled to manage remotely and look for signs of burnout using the psychological and neuroscience knowledge identified in the research and adapted based on the feedback received. Here, once more, I was able to utilise the deep internal knowledge base that was available to me:

> *A neurosurgeon delivered the module on what happens to the human brain in stressful and uncertain times.*

Clinicians prefer to listen to other clinicians, and even though the content was crafted by HR, having a neurosurgeon deliver the programme gave it greater credibility with the hospital teams.

The Company provided a death-in-service enhanced benefit, which was communicated to all employees.

> *The communication of this benefit provided certainty as to how the organisation would financially care for the families of employees should fatalities occur.*

This application was a direct learning from this research when identifying that the publication of the redundancy calculator had provided certainty and comfort for employees.

6.4.5 Identity:

As the Group Chief HR Officer, I established the identity principle of the HR function and purpose during this time, which was to:

> *Care for our people so that they can care for their patients.*

This principle encompassed the duality of people and organisational requirements; however, the starting point was on people: a learning from this research.

This principle was internally communicated to all 500 HR practitioners across the organisations, and key deliverables were mapped to this agenda. I invested time in discussing and upskilling the teams on what HR was there to deliver and this idea of holding both people and organisational requirements.

As the setting is a medical and clinical environment, I used clinical terms with the DNA helix, as shown in Figure 36:

People and organisations are in our DNA.

Figure 36: People and organisations are in our DNA (IHH, 2023)

Additionally, to emphasise the link to business results and therefore ensure that those HR practitioners who identified more as Business Partners were not threatened by the changes I was making, I communicated using the below imagery in Figure 37 to reinforce the link to the business:

> ***Caring for our people means that our people can care for our patients, which also means that the organisation's targets are dually emphasised to the HR team.***

Figure 37: What we do matters (IHH, 2023)

6.4.6 Culture:

Many HR practitioners and clinicians across the organisation do not speak English and therefore, my messaging as Chief HR Officer was often expressed in imagery with these simple straplines translated into multiple languages. This was the method I chose to communicate a concept. A critical learning from this research was that:

> *It is the responsibility of the HR Leader to pivot into the cultures they lead and to do so with respect.*

As the topic of wellbeing became a new HR agenda during the pandemic, this was also a moment where culture was pertinent. Unlike the West, where mental health is becoming a more common discussion, in many Asian cultures, there is still an elevated level of stigma and shame assigned to mental health.

Local culture was a primary consideration in how HR delivered the mental health component of wellbeing knowledge. Workshops could be attended anonymously without requiring cameras or contributions. Confidential counselling services were established and were well utilised, and Employee

Assistance Programmes were launched. This approach highlighted a paramount consideration:

> *Cultural considerations of how HR topics should be adopted and adapted across geographies and categories of workers.*

6.4.7 Outcomes of the application of the framework

The duality of organisational objectives and people need was delivered through the period of COVID-19. The 2022 organisational results demonstrated:

Organisational Objectives:

> ***In 2022, the annual report of the company demonstrated a 30% increase in EBITDA 2019-2022***

People Perspective:

> ***In 2022, Forbes magazine named the company #258 in the Global Best Employers. The only hospital group to make this list of 800 global companies.***

6.5 Continuing Relevance of the Research

As the World transitions from pandemic to endemic, the macroeconomic factors and political uncertainties significantly impact the workplace. Traditionally, high-growth businesses, including technology, are reporting significant downsizing, and this trend is not confined to any single industry or geography. Indeed, there is a shift, with industries previously considered ‘recession-proof ‘reporting layoffs.

Although the geographical focus of this research was Asia Pacific and the Middle East, there are similar, contemporaneous changes happening in the West in 2023; therefore, the research outcomes are pertinent there.

In April 2022, ACAS, the UK Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service, released a report regarding a study conducted with British businesses. ACAS Chief Executive Susan Clews (Clews, 2022) stated that:

> *"The impact of global events has seen some businesses facing difficult circumstances and our poll reveals that nearly 1 in 5 are considering redundancies in the year ahead.*
>
> *Redundancies at large organisations have been in the news recently and it appears that 3 in 10 organisations that employ more than 250 employees are likely to make redundancies in the next 12 months.*
>
> *ACAS advice for bosses is to exhaust all possible alternatives to redundancies first but if employers feel like they have no choice then they must follow the law in this area or they could be subject to a costly legal process." (Clews, 2022)*

The ACAS position is technically correct. Poorly managed severances and reorganisations create a significant risk of litigation in countries where employment law provides employee protection. Litigation is often the 'stick' for organisations to follow the law. However, this should be the minimum requirement in these scenarios, not least due to the risk of media and consumer reaction to poorly managed changes, as exemplified by the P&O Ferries downsizing debacle in 2022 (Independent, 2022).

This trend is indeed reflected globally in 2023. These layoffs are happening at the time of writing. Arguably, in some instances, business leaders and HR's poor workforce planning has led to over-hiring during the pandemic. Now, redundancies are required as global economies and organisational revenues slow down, directly impacting employees and their trust in the organisation. Therefore, the role of HR and, consequently, the HR Leader who sets the direction for the function becomes even more critical.

HR represents the organisation to the employee from the first touch to their exit, as HR is commonly the first and last face to be seen by the employee during their tenure with an organisation. Suppose employees do not believe they can trust the organisation to consider their interests. In that case, they will find other ways to self-organise, and the rise of unions in the US has recently demonstrated this. Organisations such as Tesla, Starbucks and Amazon have experienced unionisation attempts.

I propose that this trend continues in organisations where employees feel unsafe. If this trend continues, this will indeed reverse the evolution of the HR function and return to the earlier phase of development where HR had an employee relations centricity and focused on union negotiations.

This expectation to have their concerns considered, is not, in my view, an unreasonable request by employees. I acknowledge that other researchers have previously, and will continue to disagree with my position, but in no way should my view be interpreted that lifetime employment can be guaranteed or is indeed desirable. The primary objective of the private sector organisation is to deliver growth in shareholder value, which often requires removing costs (people) from the organisation.

6.6 Recommendations for Further Research and Practice

Adjacent to the recommendations for the HR practitioner are broader recommendations in terms of educational pathways, executive education, and further research; therefore, the following recommendations are proposed:

- MBAs and other leadership programs offered by academic institutions should broaden the programmes to better encompass Human Resources education for all executives leading the organisation.

- I have identified the identity of the HR Leader as an area for further research. I would like to undertake this in an international context to allow for consideration of cultural nuances.

- Balancing Dualities – I propose to develop a suite of practitioner tools on how to balance the HR dualities to better anchor developing and upcoming HR leaders.

- Organisations should ensure that internal communications strategies provide opportunities for employee voice on matters.

6.7 Distinct Contribution

In assessing the Contributions of this research, I return to the research's Purpose, Aims and Objectives stated earlier in Chapter 3.

I propose that the findings of this research contribute to both the knowledge and practice of international HR practices and directly address an opportunity identified in Chapter Two regarding the evolution of HR knowledge and frameworks to prioritise the organisational priorities and position HR leaders first and foremost as Business Partners.

Regarding existing theory, at the time of writing, only Professor Ulrich's research had articulated the requirement for Paradox Navigation as an established model for HR Practitioners. As discussed, this was subsequently removed, and I believe that it was too early to do so. My findings show the necessity to make it explicit to HR Practitioners that they should hold the duality of people and organisation for the mutual benefit of both.

This research, therefore, makes a distinctive contribution in the form of the resulting new framework that enables HR leaders and their teams to analyse their positioning and ontology to best deliver to both employee and organisational requirements. In addition to this contribution, I have made recommendations for future research.

As an insider-researcher, I have captured experiences in which I have lived alongside employees in the organisation. My unique position as an employee, HR Leader, and Researcher has created the opportunity to represent employees' and leaders' lived experiences and findings that could not have been achieved otherwise. As a practitioner peer, I was able to have discussions with other HR leaders that authentically captured their stories. My years of experience as an international HR practitioner established the foundations for this research, which I believe is unique to myself and my context.

Knowledge

As a result of this research, I have identified the need for a new diagnostic framework for HR practitioners to traverse the duality of People and Organisational requirements in their practice, which I identified as a knowledge and HR practice gap in Chapter Two.

Meeting the Research Aim

By undertaking the research described, I have met the aim of providing targeted support to employees experiencing the transformation. I achieved this by applying the learnings from the literature review in a bespoke masterclass and toolkit. Furthermore, I have completed the objectives by capturing the lived experiences of employees, business and HR leaders and have additionally considered the opinions of an HR scholar.

Practice

Developed from the findings of this research and the multiple perspectives captured, I have designed an HR Practitioner model and evidenced its application in a different industry and geographical location. I therefore propose it has potential value to other HR leaders around the globe. Additionally, there is potential to be used by HR leaders to consider their position on other paradoxes – for example, outside stakeholders (investors, unions, government) and internal perspectives.

6.8 Conclusion

In this research, I sought to explore the continuing evolution of the HR practice and Leader through multiple perspectives of employees, business leaders and HR leaders.

Despite my distinct contribution, I am mindful of the broader HR community priorities as we continue to drive evolving agendas forward as the workplace changes.

I remain optimistic, though, about the contribution that HR can make, and I will continue to use the HR panel discussions, HR conferences and forums, and the other platforms available to me as a Chief HR Officer and a Researcher to ignite the debates I propose we need to have as a professional HR community.

In Chapter 7, I will discuss my (long) journey as a researcher, the challenges I faced, the reflexive journal that at times I felt was one task too many, my invaluable critical friend and my closing thoughts of my research journey with my hope for future HR Leaders consideration.

7 Reflexive Account of the Learning Journey

In this concluding chapter, I share my observations of the learning journey with the intent of it being useful for others considering undertaking a DProf. The reflections from the Journal will also be presented.

7.1 My journey

With an HR career spanning nearly thirty years and multiple geographies, I undertook this doctoral journey to explore whether there was a different way to approach my work. Having taken the more traditional HR textbook approach to change/transformation in the past with limited and varied success rates, some tears, and tantrums, I simply wanted to explore a different way and share that with other HR practitioners. In my interview for the course, I recall explaining that my motivation was how I had read so many books and attended so many HR courses and conferences and still have not gotten the answers I sought. I figured I should stop complaining and do it myself.

That is the practitioner mindset – we get the job done.

I knew I needed to soften my views and create a greater fluidity in my HR practice, to be open to unlearning and then learn with a differing mindset. John Keats, the Poet, described his creative pursuit as “negative capability”, an endeavour of a vision that leads to intellectual uncertainty and confusion as opposed to aiming for the outcome of certainty. Over the past seven years, that has been my experience undertaking the research and the slow crystallisation of the outcome. As a practitioner, I am accustomed to clear deliverables and fast timescales, and I could not have predicted where the research would conclude and that it would take nearly seven years. That process has itself been a learning. If, after thirty years, I do not have all the answers, what does that mean for my identity as an HR Leader?

The duration of this doctorate has seen many unprecedented global events, and the pandemic has changed the experience of work and the place that work has in our lives. I am reassured to see the growing importance placed on employees, their well-being and potential, not as a replacement for the need to grow an organisation but alongside that. I would not have anticipated that discussion happening when I commenced this research. The question is whether this will continue and be embedded in day-to-day HR practices or will the next HR trend shortly replace it.

However, the pandemic instigated a break in these studies; clear prioritisation was required, and my focus was on the healthcare workers in my organisation, my family, and my well-being. With my limited capacity, hard choices were made. Therefore, this research is being submitted much later than anticipated.

It has, therefore, been a curious encounter to return to the Fox / the acquiring company experience, reading the comments, the feedback, and the angst of the pre-pandemic world in an acquisition that was making media headlines. The pause has brought a greater level of objectivity; the personal emotions that were evidenced in the Reflective Journal have evaporated, and while not planned, I can conclude that the delay in analysis and writing up has enabled a more robust and objective analysis of the findings.

This closing chapter will therefore examine the Journal, the input of the critical friends selected to accompany the research journey and conclude with the personal learnings and professional journey.

7.2 Reflective Journal

7.2.1 Employee/HR Leader/ Researcher

The Reflective Journal commenced immediately prior to the close of the deal with the planning sessions underway in Asia. the acquiring company had come to Asia to meet with local Fox and the acquiring company management and outline the way forward.

The session was a textbook change and communications case study in that it only detailed why the deal had been done and the benefits to the organisation, with no emphasis or evident consideration given to the impact on people. At this stage in the acquisition, pre-close, legally, no decisions could be made; however, even with that in mind, there was no recognition of the impact on people.

Indeed, when asked about people implications, the response from management was, "*Not all of you will have go-forward roles."* The discouragement and mixed emotions in the room were palpable at that time. Yet there was an insightful moment, as the Journal states:

"I could sense the frustration and apathy in the room, how do we keep performance high for everyone's benefit when people feel flat and worried?

This insight was the first moment where the plurality of the roles was first experienced: as an employee not knowing whether a go-forward role would be offered. I was the HR Leader tasked with managing the integration programme and also, I was in the researcher role, there to examine the work, it was clear from my statement that I was evidentially anticipating the process to be unpleasant; therefore, this would need to be considered both during the data collection and the thematic analysis. My own bias and mindset would be an essential consideration to ensure that my beliefs and emotions towards the events were not colouring the findings of the research. Therefore, I was determined to observe and note my emotions in the Journal before each element of the data collection process and to refer back to this when undertaking the analysis phase. I would need to ensure that questions were positioned and worded objectively and that I separated the practitioner and researcher personas. In the Journal, I noted the observation and made an action point to sense-check whether my interpretation of and reaction to the events was reasonable with my critical friend.

The Reflective Journal identified the need to counterbalance the emotions felt by people in the business and ensure I was forming my views and not absorbing the emotions and views of others.

7.2.2 Why bother?

What was the point of doing the work if redundancies were inevitable and people would leave? That was one of the main challenges I received from my critical friend. If these people would not all remain employees, then why was it important that I go to such lengths to create an additional workload for myself and the HR team to meet their needs?

This question caused a period of reflection: While the research was an important consideration, was it the priority? Or was the priority the people and the process? Should I just worry about whether I had a job? Should I just get on with the job?

I was experiencing the Paradox Navigation construct before I had fully identified it and positioned it as the golden thread of the research. My Journal entry stated:

> *Why do I have to make a choice? I need to do it all.*

Acknowledging the paradoxical scenario created ambiguity and uncertainty in that I had to manage all the priorities, recognising that I would need to make differing choices at critical junctures in the journey and that there was no easy solution.

7.2.3 Marking my own homework

I would be creating new initiatives for the employees, anchored to the knowledge and views on how to enable employees best to navigate these times. How would I feel if the feedback was poor, or the interventions were considered ineffective? The Reflective Journal identified the need to apply a growth mindset, to aim to put aside my ego and recognise that the first iteration would simply be the first.

Indeed, I can apply this learning to the process of the doctorate. My initial challenge had been the requirement to accept critique and rewriting instructions. The separation of ego and the work, so that critique of the work was not experienced as a critique of self. This challenge was a topic of discussion with my critical friend, and the instruction to that person was that if they observed that I was emphasising myself over the work, they should identify this to me.

7.2.4 The Critical Friend

The role of the Critical Friend was indeed critical to the success of the research, which was an initially underestimated element of the process. The opportunity to sense-check and validate perceptions challenge my own bias and beliefs has undoubtedly contributed to the findings' validity.

The benefit of assigning the role to an internal resource was that the person was present and engaged in activities and could provide real-time feedback.

The Critical Friend considered the proposed findings of the focus groups, gave feedback, reviewed, and confirmed notes. I had not anticipated the solitude in undertaking a DProf, and the interactions with the Critical Friend were highly beneficial.

7.2.5 The Research Journey

Accepting the role with Fox, I understood what would be required from me. Being new to the organisation, I had no deep attachments to products or people; this objectivity was the primary reason I was appointed as one of the team of Integration Leaders.

These early observations ensured that cultural nuances and the impact of not recognising these would need to be flagged. I also questioned at the time my emotional state: *'How do I feel?'* and I continued throughout the programme to do a check-in each day. This practice, acquired during the research, is something I continue today when managing high-impact scenarios such as COVID-19.

At the end of the year, a Christmas party was held. It would be the last one as the old organisation, and there was an activity planned:

> *I got people to write memories on a memory board of their favourite memories. We raised a toast to* Fox*.*
> *As I read the literature, there was a lot of talk about grief as an emotional reaction to change, I think I was trying to almost have a wake, a memorial. To give people the emotional space to say goodbye to their old reality. Will it help?*

This entry in my Reflective Journal was a critical reflection point. I needed to be aware of the requirement to be objective through the research journey and give space to others to share their story and not presume how they felt. It was critical, therefore, that I was thoroughly reviewing my process and findings for bias, which I did with an extensive thematic analysis.

7.2.6 Masterclass

As the Close date fast approached, HR was delivering the masterclass series and a number of well-being activities that had been designed as a result of the feedback:

> *The well-being programme is also live and out there. Great to see how many people signed up! It is interesting how people respond to science when they dismiss some other programmes as HR fluff. Some of the feedback is mixed, again putting a meaning where it does not exist – was asked is there a reason they need to build resilience?*

It was interesting to observe my reactions to feedback on initiatives HR had designed, to fully acknowledge and appreciate the suspicion even when the intention was positive. In these circumstances, where trust is non-existent, should we even try? That became a topic of interaction with the critical friend.

At this juncture, the interviews and focus groups commenced, and I timed those for a period when I did not know who would be offered go-forward roles. It was essential to remove my bias and preserve professional integrity as both an HR practitioner and researcher. I was surprised by how open and candid people were, cognisant of the pressure upon them. I believed (as noted in the Journal) that as leaders, they were used to looking after everyone else and yet had no one to check in on them. The vulnerability was apparent, and I was aware that I needed to be respectful of that.

The realisation about the vulnerability of leaders raised a topic that I again discussed with my Critical Friends about the role of HR and, indeed, that of organisations towards our employees:

Where does the responsibility for HR end? Do we have social responsibility?

This research journey has required me to question the role of the HR leader and the HR function from many perspectives.

7.2.7 Deadlines Accelerated

As is common in the practitioner experience, the deadline changed. These changes were compressing the integration journey significantly, impacting the timelines for the practitioner outcomes and the research deliverables. The Journal entries during this time reflect the pace of both programmes and the impact on people and me personally. Based on the data collection, it was a clear reflection that even great HR cannot offset organisational deadlines.

From the external HR leader interviews, I noted that an opportunity for future research would be the dynamic relationship between HR Leaders and their CEOs. Therefore, the CEO and HR relationship has become a recommendation from this research. While the attributes and skill set of HR Leaders have been discussed, with many dependencies on the CEO or equivalent, it would be interesting to map the corresponding CEOs for highly and poorly rated HR Leaders. My Journal noted the enjoyment I had in these interviews.

7.2.8 Dyslexia, Dyspraxia, Data Analysis and Writing up

As an individual with learning difficulties (Dyslexia and Dyspraxia), I was aware that I would have additional considerations during this journey. However, I had the experience of navigating undergraduate and graduate programmes along with professional education that gave me the evidence to know I could manage.

In the Literature review where available, I listened to audio versions of the material. During the analysis phase, I represented my findings in visual form. I utilised the tools available in Grammarly and initial drafts typed in dyslexia-friendly fonts.

It is undoubtedly a challenge to complete a DProf with learning difficulties, but with a Growth Mindset, it is certainly feasible. I would encourage other students with learning difficulties to find their voice and path.

7.2.9 Final Thoughts

The research was undertaken not as a career accelerator but as an opportunity to explore topics that had previously frustrated me as a practitioner, from being unable to find answers in textbooks or conferences to determining that I need to take agency and shape my answers. The research was put into practice during the COVID-19 pandemic, and with the benefit of several years of research prior to that event, I already had the framework in place, which meant that as an HR function, we were fast to respond.

On April 11, 2023, I contributed to a CIPD Asia HR Leaders Roundtable and raised this research topic. I believe this remains an opportunity area for the function, one in which I continue to invest my career and aspirations. My hope is that at some stage, we can move beyond the Dilbert cartoon personification of the HR function and find our solid footing. While technological advances and the future of work will change the workplace, there will continue to be human beings in the workplace and, therefore, a requirement for a function to leverage and care for those human capabilities and the human beings. The role of the HR Leader and the function they represent will continue to impact people and organisations, and I hope that my HR TOPIC becomes part of that discourse.

END
Singapore, 2024.

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9 Appendices

9.1 List of Appendices

Appendix 1 – Approval – Middlesex Online Research Ethics - MORE

Approval letter for Application Number: 7672

2019 Aug - Trans Disciplinary DProf Sub-Committee

Middlesex University London

Trans Disciplinary DProf Sub-Committee

The Burroughs
Hendon
London NW4 4BT

Main Switchboard: 0208 411 5000

22/08/2019

APPLICATION NUMBER: 7672

Dear Angela Marie Ryan and all collaborators/co-investigators

Re your application title: Qualitative case study - HR & Organisational change

Supervisor: Paula Nottingham

Co-investigators/collaborators:

Thank you for submitting your application. I can confirm that your application has been given APPROVAL from the date of this letter by the Trans Disciplinary DProf Sub-Committee.

The following documents have been reviewed and approved as part of this research ethics application:

Document Type	File Name	Date	Version
Permission/Agreement Letter	Angela Ryan Doctorate Letter copy	13/04/2019	final
Data Protection Act checklist	MU Data Protection Checklist (GDPR) 2018	03/07/2019	Final
Participant Information Sheet	Final Participation Information Sheet	03/07/2019	final
Participant Information Sheet	Final Final consent form	03/07/2019	final

Although your application has been approved, the reviewers of your application may have made some useful comments on your application. Please look at your online application again to check whether the reviewers have added any comments for you to look at.

Also, please note the following:

1. Please ensure that you contact your supervisor/research ethics committee (REC) if any changes are made to the research project which could affect your ethics approval. There is an Amendment sub-form on MORE that can be completed and submitted to your REC for further review.

2. You must notify your supervisor/REC if there is a breach in data protection management or any issues that arise that may lead to a health and safety concern or conflict of interests.

3. If you require more time to complete your research, i.e., beyond the date specified in your application, please complete the Extension sub-form on MORE and submit it your REC for review.

4. Please quote the application number in any correspondence.

5. It is important that you retain this document as evidence of research ethics approval, as it may be required for submission to external bodies (e.g., NHS, grant awarding bodies) or as part of your research report, dissemination (e.g., journal articles) and data management plan.

6. Also, please forward any other information that would be helpful in enhancing our application form and procedures - please contact MOREsupport@mdx.ac.uk to provide feedback.

Good luck with your research.

Yours sincerely

Chair Dr Kate Maguire

Trans Disciplinary DProf Sub-Committee

Appendix 2 – Participant Consent form and Information Sheet (PIS)

Participant Consent Form

Participant Identification Number:

CONSENT FORM

Title of Project:

Exploring the evolving role of the HR function and leadership in facilitating organisational transformation

Name of Researcher: Angela Ryan

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.
3. I agree that this form that bears my name and signature may be seen by a designated ethics committee within the University process
4. I agree to take part in the above study.

Name of participant	Date	Signature
Researcher	Date	Signature

1 copy for participant; 1 copy for researcher.

Participant Information Sheet (PIS)

MIDDLESEX UNIVERSITY

PARTICIPANT SHEET (PIS)

Participant ID Code:

1. Study title

Exploring the evolving role of the HR function and leadership in facilitating organisational transformation

2. Invitation paragraph

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

Thank you for reading this.

3. What is the purpose of the study?

The integration of [redacted] and [redacted] provides a unique opportunity to understand the evolving role of HR working with employees whose working lives are being disrupted in multiple ways both internally and externally. My purpose is to enhance our employee well-being by tackling some of the more difficult problems in this organisational transformation and getting the real-time results into the hands of stakeholders who can apply the research findings.

4. Why have I been chosen?

It is important that we assess as many participants as possible, and you have indicated, by responding to the email flyer that you are interested in taking part in this study. Around 50 people will be taking part in focus groups and interviews and giving feedback on the Masterclass series.

5. Do I have to take part?

No. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. If you do decide to withdraw from the study then please inform the researcher as soon as possible, and they will facilitate your withdrawal. If, for any reason, you wish to withdraw your data please contact the researcher within a month of your participation. After this data it may not be possible to withdraw your individual data as the results may have already been published. However, as all data are anonymised, your individual data will not be identifiable in any way.

6. What will I have to do?

You will be invited to join a focus group facilitated by an HR leader or a 121 interview with Angela Ryan. The session will last around 90 mins and you will be invited to discuss and comment on the integration process, the Masterclasses, Integration toolkit and how HR can best support you and your teams as well as share anything else you would like to cover.

Notes will be taken, your comments will be anonymised in the write up.

Please note that in order to ensure quality assurance and equity this project may be selected for audit by a designated member of the committee. This means that the designated member can request to see signed consent forms. However, if this is the case your signed consent form will only be accessed by the designated auditor or member of the audit team.

7. Will I have to provide any bodily samples (i.e. blood/saliva/urine)?

No

8. What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

Your comments are confidential and will not be disclosed to anyone else in [redacted] or [redacted] There is no known risk in participating in this project. Appropriate risk assessments for all procedures have been conducted, and will be followed throughout the duration of the study.

9. What are the possible benefits of taking part?

We hope that participating in the study will help you. However, this cannot be guaranteed. The information we get from this study may help us to better support [redacted] employees through the integration process into [redacted].

10. Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?

The research team has put a number of procedures in place to protect the confidentiality of participants. You will be allocated a participant code that will always be used to identify any data you provide. Your name or other personal details will not be associated with your data, for example, the consent form that you sign will be kept separate from your data. All paper records will be stored in a locked filing cabinet, accessible only to the research team, and all electronic data will be stored on a password protected computer. All information you provide will be treated in accordance with the UK Data Protection Act.

11. What will happen to the results of the research study?

The results of the research study will be used as part of an Postgraduate dissertation. The results may also be presented at conferences or in journal articles. However, the data will only be used by members of the research team and at no point will your personal information or data be revealed.

12. Who has reviewed the study?

The study has received full ethical clearance from the Research ethics committee who reviewed the study.

13. Contact for further information

If you require further information, have any questions or would like to withdraw your data then please contact:

Angela Ryan, angela.ryan@fox.com or angela.ryan@hotmail.co.uk

Or

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Thank you for taking part in this study. You should keep this participant information sheet as it contains your participant code, important information and the research teams contact details.

Appendix 3 – Coding summary table of Stages 1 – 5

The following appendix is a summary table to demonstrate this research project's coding process through the 5 stages of Thematic Analysis guided by Braun and Clark, adapted from the NVivo coding tables for Stages 1-5.

Page 1 of Thematic Analysis adapted from NVivo coding tables for Stages 1-5

Stage 1 - Familiarisation of Data	Stage 2 - Initial Coding	Stage 3 - Generate Themes	Stage 4- Refine Themes	Stage 5 - Redefine Themes
Data-derived Codes	Abolishing hierarchy in company	Alignment with Company	Communication	Communication
Alignment with Company value, culture and vision	acting to fit in to success	Abolishing hierarchy in company	anxiety arising from uncertainty	anxiety arising from uncertainty
Abolishing hierarchy in company	Adaptability of leaders	Acting to fit in	clear directions	clear directions
acting to fit in to success	AI replacing HR for traditional works	Alignment with company culture	Communication strategies	Communication strategies
building an ecosystem for greater collaboration	building an ecosystem for greater collaboration	Clearly defined company goals and vision	Leadership communication	Leadership communication
building relationships	Building Connections	cultural context	Coping Strategies	Culture
Clearly defined company goals and vision	building an ecosystem for greater collaboration	difference in company culture	Coping strategies	Culture - national
cultural context	building relationships	flexibility and agility	Family as support system	Nationality Cultural Differences
difference in company culture	sharing and working as a team	Inculcating purpose and value	Culture - national	Culture - organisation
flexibility and agility	Skills orientated and leveraging ecosystem	Organisational justice	Nationality Cultural Differences	Abolishing hierarchy in company
Importance of alignment with company culture	TRUST and transparency	Racism in workplace and recruitment	Culture - organisation	Acting to fit in
inculcating purpose and value in staff	lack of trust	Sexism in workplace and recruitment	Abolishing hierarchy in company	Alignment with company culture
Organisational justice	building relationships	Peer coaching	Acting to fit in	Clearly defined company goals and vision
Racism in workplace and recruitment	Building Relationships and ecosystems	Redefining work cultures and mindset	Alignment with company culture	Company culture differences
Sexism in workplace and recruitment	building an ecosystem for greater collaboration	Approaches for employees	Clearly defined company goals and vision	cultural context
Redefining work cultures and mindset	building relationships	humanistic approach	Company culture differences	Cutting bad managers
replacing hierarchies with peer coaching	sharing and working as a team	reasons for humanistic approach	cultural context	difference in company culture
sharing and working as a team	Skills orientated and leveraging ecosystem	individualistic approach	Cutting bad managers	Empowering staff
Skills orientated and leveraging ecosystem	building talent pipeline and external brand positioning for recruitment	Building Relationships	difference in company culture	flexibility and agility
Building Relationships and ecosystems	Capabilities of leaders and top management	Building collaboration	Empowering staff	Inculcating purpose and value
TRUST and transparency	Capabilities of leaders and top management (2)	Building relationships	flexibility and agility	Opinions disregarded
lack of trust	Certainty	Skills orientated	Inculcating purpose and value	Redefining work cultures and mindset
Competency of workforce and leadership	Information and communication is key in assuring employees	Team working	Opinions disregarded	Toxicity of the work environment
Adaptability of leaders	anxiety arising from uncertainty	TRUST and transparency	Redefining work cultures and mindset	Verbal abuse and rudeness
Capabilities of leaders and top management	clear directions	lack of trust	Toxicity of the work environment	HR ROLE
Competency of employee	frustration over job security	Change Management	Verbal abuse and rudeness	HR - Building connections
developing employee skills instead of simply replacing them	importance of communication from leadership in particular	Getting buy-in	Employee Identity	building greater collaboration
emphasis on skillsets over job titles	insecurity and uncertainty in employee	Performance management	Job loyalty - generations	Empathy
having resiliency dealing with challenges	lack of direction and information from the top	Successful transformation	Work Identity loss	Employee centricity
Importance of functional leadership	patronising employees	Competency of staff	HR - Building connections	humanistic approach
lack of strategic skills	The role of communication strategies	Competency of employee	building greater collaboration	individualistic approach
Leaders ability to manage crisis and envisage needs	understanding the psyche of the staff	Developing employee skills	Empathy	sharing and working as a team
Leaders and managers lacking people skills	Change Management Interventions	Employee working outside expertise	Employee centricity	Team working
organisations lacking the ability to cut bad managers	Attitudes towards change	HR lacking strategic skills	humanistic approach	HR - Business Partner
outdated skill set	Change in organisational culture	Outdated skill set	individualistic approach	HR - Business oriented
positive strong image projection of leaders (CEO)	Abolishing hierarchy in company	Resiliency	sharing and working as a team	HR as business partners
skill set	Clearly defined company goals and vision	Skillsets	Team working	progressive planning and transition into change
staff being asked to do job outside of their expertise	utilising internal coaches as resource	Competency of workforce and leadership	HR - Business Partner	Stakeholder management
stakeholder management	Rational planning perspective	Adaptability of leaders	HR - Business oriented	HR - Collaboration
traditional concept of successful leadership	progressive planning and transition into change	Capabilities of leaders and top management	HR as business partners	Building collaboration
Traits of a good supervisor	Clear convictions	Competency of employee	progressive planning and transition into change	HR - Diversified Role
utilising internal coaches as resource	Clearly defined company goals and vision	Cutting bad managers	Stakeholder management	Administrative HR duties
Coping strategies	Company culture differences	Developing employee skills	HR - Collaboration	AI replacing HR
having resiliency dealing with challenges	Competency of employee	Functional leadership	Building collaboration	Clear definition of HR functions
Learning coping strategies	Complacency and lack of regard for employee's value	Internal coaches	HR - Diversified Role	covid triggered anxiety prompting reversion of HR roles to employee needs
relying on family as support system	Conventional role of HR	Lack of strategic skills	Administrative HR duties	diverse experience and skill set
Emotional States	administrative HR duties	Leaders ability to manage crisis	AI replacing HR	Ethical HR person
Depressed	Employee engagement and relations	Leaders and managers lacking people skills	Clear definition of HR functions	Functional leadership

Stage 1 - Familiarisation of Data	Stage 2 - Initial Coding	Stage 3 - Generate Themes	Stage 4- Refine Themes	Stage 5 - Redefine Themes
Fear	covid triggered anxiety prompting reversion of HR roles to employee needs	Outdated skill set	covid triggered anxiety prompting reversion of HR roles to employee needs	HR being proactive in ensuring sufficient supplies to staff
Employee Experience and Wellbeing Needs	HR being proactive in ensuring sufficient supplies to staff	Positive image leaders (CEO)	diverse experience and skill set	HR Merger of functions and service
Complacency and lack of regard for employee's value	HR role regressing back to traditional admin duty	Resiliency	Ethical HR person	HR role regressing to admin
empathy	Stakeholders delegating communication to HR	Skillsets	Functional leadership	Outdated skill set
empowering staff	Criticism of HR	skill set	HR being proactive in ensuring sufficient supplies to staff	Recruitment
globalisation and digitalisation reduced humans to mere numbers	frustrations from business functions over HR	Staff work outside expertise	HR role regressing to admin	HR - Duality of Role
guilt and support	cultural context	Stakeholder management	Outdated skill set	COVID Support
leaders lack of regards for staff	Debate over merger of functions and service team	Traditional concept of successful leadership	HR - Duality of Role	Diverse role of HR
Negotiating and supporting employee through pandemic	Depressed	Traits of a good supervisor	COVID Support	Financial role of HR
opinions disregarded	Develop learning opportunities for professionals	Coping strategies	Diverse role of HR	HR - Business partners and employee advocate
shift in job loyalty with generations	developing employee skills instead of simply replacing them	Coping strategies	Financial role of HR	HR being business oriented instead of employee centric
staff experiences verbal abuse and rudeness	difference in company culture	Family as support system	HR - Business partners and employee advocate	HR exposure to different business functions
struggling to cope with the toxicity of the work environment	Diversification of HR role	Resiliency	HR being business oriented instead of employee centric	Justification of HR role and value
waiting for severance payment	diverse experience and skill set	COVID-19 government	HR exposure to different business functions	Legal function of HR
government downplaying the seriousness of the pandemic	expanding exposure to diverse role of HR to create holistic and empathic future HR leaders	Cultural differences	Justification of HR role and value	Overlapping role of HR
HR's position in the company	Financial role of HR	Company culture differences	Legal function of HR	HR – Building capabilities
AI replacing HR for traditional works	HR as both business partners and employee advocates	Nationality Cultural Differences	Overlapping role of HR	Competency of employee
building talent pipeline and external brand positioning for recruitment	HR as business partners	Dysfunctional Leadership	HR - Identity	Developing employee skills
Conventional role of HR	HR being business oriented instead of employee centric	Capabilities of leaders and top management	HR - Generalist vs Specialist	Digitalisation
administrative HR duties	HR exposure to different business functions	Importance of functional leadership	HR Merger of functions and service	Employee working outside expertise
Employee engagement and relations	Legal function of HR	Leaders ability to manage crisis and envisage needs	HR role regressing to admin	HR future leaders
covid triggered anxiety prompting reversion of HR roles to employee needs	the overlapping role of HR	Leaders and managers lacking people skills	Justification of HR role and value	Internal coaches
HR being proactive in ensuring sufficient supplies to staff	Emotional States	Leaders temperament	Recruitment	Peer coaching
HR role regressing back to traditional admin duty	Depressed	Emotional States	Redefine HR role - COVID	Skill Set
Stakeholders delegating communication to HR	Fear	Depressed	HR – Building capabilities	Skills orientated
Criticism of HR	empathy	Fear	Competency of employee	Staff work outside expertise
frustrations from business functions over HR	emphasis on skillsets over job titles	Employee Experience and Wellbeing	Developing employee skills	Identity
Debate over merger of functions and service team	employee centricity	Complacency	Digitalisation	Employee Identity
Diversification of HR role	Employee Experience and Engagement	Digitalisation	Employee working outside expertise	Job loyalty - generations
diverse experience and skill set	covid triggered anxiety prompting reversion of HR roles to employee needs	Empathy	HR future leaders	Work Identity loss
expanding exposure to diverse role of HR to create holistic and empathic future HR leaders	HR being proactive in ensuring sufficient supplies to staff	Empowering staff	Internal coaches	HR - Identity
Financial role of HR	Negotiating and supporting employee through pandemic	Guilt	Peer coaching	HR - Generalist vs Specialist
HR as both business partners and employee advocates	TRUST and transparency	Job loyalty - generations	Skill Set	HR role regressing to admin
HR as business partners	lack of trust	Leaders - lack of regard for staff	Skills orientated	Justification of HR role and value
HR being business oriented instead of employee centric	employee wellbeing and productivity	Opinions disregarded	Staff work outside expertise	Redefine HR role - COVID

Page 3 of Thematic Analysis adapted from NVivo coding tables for Stages 1-5

Stage 1 - Familiarisation of Data	Stage 2 - Initial Coding	Stage 3 - Generate Themes	Stage 4- Refine Themes	Stage 5 - Redefine Themes
HR exposure to different business functions	empowering staff	Severance payment	Impact of Organisation Leaders	Organisation
Legal function of HR	Ethical HR person	Supporting employee - COVID	Adaptability of leaders	Impact of Organisation Leaders
the overlapping role of HR	Fairness	Toxicity of the work environment	Capabilities of leaders and top management	Adaptability of leaders
generalist vs specialist	Organisational justice	Verbal abuse and rudeness	Leaders ability to manage crisis	Capabilities of leaders and top management
Negotiating and supporting employee through pandemic	Racism in workplace and recruitment	HR leader in organisational change	Leaders ability to manage crisis and envisage needs	Leaders ability to manage crisis
opportunity to redefine HR role and function with COVID	Sexism in workplace and recruitment	Change Management Interventions	Leaders and managers lacking people skills	Leaders ability to manage crisis and envisage needs
shrinking function of traditional HR role with expanded branches of HR-related position	Fear	Attitudes towards change	Leaders and managers lacking people skills (2)	Leaders and managers lacking people skills
The need for clear definition of roles and HR functions	flexibility and agility	Change in organisational culture	Positive image leaders (CEO)	Positive image leaders (CEO)
Value Proposition of HR's Role	generalist vs specialist	Abolishing hierarchy in company	Stakeholders delegating communication to HR	Stakeholders delegating communication to HR
cost cutting measures removing HR	Getting buy-in	Clearly defined company goals and vision	Traditional concept of successful leadership	Traditional concept of successful leadership
HR not included in decision making	globalisation and digitalisation reduced humans to mere numbers	utilising internal coaches as resource	Traits of a good supervisor	Traits of a good supervisor
Justification of HR role and value	government downplaying the seriousness of the pandemic	Rational planning perspective	Mindset	Organisation - justice
value proposition of HR in the eyes of others	guilt and support	progressive planning and transition into change	Attitudes towards change	Leaders - lack of regard for staff
Information and communication is key in assuring employees	having a safe space and someone to confide in for psychological support	Leadership	Resiliency	Racism in workplace and recruitment
Clear convictions	having resiliency dealing with challenges	positive strong image projection of leaders (CEO)	Organisation - justice	Severance payment
importance of communication from leadership in particular	having resiliency dealing with challenges (2)	HR role in employee wellbeing	Leaders - lack of regard for staff	Sexism in workplace and recruitment
insecurity and uncertainty in employee	having resiliency dealing with challenges (3)	Empathy	Racism in workplace and recruitment	Organisation - priorities
patronising employees	HR lacking strategic skills	Employee centricity	Severance payment	Getting buy-in
Psychological experience of employee	humanistic approach	Employee wellbeing	Sexism in workplace and recruitment	Performance management
psychological stress imposed by dysfunctional leadership	reasons for humanistic approach	Psychological support	Organisation - priorities	Successful transformation
The role of communication strategies	Importance of alignment with company culture	HR's position in the company	Getting buy-in	People
self reflection	importance of communication from leadership in particular	AI replacing HR	Performance management	Coping Strategies
Ethical HR person	Importance of functional leadership	Clear definition of HR functions	Successful transformation	Coping strategies
Successes and Challenges to Change Management	inculcating purpose and value in staff	Conventional role of HR	Psychological Experience	Family as support system
Getting buy-in	individualistic approach	Administrative HR duties	Complacency	Mindset
performance management	Information and communication is key in assuring employees	Employee engagement and relations	Depressed	Attitudes towards change
successful transformation	anxiety arising from uncertainty	covid triggered anxiety prompting reversion of HR roles to employee needs	Employee wellbeing	Resiliency
Various Approaches of dealing with Employees	clear directions	HR being proactive in ensuring sufficient supplies to staff	Fear	Psychological Experience
humanistic approach	frustration over job security	HR role regressing to admin	frustration over job security	Complacency
reasons for humanistic approach	importance of communication from leadership in particular	Stakeholders delegating communication to HR	Guilt	Depressed
individualistic approach	insecurity and uncertainty in employee	Criticism of HR	lack of direction from the top	Employee wellbeing
Literature-derived Codes	lack of direction and information from the top	Business frustrations with HR	Leaders temperament	Fear
HR leader in organisational change	patronising employees	Diversification of HR role	patronising employees	frustration over job security
Change Management Interventions	The role of communication strategies	diverse experience and skill set	Psyche of staff	Guilt
Attitudes towards change	understanding the psyche of the staff	Financial role of HR	psychological stress imposed by dysfunctional leadership	lack of direction from the top
Change in organisational culture	insecurity and uncertainty in employee	HR - Business oriented	Psychological support	Leaders temperament
Abolishing hierarchy in company	lack of strategic skills	HR - Business partners and employee advocate	Supporting employee - COVID	patronising employees

Page 4 of Thematic Analysis adapted from NVivo coding tables for Stages 1-5

Stage 1 - Familiarisation of Data	Stage 2 - Initial Coding	Stage 3 - Generate Themes	Stage 4- Refine Themes	Stage 5 - Redefine Themes
Clearly defined company goals and vision	Leaders ability to manage crisis and envisage needs	HR as business partners	Trust of HR	Psyche of staff
utilising internal coaches as resource	Leaders and managers lacking people skills	HR exposure to different business functions	Business frustrations with HR	psychological stress imposed by dysfunctional leadership
Rational planning perspective	leaders lack of regards for staff	HR future leaders	Business frustrations with HR (2)	Psychological support
progressive planning and transition into change	Leaders temperament	Legal function of HR	cost cutting measures removing HR	Supporting employee - COVID
Leadership	Leadership	Overlapping role of HR	COVID anxiety	Trust of HR
positive strong image projection of leaders (CEO)	positive strong image projection of leaders (CEO)	Employee support - COVID	HR lacking strategic skills	Business frustrations with HR
HR's value proposition arising from COVID	Learning coping strategies	HR - Generalist vs Specialist	HR not included in decision making	cost cutting measures removing HR
Building Connections	Legal & Compliance	HR Merger of functions and service	Importance of functional leadership	COVID anxiety
building an ecosystem for greater collaboration	administrative HR duties	Recruitment	Lack of strategic skills	HR lacking strategic skills
building relationships	HR role regressing back to traditional admin duty	Redefine HR role - COVID	lack of trust	HR not included in decision making
sharing and working as a team	Legal function of HR	Shrinking traditional HR		Importance of functional leadership
Skills orientated and leveraging ecosystem	Nationality Cultural Differences	Value Proposition of HR		Lack of strategic skills
TRUST and transparency	Negotiating and supporting employee through pandemic	cost cutting measures removing HR		lack of trust
lack of trust	Negotiating and supporting employee through pandemic (2)	HR not included in decision making		
Develop learning opportunities for professionals	opinions disregarded	Justification of HR role and value		
Opportunity to redefine HR role and function with COVID	opportunity to redefine HR role and function with COVID	value proposition of HR in the eyes of others		
Organisational justice	Opportunity to redefine HR role and function with COVID (2)	HR's value proposition arising from COVID		
Racism in workplace and recruitment	Organisational justice	Building Connections		
Sexism in workplace and recruitment	Racism in workplace and recruitment	Building relationships		
Psychological Experience	Sexism in workplace and recruitment	Collaboration		
Emotional States	organisations lacking the ability to cut bad managers	Skills orientated		
Depressed	outdated skill set	Team working		
Fear	patronising employees	TRUST and transparency		
Work Identity loss	performance management	lack of trust		
SCARF Model	positive strong image projection of leaders (CEO)	Develop learning opportunities		
Certainty	Psychological experience of employee	Redefine HR role - COVID		
Information and communication is key in assuring employees	psychological stress imposed by dysfunctional leadership	Information and communication		
anxiety arising from uncertainty	Racism in workplace and recruitment	Assuring employees		
clear directions	Recruitment & Employee Benefit	anxiety arising from uncertainty		
frustration over job security	building talent pipeline and external brand positioning for recruitment	clear directions		
importance of communication from leadership in particular	Redefining work cultures and mindset	frustration over job security		
insecurity and uncertainty in employee	relying on family as support system	lack of direction from the top		
lack of direction and information from the top	replacing hierarchies with peer coaching	Psyche of staff		
patronising employees	Sexism in workplace and recruitment	Psychological experience of employee		
The role of communication strategies	sharing and working as a team	psychological stress imposed by dysfunctional leadership		
understanding the psyche of the staff	shift in job loyalty with generations	Clear convictions		
Fairness	shrinking function of traditional HR role with expanded branches of HR-related position	Communication strategies		
Organisational justice	skill set	insecurity and uncertainty in employee		
Racism in workplace and recruitment	Skills orientated and leveraging ecosystem	Leadership communication		
Sexism in workplace and recruitment	staff being asked to do job outside of their expertise	patronising employees		
Social connections	staff experiences verbal abuse and rudeness	Organisational justice		
Building Relationships and ecosystems	stakeholder management	Racism in workplace and recruitment		
building an ecosystem for greater collaboration	Strategic Business Partners	Sexism in workplace and recruitment		
building relationships	diverse experience and skill set	Psychological Experience		
sharing and working as a team	expanding exposure to diverse role of HR to create holistic and empathic future HR leaders	Emotional States		

Page 5 of Thematic Analysis adapted from NVivo coding tables for Stages 1-5

Stage 1 - Familiarisation of Data	Stage 2 - Initial Coding	Stage 3 - Generate Themes	Stage 4- Refine Themes	Stage 5 - Redefine Themes
Skills orientated and leveraging ecosystem	HR as both business partners and employee advocates	Depressed		
TRUST and transparency	HR as business partners	Fear		
lack of trust	HR being business oriented instead of employee centric	Work Identity loss		
The evolutionary role of HR	HR exposure to different business functions	SCARF Model		
Employee Experience and Engagement	struggling to cope with the toxicity of the work environment	Certainty		
covid triggered anxiety prompting reversion of HR roles to employee needs	successful transformation	Information and communication is key in assuring employees		
HR being proactive in ensuring sufficient supplies to staff	The need for clear definition of roles and HR functions	anxiety arising from uncertainty		
Negotiating and supporting employee through pandemic	The role of communication strategies	clear directions		
TRUST and transparency	traditional concept of successful leadership	frustration over job security		
lack of trust	Traits of a good supervisor	importance of communication from leadership in particular		
Legal & Compliance	TRUST and transparency	insecurity and uncertainty in employee		
administrative HR duties	lack of trust	lack of direction and information from the top		
HR role regressing back to traditional admin duty	utilising internal coaches as resource	patronising employees		
Legal function of HR	Value Proposition of HR's Role	The role of communication strategies		
Recruitment & Employee Benefit	cost cutting measures removing HR	understanding the psyche of the staff		
building talent pipeline and external brand positioning for recruitment	HR not included in decision making	Fairness		
Strategic Business Partners	Justification of HR role and value	Organisational justice		
diverse experience and skill set	value proposition of HR in the eyes of others	Racism in workplace and recruitment		
expanding exposure to diverse role of HR to create holistic and empathic future HR leaders	waiting for severance payment	Sexism in workplace and recruitment		
HR as both business partners and employee advocates	Work Identity loss	self reflection		
HR as business partners		Ethical HR person		
HR being business oriented instead of employee centric		Social connections		
HR exposure to different business functions		Building Relationships		
Reflective Journal-derived Codes		building greater collaboration		
Competency of staff		building relationships		
Competency of employee		sharing and working as a team		
developing employee skills instead of simply replacing them		Skills orientated and leveraging ecosystem		
emphasis on skillsets over job titles		TRUST and transparency		
having resiliency dealing with challenges		lack of trust		
HR lacking strategic skills		The evolutionary role of HR		
outdated skill set		Employee Experience and Engagement		
staff being asked to do job outside of their expertise		COVID anxiety		
Distinct cultural differences between companies		COVID Support		
Company culture differences		HR being proactive in ensuring sufficient supplies to staff		
Nationality Cultural Differences		TRUST and transparency		
Dysfunctional Leadership		lack of trust		
Capabilities of leaders and top management		Legal & Compliance		
Importance of functional leadership		administrative HR duties		
Leaders ability to manage crisis and envisage needs		HR role regressing back to traditional admin duty		
Leaders and managers lacking people skills		Legal function of HR		
Leaders temperament		Recruitment & Employee Benefit		
HR role in employee wellbeing		building talent pipeline and external brand positioning for recruitment		
empathy		Strategic Business Partners		

Page 6 of Thematic Analysis adapted from NVivo coding tables for Stages 1-5

Stage 1 - Familiarisation of Data	Stage 2 - Initial Coding	Stage 3 - Generate Themes	Stage 4- Refine Themes	Stage 5 - Redefine Themes
employee centricity		diverse experience and skill set		
employee wellbeing and productivity		Diverse role of HR		
having a safe space and someone to confide in for psychological support		HR as both business partners and employee advocates		
Lack of information and poor communication strategies effect on morale		HR as business partners		
Information and communication is key in assuring employees		HR being business oriented instead of employee centric		
anxiety arising from uncertainty		HR exposure to different business functions		
clear directions				
frustration over job security				
importance of communication from leadership in particular				
insecurity and uncertainty in employee				
lack of direction and information from the top				
patronising employees				
The role of communication strategies				
understanding the psyche of the staff				

Appendix 4 – Defined Themes NVivo coding table.

This appendix is the NVivo export of the Code Table from Stage 5 of this research project's Thematic Analysis.

Angela Ryan HR Project

Codes\\Stage 5 - Redefine Themes

COMMUNICATION

Name	Description	Files	References
Communication	Employees have a requirement for frequent communication. Structured communication from the organisation and leadership.	45	132
anxiety arising from uncertainty		14	20
clear directions		3	3
Communication strategies		24	62
Leadership communication		27	47

Codes\\Stage 5 - Redefine Themes\\

CULTURE

Name	Description	Files	References
Culture	Culture at a National / Country basis Asian Face concept Organisational Culture - apparent negative cultural indicators from leadership	33	101
Culture - national		6	6
Nationality Cultural Differences		6	6
Culture - organisation		33	95
Abolishing hierarchy in company		3	3
Acting to fit in		3	3
Alignment with company culture		15	25
Clearly defined company goals and vision		3	3
Company culture differences		3	3
cultural context		6	6
Cutting bad managers		3	3
difference in company culture		3	3
Empowering staff		3	3
flexibility and agility		3	5
Inculcating purpose and value		3	11
Opinions disregarded		3	6
Redefining work cultures and mindset		3	3
Toxicity of the work environment		6	12
Verbal abuse and rudeness		6	6

Codes\\Stage 5 - Redefine Themes\\

HR ROLE

Name	Description	Files	References
HR ROLE	HR as a Business Partner Represent Employee voice (including Leaders) Need Connection, Communication and Collaboration from HR	30	254
HR - Building connections		15	76
building greater collaboration		6	9
Empathy		12	15
Employee centricity		6	18
humanistic approach		4	10
individualistic approach		3	12
sharing and working as a team		3	6
Team working		3	6
HR - Business Partner		16	32
HR - Business oriented		2	2
HR as business partners		8	18
progressive planning and transition into change		6	9
Stakeholder management		3	3
HR - Collaboration		6	9
Building collaboration		6	9
HR - Diversified Role		18	56
Administrative HR duties		3	3
AI replacing HR		2	2
Clear definition of HR functions		6	16

Name	Description	Files	References
covid triggered anxiety prompting reversion of HR roles to employee needs		2	2
diverse experience and skill set		3	6
Ethical HR person	personal value and branding	3	3
Functional leadership		3	3
HR being proactive in ensuring sufficient supplies to staff		3	3
HR Merger of functions and service		3	3
HR role regressing to admin		3	6
Outdated skill set		6	6
Recruitment		3	3
HR - Duality of Role		18	34
COVID Support		3	3
Diverse role of HR		2	2
Financial role of HR		3	3
HR - Business partners and employee advocate		3	6
HR being business oriented instead of employee centric		3	3
HR exposure to different business functions		3	3
Justification of HR role and value		6	8
Legal function of HR		3	3
Overlapping role of HR		3	3
HR – Building capabilities		20	47
Competency of employee		3	6

Name	Description	Files	References
Developing employee skills		6	12
Digitalisation		3	3
Employee working outside expertise		3	6
HR future leaders		2	2
Internal coaches		3	3
Peer coaching		3	3
Skill Set		3	3
Skills orientated		3	3
Staff work outside expertise		3	6

Codes\\Stage 5 - Redefine Themes\\

IDENTITY

Name	Description	Files	References
Identity	Employee Identity with job loss or uncertainty HR Identity - Justify role, changing role, new responsibilities from COVID-19	0	0
Employee Identity		15	21
Job loyalty - generations		3	3
Work Identity loss		12	18
HR - Identity		9	18
HR - Generalist vs Specialist		2	2
HR role regressing to admin		3	6
Justification of HR role and value		6	8
Redefine HR role - COVID		2	2

Codes\\Stage 5 - Redefine Themes\\

ORGANISATION

Name	Description	Files	References
Organisation	Organisational priorities - deadlines, budgets. Organisation Leadership - skills, communication style, delegating hard tasks	35	189
Impact of Organisation Leaders		21	106
Adaptability of leaders		3	3
Capabilities of leaders and top management		11	41
Leaders ability to manage crisis		9	12
Leaders ability to manage crisis and envisage needs		8	11
Leaders and managers lacking people skills		12	12
Positive image leaders (CEO)		3	3
Stakeholders delegating communication to HR		9	12
Traditional concept of successful leadership		3	3
Traits of a good supervisor		3	9
Organisation - justice		24	54
Leaders - lack of regard for staff		21	33
Racism in workplace and recruitment		3	3
Severance payment		9	12
Sexism in workplace and recruitment		6	6
Organisation - priorities		14	29
Getting buy-in	Convincing employees and garnering management support	11	20

Name	Description	Files	References
Performance management		3	6
Successful transformation		3	3

Codes\\Stage 5 - Redefine Themes\\

PEOPLE

Name	Description	Files	References
People	Psychological impact - depressed, toxic, absent Family as a support mechanism. Growth Mindset from masterclasses a benefit.	38	124
Coping Strategies		6	6
Coping strategies		0	0
Family as support system		6	6
Mindset		11	23
Attitudes towards change		11	20
Resiliency		3	3
Psychological Experience		36	95
Complacency		6	6
Depressed		3	3
Employee wellbeing		6	6
Fear		3	3
frustration over job security		2	2
Guilt		3	3
lack of direction from the top		21	38
Leaders temperament		5	5
patronising employees		3	3
Psyche of staff		6	9
psychological stress imposed by dysfunctional leadership		3	3
Psychological support		11	11
Supporting employee - COVID		3	3

Codes\\Stage 5 - Redefine Themes\\

TRUST of HR

Name	Description	Files	References
Trust of HR	Business not trusting HR Employees not trusting HR practitioners do not feel trusted by business.	28	46
Business frustrations with HR		3	3
cost cutting measures removing HR		3	3
COVID anxiety		2	2
HR lacking strategic skills		3	3
HR not included in decision making		3	3
Importance of functional leadership		3	3
Lack of strategic skills		3	3
lack of trust		17	26