The Human Leader

To Create More “Human” Leaders, You Need to Treat Leaders Like Humans, Too

Embracing Human Leadership Takes Active (Re)commitment

Build Hybrid Workplaces That Support Women’s Progression to Leadership

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In a changing work environment and a changing world, employees have developed new expectations of their organizations and leaders. Social and political turmoil, the dissolving boundaries between work and personal life, and the increasingly varied ways of working in the hybrid environment have altered the behaviors and strategies required to lead effectively. Our research finds that employees increasingly expect a more human experience at work, and they want leaders who embody that. For an organization to support its employees as humans and not just workers, it needs human leaders as well.

This issue of HR Leaders Monthly showcases our research into what makes a “human leader” and why a commitment to human leadership is necessary in this new world of work. By “human,” we don’t just mean “humane” — fairness and decency have always mattered, and leaders cannot take credit simply for not abusing their employees. Rather, a human leader is one who leads with authenticity, empathy and adaptability, enabling employees’ self-expression, responding to their life challenges and allowing them the flexibility to meet their needs.

For HR leaders, the challenge of this new leadership model is in developing the kinds of leaders the organization needs to meet employees’ changing expectations and drive better talent outcomes. Many leaders are resistant to this change, which often conflicts with the style of leadership they are used to practicing and that has worked for them in the past. They may be wary of the risks or lack confidence in their ability to be an effective human leader.

The contents of this issue address several aspects of this challenge: what human leadership means, how to develop human leaders and secure their commitment, and how HR can design new career paths for leaders who can’t commit to leading people in a new way. Other articles focus on how to support women in the leadership pipeline, amid the challenges and opportunities of the changing work environment. We also explore another challenge of leading in these tumultuous times — the pressure to speak and act on societal issues that are often politically charged — and offer a framework CHROs can use to help their organizations make appropriate decisions.

Finally, nobody knows more about leadership than seasoned HR leaders themselves, so this issue features original interviews with Kathleen McCarthy, CHRO of GE Aviation, and Tamara Dillon, CHRO of Akebia Therapeutics, who share their experience and expertise in developing people leaders for a changing environment. The insights from our research and these experts will help HR leaders respond to changing employee expectations and enable their organizations to more effectively engage, retain and develop employees in an uncertain, dynamic, hybrid world of work.
To Create More “Human” Leaders, You Need to Treat Leaders Like Humans, Too

by Kayla Velnoskey & Caitlin Duffy

Business leaders must take a more human approach to leadership to attract and retain talent in the current environment. CHROs can foster human leadership by building leaders’ commitment, courage and confidence, but only if they recognize leaders’ own human (emotional) barriers to change.

In today’s hypercompetitive talent market, organizations are urgently seeking ways to differentiate themselves. From 2021 to 2022, total job postings have increased by 61% globally, and among candidates offered a job, 49% were considering at least three offers.¹ ²

HR leaders are overhauling many aspects of the employee experience to better attract and retain talent, but 92% say their organizations can’t compete in the talent market without great leaders.³

What does it mean to be a great leader in today’s work environment? Most HR leaders point to a new approach to leadership: 90% say that leaders must now operate in a more human way to succeed.³
The Call for More “Human” Leadership

The call for more “human” leadership does not mean that leaders have an entirely new set of responsibilities; rather, they must achieve their same core responsibilities in a different way. Social and political turbulence, work-life fusion and flexible work arrangements have changed leaders’ approaches to their core responsibilities in the following ways (see Figure 1):

- **Role-modeling behavior requires greater authenticity** — For employees to bring their full selves to work amid social and political turbulence, leaders must role-model acting and expressing themselves authentically and make it safe for their teams to do the same.

- **Supporting teams requires greater empathy** — To support employees at work, as well as in other aspects of their lives, leaders must practice empathy and show genuine care, respect and concern for employees’ well-being.

- **Delivering results requires greater adaptivity** — To encourage high performance while allowing employees a more individualized work experience, leaders must adapt to enable flexible work arrangements that fit team members’ unique needs.

These shifts in the work environment have blurred the boundaries that used to shape the leader-employee dynamic. Now, leaders must navigate a leader-to-employee relationship as well as a human-to-human one that necessitates human leadership: the ability to lead with authenticity, empathy, and adaptivity.

### Figure 1. Work Environment Shifts Creating Human Leadership Imperatives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Core Leader Responsibility</th>
<th>Role Model Behavior</th>
<th>Support Teams</th>
<th>Deliver Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Prior Approach</strong></td>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>Employees</td>
<td>Efficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Enable workplace boundaries</td>
<td>Address work needs</td>
<td>Manage standardized workflows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Work Environment Shift</strong></td>
<td>Social and Political Turbulence</td>
<td>Increasingly visible personal lives</td>
<td>Hybrid Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High stress and risk of controversy</td>
<td></td>
<td>More variety in work patterns and norms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>New Approach</strong></td>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>People</td>
<td>Individualized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Enable safe self expression at work</td>
<td>Address life needs</td>
<td>Manage tailored, flexible workflows</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Human Leadership Imperative**

- **Authenticity**
- **Empathy**
- **Adaptivity**

Source: Gartner
Human Leaders Are Essential, but Rare

Human leaders get results. Employees who evaluate their skip-level leader as a human leader are more likely than average to report high intent to stay, high engagement and high well-being (see Figure 2). These key talent outcomes have important downstream effects that also impact organizations’ profitability. Lower attrition, higher engagement and strong employee well-being ensure a happier and more productive workforce. Highly engaged employees, for example, improve their team’s performance by up to 27%.

Yet human leaders are, unfortunately, rare. Only 29% of employees say that their skip-level leader is an effective human leader.

Deeply Human Barriers to Human Leadership

Interviews with 74 HR leaders revealed three themes in HR’s typical approaches to fostering more human leaders:

- **Commitment** — Leaders must truly believe that human leadership is right for them and for the organization, and they must commit to doing the work to change.
- **Courage** — Leaders must be courageous enough to embrace the vulnerability associated with human leadership in an environment where they are under intense scrutiny.
- **Confidence** — Leaders must feel confident in their decision making and actions to execute human leadership, even when the potential paths forward are complex or ambiguous.

Typical approaches to achieving commitment, courage and confidence fall short because they fail to recognize that the barriers leaders face are rooted in leaders’ own very human emotions. Human leadership, in many ways, runs counter to past conventional wisdom about what leadership should look like. It exposes leaders to more personal and professional risk, and it requires leaders to contend with the massive scope and ambiguity associated with addressing each employee’s individual needs.

**Figure 2. Change in Employee Outcomes by Leadership Type**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Average Leader</th>
<th>Human Leader</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High Intent to Stay</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▲ 12 pp</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Employee Engagement</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▲ 37 pp</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Well-Being</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▲ 30 pp</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n = 3,392 employees

Source: 2022 Gartner Leadership Success in the New Environment Employee Survey

Note: In addition to the absolute differences shown above, the impact of Human Leadership on engagement, well-being and intent to stay has also been tested through multivariate regression models controlling for age, gender, region, industry, function and onsite/hybrid/remote status.
After surveying 1,000 business leaders, we found that the 71% of leaders who are not effective human leaders can be classified into three types, each of which faces distinct emotional barriers to executing human leadership with commitment, courage and confidence (see Figure 3).  

**From Doubt to Commitment: Leverage Trusted Sources**

The first type of leader who is ineffective at human leadership is the doubtful achiever. Doubtful achievers make up 28% of the leaders we surveyed. The biggest barrier they face is their doubt that the qualities of human leadership are important to achieving their business objectives, though they may not voice these doubts to HR in so many words. Under the surface, their doubt is rooted in fundamental beliefs about what leadership looks like based on their experiences, their expertise and the behaviors they were rewarded for in the past.

HR typically makes a business case for human leadership that includes sharing expert opinions, employee voices and new expectations to encourage leaders to commit to change. Over half (57%) of HR leaders consider this business case a high-priority investment for 2022 to 2023. Although informing leaders with data is necessary, the stark reality is that it is insufficient to override their firmly held beliefs, because only 37% of business leaders say they actually trust data and analysis provided by HR.

If leaders don’t trust HR, what can HR do to combat their doubts? The good news is that leaders’ beliefs can be changed, but HR must leverage leaders’ most trusted sources to do so. Leaders trust the voices of employees when they are shared directly, instead of through the intermediary of HR, and they trust other leaders whom they see as effective and successful and whose perspective is relevant to their own roles. The best organizations help leaders commit to human leadership by leveraging these trusted sources to make the case for change.

**Figure 3. Effective and Ineffective Types of Human Leaders**

- **29% Effective Human Leaders** lead with authenticity, empathy and agility
- **22% Uncertain Strivers** feel uncertain about how to effectively deliver human leadership
- **21% Fearful Believers** fear the vulnerability and risk associated with human leadership
- **28% Doubtful Achievers** doubt that human leadership is important to achieving their business objectives

n = 1,000 business leaders, 3,392 employees

Source: 2022 Gartner Leadership Success in the New Environment Leader Survey, 2022 Gartner Leadership Success in the New Environment Employee Survey

Note: Business leaders who were not effective at Human Leadership were classified into different categories based on the biggest barriers they faced to being effective Human Leaders.
From Fear to Courage: Teach How to Lead Despite Fear

The next type of leader who is ineffective at human leadership is the fearful believer. Fearful believers, who make up 21% of the leaders we surveyed, may accept the need for human leadership, but are most concerned about the associated vulnerability and risk. Forty-four percent of leaders said their actions are more scrutinized now than they were three years ago. For fearful believers, this scrutiny creates anxiety about how one misstep on a sensitive issue could damage their professional and personal reputations.

HR functions typically offer leaders development, coaching and guidance on how to handle sensitive issues. Simultaneously, they also focus on creating a psychologically safe environment where leaders can comfortably confront tough human leadership situations. However, in today’s environment, no amount of guidance or reassurance is sufficient to eliminate fear of high-risk failures. Like touching a hot stove, failure with painful consequences can lead to avoidance, so organizations must help leaders courageously navigate their fear without leaving them overly exposed in risky situations.

When support focuses on eliminating fear, it ignores that fear is a natural human reaction to risk and can make leaders feel ashamed if they are unable to eliminate their fear reactions. The best organizations do not try to reduce or eliminate leaders’ fears, but instead teach leaders how to exhibit positive leadership behaviors despite fear. They do this by helping leaders understand their personal fears so they can take ownership of their behaviors, even when afraid, as well as by fail-proofing particularly high-risk situations so leaders can learn from their successes — not just their failures.

From Uncertainty to Confidence: Support Judgment Without Prescription

The final type of leader who is ineffective at human leadership is the uncertain striver. Uncertain strivers, who make up 22% of the leaders we surveyed, may agree that human leadership is the best path forward and even feel courageous enough to try it, despite the fear they feel. However, they are uncertain how to fulfill the organization’s goals when they must face the massive scope and ambiguity associated with adapting their leadership to individual employee needs, emerging situations and sensitive topics.

HR typically tries to help leaders navigate these highly complex situations by providing prescriptive guidance. Over two-thirds (68%) of organizations, for example, provide guides to help leaders take specific actions in response to employee needs. Guides can be highly effective when they closely resemble the specific scenarios that leaders encounter or when they can be condensed into clear decision principles that leaders can apply to new scenarios. However, in today’s environment, leaders face too many unique scenarios, and guidance often does not translate to ambiguous situations. Only 29% of HR leaders say leaders at their organizations actually give employees support that fits their unique needs.
Rather than prescribing solutions to many potential scenarios, the best organizations focus on supporting leaders to use their judgment by limiting the scope and ambiguity they face. Leaders become leaders in part because they have a track record of strong decision making and, when scope and ambiguity are kept to a manageable level, are highly effective at applying that skill, even in new scenarios. Effective tools enable leaders to use their own judgment. For example, a tool that helps leaders eliminate low-impact actions and prioritize their remaining choices helps them reduce scope, and a tool to help leaders pick up on signals that they need to adapt their approach in real time helps them navigate ambiguous situations.

Foster Human Leadership With Commitment, Courage and Confidence

Organizations that approach building commitment, confidence and courage by directly addressing leaders’ emotions in a more human way see better results, increasing their proportion of effective human leaders from 29% to 48%.¹² This approach still does not get organizations to 100%. The barriers to human leadership are not confined to the emotional barriers explored in this research: Organization design, leadership competencies and skills development may also need to change to help leaders answer this call. However, helping leaders overcome the emotional barriers of doubt, fear and uncertainty is a critical first step to set them on the path to success.

¹ 2022 Gartner TalentNeuron; n = 10,953,771 job postings.
² 2021 Gartner Candidate Panel Survey; n = 1,609 candidates. Respondents were filtered for those who received an offer for the last job they interviewed for: Candidates were asked how many offers they were considering in addition to the one they ended up accepting from their current organization.
³ 2022 Gartner Leadership Success in the New Environment HR Leader Survey; n = 231 HR leaders.
⁴ 2022 Gartner Leadership Success in the New Environment Employee Survey; n = 3,392 employees.
⁵ 2022 Gartner Leadership Success in the New Environment Leader Survey; n = 1,000 business leaders.
⁶ 2021 Gartner Talent Analytics Employee Survey; n = 1,177 leaders. The 2021 Gartner Talent Analytics Employee Survey was conducted in April 2021 and includes responses from 3,000 employees focused on data partnership, trust (and perception of trust) and talent analytics, with representation from various geographies, industries and functions. The survey was designed and developed by Gartner’s HR Practice research team.
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• Complement analytics with human judgment to make principled business decisions in the face of polarization.

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To ensure people leaders are committed to human leadership, organizations should offer an annual, safe opt-out option during performance management. CHROs can build a pipeline of dedicated people leaders by asking them to commit or recommit to human leadership or choose a different leadership path.
A New Style of Human Leadership

Amid the pandemic, transitions to hybrid and remote work, accelerating digitalization and generational shifts, all leaders face more and different expectations. Employees are more vocal about their need for flexibility and desire for transparency, among other expectations of leadership. Moreover, employee tolerance for dissatisfaction is at an all-time low. To meet these new employee expectations, HR leaders say it’s time for leaders to take a more human approach (see Figure 1).

But what does it mean to humanize leadership? Three main components define what it means to be a human leader:

- **Authenticity** — Leaders must act with purpose and enable true self-expression in the workplace for both themselves and their teams.

- **Empathy** — Leaders must show genuine care, respect and concern for employees’ well-being.

- **Adaptivity** — Leaders must enable flexibility and support that fits team members’ unique needs.

The past few years have been hard on everyone, including leaders, and employees want leaders to recognize and demonstrate that the workplace is no longer a place where someone is forced to hide their identity, feelings and needs, or leave them at the door. The workplace should be a safe space for leaders and employees alike to feel comfortable sharing when things are difficult or they need support, and know that their openness will be met with genuine human care and empathy.

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**Figure 1. HR Leaders’ Predictions Regarding Employee Expectations of Human Leadership**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HR leaders say that ...</th>
<th>10% Neutral or Disagree</th>
<th>90% Agree</th>
<th>16% Neutral or Disagree</th>
<th>84% Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>...to succeed in the future, leaders need to operate in a more human way</td>
<td>10% Neutral or Disagree</td>
<td>90% Agree</td>
<td>16% Neutral or Disagree</td>
<td>84% Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...employees’ expectations for more human treatment at work are a permanent change</td>
<td>10% Neutral or Disagree</td>
<td>90% Agree</td>
<td>16% Neutral or Disagree</td>
<td>84% Agree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n = 231 HR leaders

Source: 2022 Gartner Leadership Success in the New Environment HR Leader Survey
What it means to be a human leader sounds intuitive on paper, but organizations are struggling to build a pipeline of leaders committed to this new style of leadership. The main reason for this is that many leaders have not bought into the idea of human leadership. Organizations can take two steps to ensure their people leaders are on board with human leadership:

• During performance management each year, offer leaders the choice of either actively recommitting to the expectations of human leadership or choosing a different leadership path that does not involve leading people.

• Ask leaders to declare their ongoing commitment to human leadership via their signature, indicating they are aware of the existing and new leadership expectations and are committed to fulfilling those expectations.

Offering a safe opt-out option to people leadership ensures that leaders feel valued by their organization and recognized for their individual strengths as leaders. This effort will also ensure the organization gets the most value out of its employees. Similarly, by giving leaders the human experience of making the personal choice to (re)commit, and then requesting a declaration of their commitment, the organization ensures its people leaders fully buy into and embrace the new style of human leadership.

So, Why Is It Hard to Get More Human Leaders?

Unfortunately, many organizations are struggling to get their leaders on board with this new style of human leadership and the new expectations that come with it. Only 29% of employees believe their leaders are effective at human leadership. Some leaders doubt that change is necessary because of their success with deep-rooted leadership approaches that focus on the tangible things that will produce business outcomes rather than worrying about the “squishy” stuff that comes with being an empathetic human leader (see Figure 2). The case HR leaders make on paper, to stress the importance of human leadership, isn’t enough to sway all leaders into embracing this change. You want to make sure your leaders are excited to do it. And for that, you need commitment.

Figure 2. Bases of Business Leader Doubts About Human Leadership

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What HR Hears</th>
<th>What Doubtful Leaders Believe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This imbalance of power is temporary. I’ll be back in charge soon</td>
<td>Employee expectations come and go. Why should I believe this will stick?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The squishy stuff isn’t my job. I was hired for my technical expertise.</td>
<td>This new leader profile won’t deliver results.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can’t do my job if I can’t see my team working.</td>
<td>I know what I do works. I’ve been doing this for a long time.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Gartner
Create Human Leadership Commitment With a Safe Opt-Out Option

Organizations can wield numerous methods to shift leader mindsets to embrace human leadership, but they must do so in a way that ensures long-term success. Many organizations have experimented with dual-track leadership paths, offering individuals a choice early on in their leadership careers between leading people or taking a role as a subject matter expert (SME) that does not involve leading people. This method is great for establishing career path ownership during leaders’ early careers, but it doesn’t account for leaders whose preferences may have changed over time or since their initial commitment. To ensure leaders remain on the right track, organizations should offer a more humanized approach to leadership career pathing that includes a way for leaders to safely opt out of people leadership, throughout their career, without risking their career progression.
Establishing a safe opt-out option means that leaders at any level are continually given the opportunity to either actively commit to the expectations of people leadership or to instead choose a leadership role as an SME. The biggest difference between early career dual-track options and a safe opt-out option is that the safe opt-out should be a continual offering for leaders. Just as the role of the leader will evolve as expectations change, leaders’ preferences may change as well, depending on how the role evolves. Allowing people leaders the continual choice to either recommit to people leadership expectations or safely opt out for an SME leadership role is the organization’s way of offering leaders a more human experience, similar to how the organization is asking its leaders to offer such an experience to their employees.

Each year during performance management, managers of leaders should check in by going beyond standard performance review checklists and collaboratively reevaluating each leader’s interest in and commitment to the expectations of their current role (see Figure 3). Using this approach means reviewing existing people leadership expectations as well as any new expectations that were added to people leadership. Managers of leaders can use this opportunity to verify the leader is still committed to fulfilling those expectations.

**Figure 3. A Safe Opt-Out Option for People Leadership**

Given the expectations of human leadership, do you (still) feel people leadership is for you?

- **Manager**
  - People Leader
  - Leader (re)commits to the leadership role with clear understanding and buy-in

- **Leader**
  - What would you like to do?
    - Have an idea in mind
      - Not feasible, explore other ideas
    - Don’t have an idea in mind
      - Plan transition
      - Discuss options in our area
      - Explore other areas

- **Subject Matter Expert Leader (SME Leader)**
  - Multiple real options make employees feel valued
  - Organization recognizes and maximizes employees’ value

Source: Gartner
During performance management, organizations should structure these conversations with the following steps:

1. Establish active (re)commitment to the expectations of people leadership.
2. If the leader is no longer committed, determine whether or not the leader has thought about what their role as an SME leader looks like.
3. Either determine available SME leader roles or explore open roles in other departments where skills are transferable.
4. Set a transition plan to ensure a thoughtful, seamless role transition that ensures teams are not disrupted by this change in leadership.

**Consider How to Enable Commitment With Declaration**

Committing to the expectations of people leadership means that as a leader, you are actively committed to your team’s professional and personal development. But what does it look like to have a leader actively “commit” to people leadership? Is it just saying “yes,” or is it more formal than that? The best approach to confirming leaders’ active commitment may vary, but one way HR can authenticate leaders’ dedication is by asking them to declare their lasting commitment by signing an expectation commitment form (ECF). Documenting or declaring their commitment can help leaders remember the personal choice they made to show up for their team every day.

Although the conventional nature of commitment implies an obligation that restricts freedom of action, in this case, commitment means the freedom to choose. The choice to be a people leader should not be taken lightly, nor should it be forced upon a leader. It should be the individual leader’s choice to pursue and continue pursuing people leadership. Organizations should ask their people leaders each year during performance management reviews to (re)commit by signing an ECF that explicitly states the existing and updated expectations of the role, with clear examples of what those expectations could look like on a day-to-day basis (see Figure 4).

**Figure 4. Example People Leader Expectation Commitment Form**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Values</th>
<th>Existing Expectations [Example]</th>
<th>New Expectations [Example]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Accountability | • Continuously seek development feedback from team members.  
• ...                                           | • When a mistake is made, ensure team members are aware of how it happened and how it will be rectified.  
• ...                                           |
| Transparency | • Clearly communicate the expectations of individual employees and how you will support their development.  
• ...                                           | • Build trust with employees by creating time to connect and share experiences  
• ...                                           |
| Inclusion | • ...                                                                                          | • ...                                                                                     |
| Humility   | • ...                                                                                          | • ...                                                                                     |

**Sample Opt-Out Statement:** Should a leader feel they are no longer committed to the expectations of people leadership, {insert organization name} is committed to honoring their choice and supporting their decision to opt-out of leading a team of people to develop a new leadership path, such as a Subject Matter Expert.

Source: Gartner
To create an ECF, organizations can pull ideas from the following list and customize to fit their specific goals.

- Clearly state the organization’s vision and values so the leader is aware of how role expectations are designed to support these guiding pillars.
- Clearly state the expectations of people leadership and how they align to specific organizational values, calling out any new or updated expectations that a leader should be aware of before committing.
- Clarify the safe opt-out option by stating that, should any people leader feel they can no longer meet these expectations, they can bring their concerns to management and create a plan based on their individual preferences to transition out of people leadership.
- For those who have actively chosen people leadership, ask them to sign their names as a way to demonstrate and take personal ownership over their commitment to meeting the stated expectations.

Giving leaders the freedom to actively choose to (re)commit to their role’s expectations ensures those who have chosen to commit are wholly dedicated to and invested in bettering themselves and fulfilling expectations. This approach creates an environment where people leaders feel excited and energized about their role as it continues to evolve, as well as feel in control of their career and believe that the organization values their individual strengths.

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1. 2022 Gartner Leadership Success in the New Environment Employee Survey; n = 231 HR leaders
In today’s highly competitive labor market, leaders must understand how their behaviors impact employee retention. Leaders can adapt their behaviors to meet employee expectations in many ways, but because their time is limited, they should focus their efforts on the behaviors that have the greatest impact on retention.

In a recent global survey, over 3,000 employees reported the effectiveness of their leaders’ behaviors, and 1,000 mid-level leaders reported the amount of effort they spend on those same behaviors. We analyzed the impact of these behaviors on employee retention and found that leaders were not necessarily optimizing their efforts to focus on the highest-impact behaviors.

On average, leaders are putting in high levels of effort to give employees the flexibility to determine how they should work. Leaders also expend high levels of effort on establishing formal processes that encourage their teams to develop new ideas and creating an environment where employees are comfortable sharing these ideas and working together. Leaders should continue to optimize these efforts to mitigate attrition at their organizations. Providing an inclusive team environment, in particular, can impact retention by up to 13% (see Figure 1).

On the other hand, leaders are expending less effort on ensuring employees feel supported. In the current environment, as employee expectations continue to shift amid disruption, leaders must demonstrate an understanding of employees’ varied needs but also maintain fairness when addressing those needs. Successfully demonstrating these supportive behaviors can impact employee retention by up to 15%. Importantly, low effort does not mean leaders are not trying, but instead may indicate that they need more support from the organization to focus on high-impact behaviors. HR leaders should evaluate employee satisfaction with leaders’ ability to display these behaviors to determine where their leaders need the most support.

**Figure 1. Impact of Leader Behaviors on Employee Retention**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leader Behaviors</th>
<th>Impact on Employee Retention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low Effort</td>
<td>High Effort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Establishes processes that encourage idea development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Creates a comfortable environment for the team to share new ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Creates an environment in which the team feels comfortable working together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Gives employees the flexibility to decide how they work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Shows understanding of the team's different needs and priorities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Ensures their behavior is consistent with messaging to the team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Creates opportunities for the team to shape the culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Makes decisions that enable team engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Makes decisions that enable team productivity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Tailors support to different team members’ unique needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Maintains fairness while providing varied support to different employees</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Gartner
Evolve Culture & Leadership for the Hybrid Workplace

Today’s workplace is hybrid by default.

Accepting hybrid as a permanent feature of the modern workplace actually creates an opportunity for organizations to evolve their approach in two key areas: reshaping culture and equipping leaders.

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Build Hybrid Workplaces That Support Women’s Progression to Leadership
by Samantha Lustig

The rise of hybrid work has both positively and negatively affected women and their ability to advance into leadership roles. HR leaders in hybrid workplaces should follow four key steps to ensure their culture and processes support increased gender parity in leadership.

Increasing the number of women in leadership has been a goal for many organizations in recent years. Organizations face growing pressure to diversify their leadership: 49% of employees say it is extremely or very important that their organization’s leadership is diverse.¹ Reaching gender parity in leadership is a key step in achieving greater leadership diversity in general, but many organizations have not maintained progress toward this goal. A survey by the IBM Institute for Business Value found that from 2019 to 2021, the number of women holding senior vice president, vice president, director and manager roles declined.² Among the reasons for why the number of women in the leadership pipeline has dropped, the transition to hybrid work is an important factor to consider.
Hybrid work has made it easier to balance work and caregiving, but it has also exacerbated issues like visibility and burnout that will disadvantage women in the workforce if not addressed. To avert these risks, HR leaders need to build hybrid workplaces, cultures and processes that support their organizations’ diversity goals, beginning with four key steps:

1. Support flexible work through role modeling
2. Consciously address proximity bias
3. Rethink assumptions on leadership aspirations
4. Support high-potential (HIPO) women without increasing burnout

**Support Flexible Work Through Role Modeling**

Flexible work can help women caregivers better manage their work and home responsibilities and ultimately have more capacity to rise to leadership roles. However, flexible work will not be as effective in supporting women’s rise to leadership if only women take advantage of those policies.

HR leaders should ensure that a hybrid or flexible work strategy is viewed as the default working model at the organization, not the exception, to avoid unintentionally disadvantaging women.

When HR leaders at Schroders, a UK-based asset management company, designed their flexible work strategy, they identified the actions different stakeholders could take to build support for flexible work (see Figure 1). For example, senior leaders can share personal stories of flexibility, and also act as role models by adopting a flexible work schedule. Schroders’ HR leaders understood that if leaders and managers were always in the office in a hybrid work environment, then employees would feel pressure to be in the office, too, and fear that they would be penalized for choosing to work flexibly. If organizations want hybrid work to be successful, everyone needs to support it. After Schroders implemented this policy, 83% of employees scored the company favorably for inclusion, demonstrating that this approach to flexible work has clear benefits for organizations looking to create a positive work environment for all employees.

**Figure 1. Roles in Building Support for Flexible Work**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Senior Leaders</th>
<th>HR Leaders</th>
<th>Managers</th>
<th>Employees</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Role in Supporting Mindset Shift</td>
<td>Role models of flexible working</td>
<td>Communicators and support providers</td>
<td>Co-creators of flexible working patterns</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Contributing Actions</strong></td>
<td>• Share personal stories of flexibility</td>
<td>• Create materials and resources</td>
<td>• Support flexible working requests without requiring justification</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Work flexibly to show there is no single way to succeed</td>
<td>• Showcase success stories</td>
<td>• Translate organizational strategy</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Assist managers and employees</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Role model flexibility</td>
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Source: Gartner
Consciously Address Proximity Bias

Hybrid work creates an environment where employees are not in the office as frequently, leading to visibility issues that can affect major talent decisions. Women are more likely than men to want to work remotely, but many also believe that they will be disadvantaged by this choice.³ Fifty-nine percent of women knowledge workers think employees who work in the office will be seen as higher performers, and 78% think employees who work on-site are more likely to be promoted. These concerns are not unfounded: 67% of managers say those who work in the office are higher performers, and 80% say employees who work on-site are more likely to be promoted (see Figure 2).³ This proximity bias against remote workers could easily become a gender bias issue, resulting in fewer women promoted to leadership positions. HR leaders can address proximity bias by using inclusion nudges in talent decisions and increasing the visibility of remote workers.

Use Inclusion Nudges in Talent Decisions

Proximity bias influences talent decisions because it shapes leaders’ perceptions of top talent. HR leaders should moderate leaders’ biases by using inclusion nudges and a designated inclusion interrupter. Inclusion nudges are small, mental pushes that gently confront leaders’ biases and prompt more inclusive behaviors.⁴ Inclusion nudges can include adding pictures to an organization chart, so leaders can visually see the diversity of their leadership bench, or conducting blind résumé reviews. HR leaders concerned about proximity bias could show leaders the percentage of remote workers discussed in the talent review compared to the percentage of remote workers in the overall talent pool.

Figure 2. Perceptions of Bias Toward In-Office Workers
Percentage of Women Knowledge Workers and Managers Responding

n = 1,158 women knowledge workers; 1,489 managers
Source: 2021 Gartner Hybrid and Return to Workplace Sentiment Survey
Danish pharmaceutical company Novo Nordisk’s HR leaders assign roles to each participant in their succession conversations to reduce the impact of bias on the conversation. One of these roles is the inclusion interrupter, who acknowledges biased comments and redirects the conversation to objective facts. For example, if someone says, “I always see this person in the office,” during a succession conversation, the inclusion interrupter can remind them to focus on the employee’s performance, not their presence in the office.

Increase the Visibility of Rising Women Leaders

As face-to-face interactions in the workplace decrease, senior leaders have less exposure to HIPO employees outside of their teams or business units. If more women work remotely, senior leaders may overlook them when making key talent decisions. When HR leaders at the Toronto-based insurance company Intact Financial realized that their leaders lacked visibility into the work of HIPO women, they created a list of HIPO women throughout the organization, ensuring their inclusion in talent review conversations. HR leaders can create similar lists for their remote and/or women HIPO employees to fight proximity bias at their organizations.

Rethink Your Assumptions on Leadership Aspirations

Typically, aspiration to leadership is perceived as constant and linear. Employees who want to become senior leaders consistently work their way up the ranks, taking on more management responsibilities with every new role. However, many women do not have linear career paths. Some women scale back their careers when they have young children. Other women reevaluated their career aspirations during the pandemic, with 65% of women saying the pandemic has made them rethink the place work should have in their lives. Women with shifting aspirations or nontraditional career paths may discount themselves from leadership positions, fearing they wouldn’t make strong candidates.

If organizations limit their search only to those who have had consistent and clear aspirations for leadership roles, they may overlook women whose unique experiences could make them more adaptable, authentic leaders: all valuable characteristics for leaders in a hybrid world. HR leaders at the Sydney-based healthcare company Cochlear saw that many women who were high-performing individual contributors did not list rising to senior management as a goal. They encouraged these women to reflect on their strengths and revise their career goals to include leadership opportunities that draw on these strengths. Fifty-two percent of these women ultimately made vertical movements toward their career goals.

Case in Point: Women on the Rise List

Intact Financial

To increase women’s representation in leadership, Intact created a Women on the Rise list. The list consisted of qualified, HIPO women in all roles and business units, designed to increase the visibility of these women, facilitate relationships with business unit leaders and boost the number of women on succession slates. To further enable these outcomes, Intact used this list as a catalyst for several additional actions, including:

• Starting discussions about gender representation in top talent programs.
• Providing women on the list with cross-functional stretch projects.
• Assigning senior leaders in the same business unit as mentors to these women.

All of these steps helped Intact reduce the amount of bias in its talent decision processes and ensure that leaders in key decision-making positions had exposure to women with leadership potential from throughout the organization.
Support HIPO Women Without Increasing Burnout

Burnout is a major issue throughout the workforce, and it is often exacerbated by hybrid work. Increased virtual meetings and the lack of boundaries between work and home life are common issues that contribute to burnout. In today’s work environment, women are burning out at a higher rate. In 2021, women were 23% more likely than men to say they felt burned out. If HR leaders don’t manage burnout among their HIPO women, they risk these women either losing their aspirations for leadership roles or leaving the organization entirely. Organizations should address burnout among HIPO women by providing sustainable development opportunities and allowing them to take breaks without discounting them from leadership roles.

Provide Sustainable Development Opportunities

Providing HIPO employees with development opportunities (e.g., stretch projects, temporary rotations) is an important part of preparing them for leadership roles. However, most HIPO employees already have substantial workloads, and these opportunities often create additional work without taking away any existing responsibilities. Metro, a Montreal-based food retail company, takes an approach to HIPO development that ensures all HIPOs are given growth opportunities without creating or worsening burnout. HR works with managers to identify responsibilities that the manager can delegate to HIPOs that are relevant, aligned to the HIPO’s needs and feasible. When the HIPO takes on some of the manager’s responsibilities, some of the HIPO’s responsibilities are then cascaded to the rest of the team. This strategy provides the HIPO with meaningful stretch opportunities without adding to burnout and gives the HIPO’s teammates opportunities to grow in their roles.

Destigmatize Career Breaks

Career breaks have become increasingly common. Whether to combat burnout, raise children, or to travel or volunteer, career breaks are a good opportunity for employees to reevaluate their careers and ultimately return with more energy and new perspectives. However, the stigma surrounding career breaks is an ongoing challenge, and many people struggle to reenter the workforce after taking time off. The majority of employees who take career breaks are women, so they would benefit substantially from HR policies that destigmatize career breaks. HR leaders should not penalize candidates with career breaks on their résumés. Organizations with more resources can also support career breaks more actively, offering paid sabbaticals or extended parental leave.
Raytheon Technologies, a U.S.-based aerospace and defense conglomerate, created the Raytheon Technologies Re-Empower Program for people who have been out of the workforce for at least two years.\(^7\) The program provides mentorship and skills-building support before participants transition to full-time careers. Policies like these show employees, particularly women, that taking time off will not disqualify them from future leadership roles.

**Conclusion**

The rise of hybrid work has highlighted and exacerbated issues that have always affected women’s ability to rise into leadership roles. The pandemic has presented a unique opportunity for organizations to radically redefine the purpose, structure and nature of work through hybrid and remote work models. As they continue to learn how to best handle this shift, HR leaders must design workplaces and policies that eliminate the barriers women face in progressing to leadership roles.

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1. 2021 Gartner Leadership Progression and Diversity Survey: This survey was conducted in February 2021. It polled over 3,500 employees from 24 industries and 21 functions around the world.
2. Women, Leadership and Missed Opportunities: Why Organizations’ Good Intentions Are Not Good Enough, IBM.
3. 2021 Gartner Hybrid and Return to Work Sentiment Survey: This survey documented feedback from 3,500 employees and was conducted between October and November 2021 across a wide range of industries, functions, geographies and current work statuses to understand their preferences and challenges related to current and future work design.
5. 2021 Gartner Inclusion Initiatives Employee Survey: This survey was conducted in 2021 to assess the different DEI initiatives introduced by the organizations for their employees. The research was conducted online from 15 February to 18 March 2021 and contains responses from 3,001 employees with representation from multiple regions, industries and functions. The survey was designed and developed by Gartner’s HR Practice research team.
6. LinkedIn Members Can Now Spotlight Career Breaks on Their Profiles, LinkedIn; A new way to represent career breaks on LinkedIn, LinkedIn.
7. Re-Empower Program, Raytheon Technologies. The organizations profiled in this research are provided for illustrative purposes only and do not constitute an exhaustive list of examples in this field, nor an endorsement by Gartner of the organizations or their offerings.
Build a Better Strategic Plan for Your Function

76% of corporate strategy leaders report that significant pivots in strategic plans are happening more frequently.

For functional leaders to keep pace, they need to be agile and adaptive and consider multiple scenarios to create robust and resilient strategic plans for their function.

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gartner.com/en/insights/strategic-planning
How to Systematically Weigh the Benefits and Costs of Acting Politically

by Alexander Kirss

Organizations may face backlash for acting on contentious political issues, yet curbing these actions may demotivate employees. CHROs can help their organizations decide whether to act politically by weighing the benefits and costs of political action in a structured, rigorous way.
Many employees today want their organizations to act politically on a variety of issues by making public statements, lobbying politicians or making donations to politically charged causes. According to a recent Gartner survey, 52% of employees want their organization to make statements on issues they care about, and 53% want their organization to act on issues they care about. A salient example of an issue employees care about is the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Fifty-two percent of European employees in countries bordering Ukraine say it is very or extremely important for their organization to lobby or otherwise directly pressure political leaders to try and shorten the war. So do 46% of European employees in countries not bordering Ukraine and 42% of North American employees.

However, organizations may face a public or political backlash when they act on contentious issues. For example, inserting themselves into delicate geopolitical situations may negatively affect an organization’s reputation and prolong negotiations by increasing the number of actors involved and inserting the organization’s interests into the bargaining process. Politicians may retaliate against organizations that criticize their legislation or policies, such as by canceling government contracts, restricting access to markets or removing tax and regulatory benefits for a specific organization or industry. Weighing employees’ demands that the organization take action on societal issues against the potential costs of doing so can be a delicate balancing act, with high stakes on both sides.

CHROs can help their organizations decide whether to act politically by weighing the benefits and costs of political action in a structured, rigorous way. In particular, CHROs should help their organizations:

• Assess the benefits and costs of both action and inaction
• Assess the probabilities of these consequences occurring
• Identify relevant root causes
• Identify ways to magnify benefits and mitigate costs
• Synthesize probabilistic assessments into actionable recommendations.
Systematically Weigh Benefits and Costs of (In)Action

Business leaders may be tempted to simply curb their political and social involvement in light of recent costly incidents in which organizations acted politically and faced blowback. However, limited political involvement may risk demotivating employees and cause organizations to miss out on potential benefits. CHROs should instead help their organization systematically weigh the benefits and costs of action and inaction — both generally and in specific circumstances — in five steps (see Figure 1).

**Step 1: Assess Benefits and Costs of Action and Inaction**

CHROs need to identify and assess both the benefits and costs of political actions to present a holistic view to the rest of the C-suite. The organization must also consider the consequences of not acting politically. Inaction may have benefits, such as bolstering the organization’s reputation as a politically neutral party, but could also have costs. For example, employees may engage in internal activism if the organization does not act politically in the ways they want it to. This dynamic can lead to strained relations with employees, as well as negative media attention.

To assess benefits and costs, HR leaders should ask:
- Which key stakeholders (e.g., employees, investors, consumers) will be affected by this political action/inaction?

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**Figure 1. Framework for Assessing Benefits and Costs of Political Action**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step 1</th>
<th>Step 2</th>
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Source: Gartner
• Do all stakeholders feel the same way about this issue (e.g., employees are unified in their views)?
• Will these effects be positive or negative?
• How large will these effects be?

**Step 2: Assess Probabilities of Benefits and Costs Occurring**

CHROs can help the organization better anticipate the overall effect of acting politically by assessing the probability of each identified benefit and cost occurring. The organization may find it more important to prepare for a smaller benefit or cost that is likely to occur rather than focusing on less likely, albeit larger, consequences. For example, although politicians may be angered by an organization’s political activity and criticize it, or move to cancel favorable policies, the organization need not worry as much about this high-cost consequence if it is unlikely to happen.

To assess these probabilities, HR leaders should ask:
• Does this consequence have a high, medium or low probability of occurring?
• Did the organization face this consequence when it acted politically in the past?
• Did other organizations face this consequence in similar situations?

**Step 3: Identify Root Causes**

HR leaders should also think critically about the potential root causes of individual consequences. Thinking strategically about root causes will ensure they have appropriately identified the relevant effects of acting politically and help them determine how to respond. For instance, an organization may face a consumer and investor backlash based on its political activity, but these effects may be connected. Investors might be less willing to provide capital to a company either because they disagree with its political activity or because they believe a consumer backlash will negatively affect the organization’s profitability. These different root causes imply the different courses of action an organization should take to mitigate potential costs.

To identify root causes, HR leaders should ask:
• How might these benefits and costs be connected?
• What is driving these potential benefits and costs?

**Step 4: Identify How to Magnify Benefits and Mitigate Costs**

Even if an organization will likely face costs from political actions, they can blunt these negative effects by taking countervailing actions. For instance, business leaders who fear their employees may be demotivated by inaction on political issues can try to minimize employee discontent by explaining why they couldn’t take action in this particular instance. Conversely, organizations can magnify positive reputational benefits by highlighting popular actions they have taken internally and externally.

To magnify benefits and mitigate costs, HR leaders should ask:
• What countervailing actions might support the organization’s political activity or lack thereof?
• Who should lead these actions?
• How can the organization send effective internal and external messages about its actions or decision not to act?
CHROs should be prepared to provide actionable recommendations to senior leaders based on their assessment. They should first synthesize the various benefits and costs of action and inaction they have calculated to identify the probabilistic net benefit of action and inaction. They should then compare these net benefits to each other. As a general guideline, the CHRO should recommend that senior leaders consider acting politically if the net benefits of action outweigh the net benefits of inaction, and recommend not acting if the net benefits do not carry substantive weight (see Figure 2). CHROs should couch these recommendations appropriately and be mindful of several potential pitfalls and limitations:

- It is difficult to identify all of the relevant costs and benefits of political action and inaction, as well as their related probabilities. HR leaders should be wary of overclaiming the accuracy of their analysis.
- It may be tempting to overengineer the analysis of benefits and costs, such as by assigning strict numerical probabilities and magnitude estimates to potential effects. Doing so may provide a false veneer of rigor and credibility.
- HR rarely takes unilateral political action. CHROs should compare their recommendations to those of other senior leaders and be prepared to defer to the CEO or other leaders who will ultimately make statements or approve actions.
Act With Confidence, but Be Ready to Adjust

Adopting this framework for assessing the benefits and costs of political action and inaction will enable CHROs and their organizations to act politically with greater confidence. Without a structured approach for deciding whether and how to act politically, organizations will be forced to rely on the gut instinct of senior leaders, leading to higher risks.

Also, organizations should be wary of the inherent limits of any decision framework and be ready to adjust their approach should circumstances change. Continuously updating their assessment of the benefits and costs of acting politically, rather than conducting this type of assessment as a one-off activity, is the best way for organizations to ensure they meet rising stakeholder demand for political action without taking on high levels of unanticipated risk.

1 2021 Gartner EVP Employee Survey; n = 5,000 employees worldwide.
2 2022 Gartner Russian Invasion of Ukraine Employee Sentiment Survey; n = 3,186 employees. Regional breakdown, n = 518 (Europe, bordering Ukraine); 1,178 (Europe, not bordering Ukraine); 493 (North America); 269 (Latin America); 140 (Africa); 434 (Asia); 154 (Australia and New Zealand).
3 CEOs Beware: “Feel-Good” Isolation of Russia Might Make Things Worse, War on the Rocks.
Top 5 Priorities for HR in 2022

Gartner surveyed more than 500 HR leaders across all major industries to assess their priorities and expected challenges in 2022.

This report highlights key findings from the survey, detailing:

- The 5 initiatives CHROs and HR leadership are prioritizing in 2022
- Common challenges HR leaders are facing in each priority
- Actions HR leadership should take to address each priority in the year ahead

View the key findings and assess your top priorities for 2022.

Download Report
As disruptions shift how we work, the role of leaders in our organizations needs to shift to better support employees in the new working environment. In this interview, Kathleen McCarthy discusses GE’s journey toward developing the modern leader and shares advice for HR leaders on the same journey.

Kathleen T. McCarthy
Chief Human Resources Officer, GE Aviation

Kathleen T. McCarthy joined GE Aviation in January 2021 from GE Digital, where she served as CHRO for two years. She joined GE in 2017 as the organizational and talent development leader for GE Digital. McCarthy drives value through innovative people strategies and initiatives, as well as leading large-scale global business transformation—including at GE Digital. She brings many years of experience in a variety of industries and HR disciplines, including work in talent acquisition, workforce planning, consulting and more.
GE has historically been focused on leadership development. What sparked this new initiative around developing leaders?

Over the last two years [since 2019], our business has faced many challenges. If the pandemic wasn’t enough, there were other challenging and disruptive domestic and global dynamics, leadership changes in the business, and the announcement that GE would become three independent companies.

During the pandemic, the aviation industry contracted, but now, the industry is on the upswing. In 2020, we had to take painful cuts to our workforce to manage through the downturn. Last year, commercial air travel returned as the world reopened and we faced a demand to grow our business. At the same time, we also saw unprecedented attrition — part of the “great resignation” and the “war for talent.” So, we needed a plan to develop the next generation of leaders who will attract and develop our best and brightest folks.

From a leadership standpoint within the past two years, we hired a new CEO, and due to recent retirements, more than two-thirds of our executive leadership team members are new, all of whom started in the middle of the pandemic when our normal rhythms were completely disrupted.

And in November 2021, GE announced its intentions to decouple its major businesses to create three independent companies. This comes with a host of challenges around identifying new strategies and evolving our culture for the future as we prepare to stand alone. We want to have leaders who can lead through this change (and build resilience for ongoing change), while staying true to our purpose statement — we invent the future of flight, lift people up and bring them home safely. To do this, we needed to invest in our leaders so they can lead from the front during this business transformation.

How do you view the role of leaders in your ongoing transformation, and how have expectations for leadership roles shifted?

We have a long, proven track record of developing leaders, many of whom have exited GE to become CEOs of other businesses. For GE Aviation, strong leaders are a competitive advantage — being courageous enough to invest in industry downturns; lead with integrity and safety at the forefront; and create a culture where talent thrives.

We’ve been on a journey to ensure our leaders are providing clarity and transparency to all our employees. This means we must also provide clarity around the expectations of our people leaders. It sounds simple, but it’s hard to implement.

Investing in our people is key to success in today’s business. You need to put your employees first and focus on their experience, where they’re at, and how to engage and connect in a whole new world. We must have strong leaders to ensure employees have all that they need, meaning the resources, flexibility and psychological safety needed to really operate in a great business.

The shift in expectations around how to lead by putting people first in this organization has been really important, making sure that we hear all voices and drive performance. We use a lean methodology to deliver on that. Having leaders with the right tools and training to help them deliver successfully on these new expectations really requires a ton of time by our people leaders.

I think our leadership framework is a strong baseline for a modern leader. We include three pillars: (1) coaching and leading people, (2) creating a model of an inclusive and diverse culture, and (3) driving performance using the lean methodology.

How did you put this framework together? Who did you involve when creating the framework?

We leveraged the lean problem-solving methodology. We pulled together cross-functional teams made up of employees at all levels, focused on understanding root causes and problem solving to identify solutions. We included the voice of the customer — in this case, our employees — from the shop floor to our engineers, our product leaders and our commercial leaders. We also pulsed employees on the viability of the potential solutions and crowdsourced feedback. This framework was designed by employees and leaders, for employees and leaders.
You mentioned earlier that it was important for leaders to hear all voices. What role do you see leaders playing in making sure all voices are heard and driving an inclusive culture?

For us, inclusion and a diversity culture mean creating an environment where others are safe to learn, contribute and challenge the status quo — tenants of psychological safety. We need our leaders to do that through diverse and inclusive mechanisms that make sure all perspectives are listened to. We’re using active listening and curiosity to ensure all voices are heard. We work with our whole organization to have employees actively participate in inclusion and diversity experiences, like employee resource groups and learning offerings, that cause us to move toward advocacy around inclusion and diversity.

Creating connections during the pandemic and building networks virtually were some of the harder things to do. Simple things, like having virtual meetings with cameras on, also meant inviting everyone to speak. There are a lot of times when employees end up shutting the camera off because there are only a couple of voices being heard. Asking how you create moments to really be inclusive, matters. We expect our leaders to recognize and address bias in an appropriate way, and we spend a lot of time educating our leaders and giving them space to talk about how to create an inclusive culture.

If you had unlimited time and unlimited resources, what would you change about how your leaders operate?

Our leaders certainly don’t have unlimited time, and that’s probably our biggest challenge when we talk to our leaders. They are committed to leading at GE, sometimes they need more help in developing that skill set, but they’re committed to it. They’re sometimes challenged by the many demands on their time (meetings, etc.) and faced with the need to prioritize leading.

I wish I could give them more time, and the gift of understanding how to subtract and focus on the right activities in the organization. And that is certainly part of leading in this organization. We can invest in training programs and building networks, and our teams love that, and historically we’ve made huge investments there, and that’s terrific. But when it comes down to it, it’s how do we help our teams, our leaders carve out time and really focus on building their leadership skills.

Do you have any advice for HR leaders going through similar challenges?

In this postpandemic world, we must teach leaders how to bring employees back together, even when we’re not all sitting in the same room. If you’re a company that’s decided to create a hybrid or remote work environment, that’s terrific. It’s certainly what we’re hearing from our employees and partially meets their needs around flexibility. But as an HR leader, you now must figure out how to connect them all back to each other. It may not mean bringing them back to an office, but from time to time, bringing them to one location where they’re all together in person and interacting and building relationships.

Many companies have tried to retain talent through pay raises and other perks, but these efforts haven’t produced the desired results. Instead, people are looking to feel connected to their company’s mission and find meaning in the work they do, and we think leaders play a critical role in creating an environment where employees thrive in this way.
Akebia Therapeutics’ Chief People Officer Tamara Dillon shares how her organization guides leaders to more deeply understand their fears. Through activities that encourage leaders to understand themselves first, HR leaders can help them better connect with and understand others.
In today’s workplace, we’re hearing that leaders are feeling highly scrutinized. That scrutiny is making many leaders worried, anxious and even afraid to make a misstep, especially when handling sensitive topics. What is the first step that leaders must take to lead despite that fear?

We believe it’s about understanding yourself as much as you can. Some people cannot break through the facade they put on everyday, but you can see they are afraid. That’s probably the hardest part. Once you get leaders to acknowledge their fear and understand it, they become more comfortable with who they are and how they’re going to show up.

How does a person’s deeper understanding of their own fears make them a better leader?

Let’s use a metaphor — heavy traffic — you can’t control traffic. Traffic’s not trying to get me. It has nothing against me. All I can control is my own reaction to traffic. If I’m angry and have road rage, I’ve done something that undermines my effectiveness and my emotional and mental health. Other drivers and cars don’t care about me, and they aren’t trying to get me.

If I don’t manage my own emotions, and understand what’s happening and how I’m reacting, I can’t control my behavior. It’s about understanding that you may not control the environment, and you may not control the immediate physical reaction your body has, but you do ultimately control your thoughts and behaviors. Your happiness and well-being are yours to own. Normalizing that in a business setting is a way to contextualize it.

People are often uncomfortable talking about their fears and being vulnerable. When you take your guard down, that’s how you can be who you are, and not be as triggered by it. You understand what’s happening. You’re not going to emotionally react and think, “Oh, she’s saying I don’t know how to do my job,” if my colleague is just consulting me about something.

This has a profound impact on engagement, on how people feel about their workplace. Once you create the energy in a team, it happens in a millisecond for the person you’re with. If I’m an angry or fearful leader saying, “I can’t believe you made a mistake,” versus “What happened, are you okay? What was the mistake? Why were you worried about it?” You can quickly experience that reaction. It’s a totally different way of approaching things that happen in your work and life. You may think “I’m worried about this.” What’s the “OK, how do we fix this?” response, versus giving in to the snap response of, “It’s never going to happen”?

How have you used the concept of understanding fears to shape your leadership development strategy?

We created a workshop that has a module for small groups, called “Unlocking Your Potential,” where we talk about leaders’ mindsets, fears and emotional awareness. It’s about leading yourself and understanding yourself. In the workshops, we talk about being vulnerable and how we humans as a species have this fight or flight response. Knowing these things about yourself gives you the power to control them. I can acknowledge my faults, work so it doesn’t happen again and have better communications.

One of our favorite parts of your approach is the “fear onion” exercise that you use with leaders to help them dive deep into understanding a core personal fear. How did leaders react to being asked to share so personally at work?

We’ve gotten interesting responses to the onion. We started this workshop with our executive leadership, but we have since expanded the first three modules to everyone in the company, all 500 employees. Some people, maybe 1%-2%, truly aren’t able to talk about their fears and choose not to participate, and we respect that as a personal decision. Others who feel uncomfortable may choose to not communicate their discomfort and choose a less painful challenge, but in our experience it’s a small percentage. The majority have told us that they are happy this is something we are doing at work.

You’re looking at deep things. People are crying, talking about their relationship with their parents, how they have tried to be perfect in their jobs. People are struggling with their personal value, thinking, “If I’m not successful, what does that say about me?” These are deep thoughts like: “This is how I spend my life. If I die and this is all I’ve done, what does that mean?”

Deep things drive who we are. People can get to a pretty deep place about who they are, how they interact with the world and what they’re really afraid of.
Is this something that leaders are going back and sharing with the people they’re working with?

Yes, but not all the levels or responses are all the same. At the end of this learning, participants’ leadership work style 360; the broader leadership group went back to their teams and talked about what they were personally working on. Typically, what they were working on was associated with their core fears, so leaders chose how much or little detail they wanted to share with their teams.

It’s about sharing what you’re working on, so this becomes a development opportunity. It allows you to talk about it in a way that it’s your development, not a personal flaw or failure, something you’re working on and that you want your team’s support. And, that you really care about it.

For example, personally, I can become a “mama bear” and be protective of my team. This is something that I’m working on, which is associated with how I value myself and how I value our function. I shared with my whole team that I’m working on this. What does it look like? It looks like me not reacting when someone says something that could be perceived as a slight to our function, but instead leaning in with curiosity and asking questions.

Would you say that the most important thing leaders gained from this approach was more control of their behavior when they feel afraid?

I would say that’s important, but I would actually say the most important outcome is a better understanding of yourself. This is the basis of our whole leadership framework. If you don’t understand yourself first, you can’t connect with and understand others.

The next step is communicating what you’ve learned about yourself to others. At the end of the session with our executive team, we took our learnings, sat down with our teams and talked about our fears with our people. Your team then understands more about you, you role model what this looks like for them and they feel more comfortable sharing with you. There’s a shared experience, which then gets you to a third piece, which is that understanding what triggers the fears of your employees, peers and manager, that allows you to understand them more deeply. Then you aren’t as triggered by their behavior.

For example, I know that one of my co-workers had an unstable childhood. They moved a lot and their parents changed jobs often. As a result, they have never felt like “they belong” anywhere. I understand when they react strongly to being “left out of a decision” or “not included” as they should be where this comes from. I can offer support and understanding in these situations and we have a closer relationship as a result.

I know you’ve seen positive changes in the responses to your culture survey as a result of this practice. What are some qualitative results you’ve seen based on this initiative?

We’ve seen a big shift in how people view the organization, how they communicate, how they feel. We certainly have people rate the workshop as effective, but it’s really a change in how we work with each other. You see people that are calmer. You see a change in your co-workers around how you react and how you interface with one another.

It feels fundamentally different. We’ve had people share things like, “My boss used to have a lot of aggressive behaviors, but I am not seeing those anymore, and I’m more comfortable and can actually talk to him now.” You can see things on a one-on-one basis, and you can see them as a team. You can see them qualitatively and you can see them quantitatively. It doesn’t happen in a week. It happens over time, and you have to have a belief and a trust and a perseverance for making this change in the organization’s culture.
Suneel Gupta, author and keynote speaker, spent years interviewing some of the greatest leaders in the world. He shares how HR leaders can bring others together around a shared vision by protecting their energy to fuel innovation and convincing themselves before convincing others.
Suneel Gupta recently joined the Gartner Talent Angle podcast to share the leadership lessons he learned from interviews with some of the most successful individuals in the world. The following insights are excerpted from that conversation. To hear the full interview, listen to this episode on Gartner’s Talent Angle podcast (see Talent Angle Podcast: Using Failure as a Pathway to Success With Suneel Gupta).

You interviewed some of the most successful business leaders, artists and academics. What was the most important thing you learned from these great minds?

I had always assumed that brilliant people who change the world had come up with a breakthrough idea. And that’s true, but that’s only part of the equation. People who change the world around them don’t just come up with a great idea. They have to learn how to convince other people to believe in that idea.

And it may sound obvious, but oftentimes we don’t treat it as such. We assume that if an idea is great, then people are going to get behind it. And if it’s not, then they’re not. But great ideas get dismissed all the time.

Through the course of my research, I started to realize bankers inside the banking industry came up with Venmo before Venmo. Blockbuster came up with Netflix before Netflix. Hospitality executives came up with the idea for Airbnb before Airbnb.

It’s not like those ideas weren’t there, it’s just that they weren’t supported. They weren’t able to get the rallying call that they needed to make their idea a reality. In order to be effective as a leader, you don’t just need to come up with an idea. You need to learn how to move and inspire people, and that is not an obvious skill set. You might be brilliant. You might be great at coming up with wonderful ideas and yet still miss that thing that I call being “backable” to get other people to believe in it.

You talk about how “backability” goes beyond just charisma. Can you share more about this idea of conviction?

I started to study who I think are some of the most extraordinary people on the planet — hundreds of leaders that were doing really amazing things. And I started to study their communication style, follow them into meetings, see how they communicated with peers, and how they recruited talent. One of the things I assumed I was going to find was that they were all going to have a very charismatic style. I assumed they were going to speak with hand gestures and have great pacing and have great eye contact. But over and over again, I realized that wasn’t the case at all.

Of course, there were some who were very charismatic. But there were many extraordinary leaders out there that did not exhibit any of the standard qualities that we think of when we think of charisma. And so I started to dig deeper to find out what makes them really effective in a room. And I realized that, more often than not, it wasn’t charisma. It was conviction.

Backable people tend to take the time to convince themselves first before they try to convince others. If they convince themselves first, then they let that conviction shine through with whatever communication style comes naturally to them.

What that means for us is that we should go with whatever communication style feels right. Don’t start to focus on things like eye contact and pacing when that’s just not your thing. Speak the way you speak, and, instead, focus on really convincing yourself. Because if you can believe in something yourself, then you’re going to be able to walk into a room and let that shine through.

For these great leaders, what separates conviction from self-delusion?

To have conviction doesn’t necessarily mean to be one hundred percent convinced. It just means that you believe in the problem, but not necessarily in the solution. In fact, one of the things we find is that great leaders will fall in love with the problem, but they won’t necessarily fall in love with the solution.

We have to, as leaders, catch ourselves on this. We go straight into falling in love with the solution, but if you can just take a moment and say, “What is the problem I’m falling in love with? What are some alternative solutions to that?” It will expand your mindset so your conviction is about the problem. Now you’ll be able to walk in believing this is something that we absolutely need to solve, but not come in telling others exactly how to solve it.
Why must HR leaders make themselves more backable?

I think every one of us is trying to make ourselves backable in some way, shape or form. That could be at home, in your community, in your career, and certainly within companies. As HR leaders, we need your leadership at this moment.

HR doesn’t operate in a silo; it expands to every inch of the company. As an HR leader, how do you influence people beyond just the HR function to make sure you’re bringing everybody to the table? Every HR leader needs to build a new skill set, which does not just entail coming up with great ideas on what the future of work really looks like, but also bringing all types of leaders together to believe in that vision.

How do great leaders address burnout?

I spent the past decade researching extraordinary leaders, and I looked at them during hard times as well. How do they manage chaos? How do they manage when things are not going well?

If you compare leaders who tend to build momentum to those who fizzle out over time, the people who fizzle out very rarely run out of time. They very rarely run out of talent or even resources. They typically run out of energy. They just get exhausted.

When we look inside big companies, for example, people start to go after incremental projects and incremental wins. And we ask them why not go after the thing that you know is going to have the biggest impact, because that’s what the organization cares about. One of the things we continue to hear is, “I don’t want to fight that fight. I know; I'm just too tired to fight that fight.”

Exhaustion has always been, and still is front and center, one of the big enemies of innovation. It’s one of the big enemies of leadership. It’s one of the big enemies of well-being. As leaders, we have to learn how to take care of our energy — not just our time and talent. Energy is just as important.

One of the ways great leaders look at this differently is through, what I call, “rhythmic renewal,” which is the idea of not waiting for a vacation or a weekend to take rest. We find that elite performers, whether in athletics or in business, take somewhere around eight recoveries every single day. I know that probably sounds unthinkable given the world we’re in right now, when we’re back-to-back in a way we’ve never been before.

One of the ways we can pull this off is by using what I call the “55-five model,” which means that for every 55 minutes of work, we’re taking five minutes of rest. We’re building that rest into our schedule, and we’re building it into the schedules of the people around us. We’re not holding 60 minute meetings; we’re holding 55 minute meetings. We’re allowing and encouraging and modeling these periods of rest. Science tells us that although we have fewer minutes per hour to work, every one of those five minutes makes the other 55 minutes far more productive, far more creative, far more energetic, and it significantly reduces the rate of overall burnout.
Metrics of the Month
August 2022

Metrics of the Month features snapshots of data from our Global Talent Monitor reports, which track worldwide trends in employee experience and perceptions. This month’s metrics highlight the impact of leadership on employee attraction, attrition and job satisfaction.

Source: Gartner Global Labor Market Survey, June 2022
Note: All metrics are measured monthly and contain responses from an average of over 3,000 employees across various geographies and industries.

### Attraction Drivers: What EVP attributes are most important to you when looking for a new job? (Top 5 + Selected)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EVP Attribute</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Compensation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>46.3%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Respect</td>
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<td>32.7%</td>
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<td>Work-Life Balance</td>
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<td>Location</td>
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<td>Recognition</td>
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<tr>
<td>Manager Quality</td>
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<td>12.5%</td>
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### Attraction Drivers: What EVP attributes were most important in your decision to leave your previous employer? (Top 5 + Selected)

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<th>EVP Attribute</th>
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<td>Recognition</td>
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<tr>
<td>Manager Quality</td>
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<tr>
<td>Work-Life Balance</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>17.4%</td>
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</table>

### Human Deal Satisfaction (Deeper Connection): What human deal attributes are employees most satisfied with in their current organization?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attribute</th>
<th>Percentage Satisfied*</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coworker Quality</td>
<td>46.4%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Manager Quality</td>
<td>44.8%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Collegial Work Environment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Diversity, Equity and Inclusion</td>
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<tr>
<td>Camaraderie</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leadership Quality</td>
<td>38.2%</td>
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### Deeper Connection: Percentage of Employees Who Believe Their Organization Helps Foster Positive Relationships with the Following Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coworker</td>
<td>55.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>37.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>34.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>28.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of the Above</td>
<td>27.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Gartner Global Labor Market Survey, June 2022
Note: All metrics are measured monthly and contain responses from an average of over 3,000 employees across various geographies and industries.

* Percentage reporting “satisfied” or “very satisfied”