

progress

/ˈprɒɡres/

- 1 forward or onward movement towards a destination
- 2 development towards an improved or more advanced condition

your organisation

2050 vision: technology and the future of work
leaders seeking innovation must embrace failure

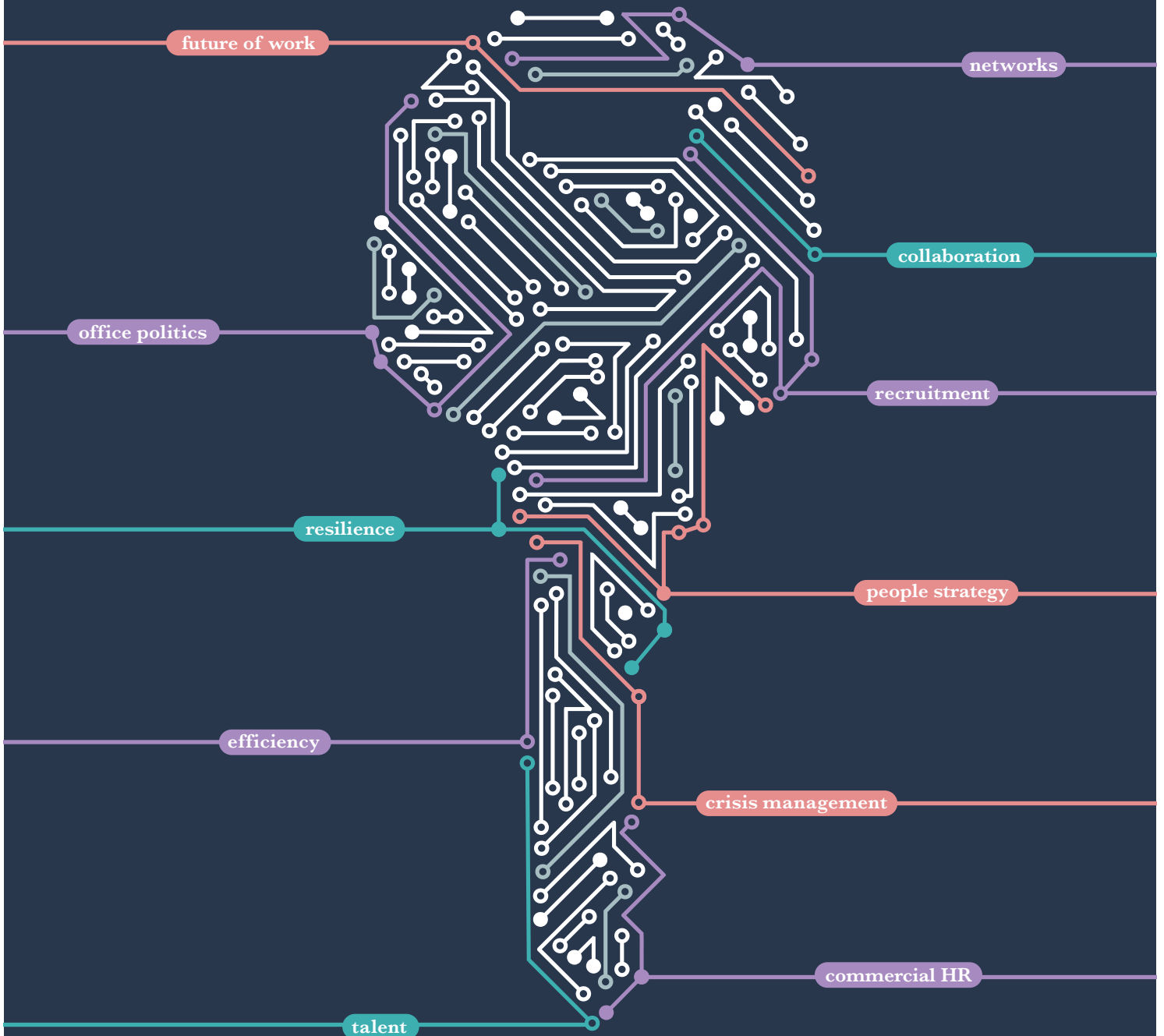
your role

the future of HR
strategic learning from crises

your career

political savvy – living in the real world
finding your next HR hire

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Welcome to the latest issue of *Progress*, a collection of short articles from a range of authors and experts on issues affecting your organisation, your role and your future career.

As highlighted in the recent French elections and forthcoming election in the UK, we continue to live in changeable times with economic, political and societal uncertainty creating difficult market conditions for most organisations. Coupled with this, technological innovation, industry disruption and a pace of change unseen before is placing even greater pressure on the strategic decision making from leaders.

In these challenging conditions, we encourage our clients to be curious about the outside world, to scan the landscape for disruptive influences, to ask difficult questions about the capability of talent (both now and what is required for the future) and to ensure the internal environment they create enables their workforce to flourish.

We are delighted that the network established by Corporate Research Forum (CRF) to develop the capability and effectiveness of the HR function continues to grow strongly, both in the UK and across Europe, and our executive search firm,

Strategic Dimensions, is working with more clients than ever before.

We are pleased to bring you a range of topics addressing many of these, and other, areas. Daniel Franklin from *The Economist* outlines his thoughts on the future of work, robotics and how organisation agility and adaptation are key to future success. Given this journey won't be smooth, we have two complementary articles from Amy Edmondson at Harvard Business School and Matt Nixon from Disraeli Group on the importance of learning from failure and the need for leaders to embrace failure to drive innovation.

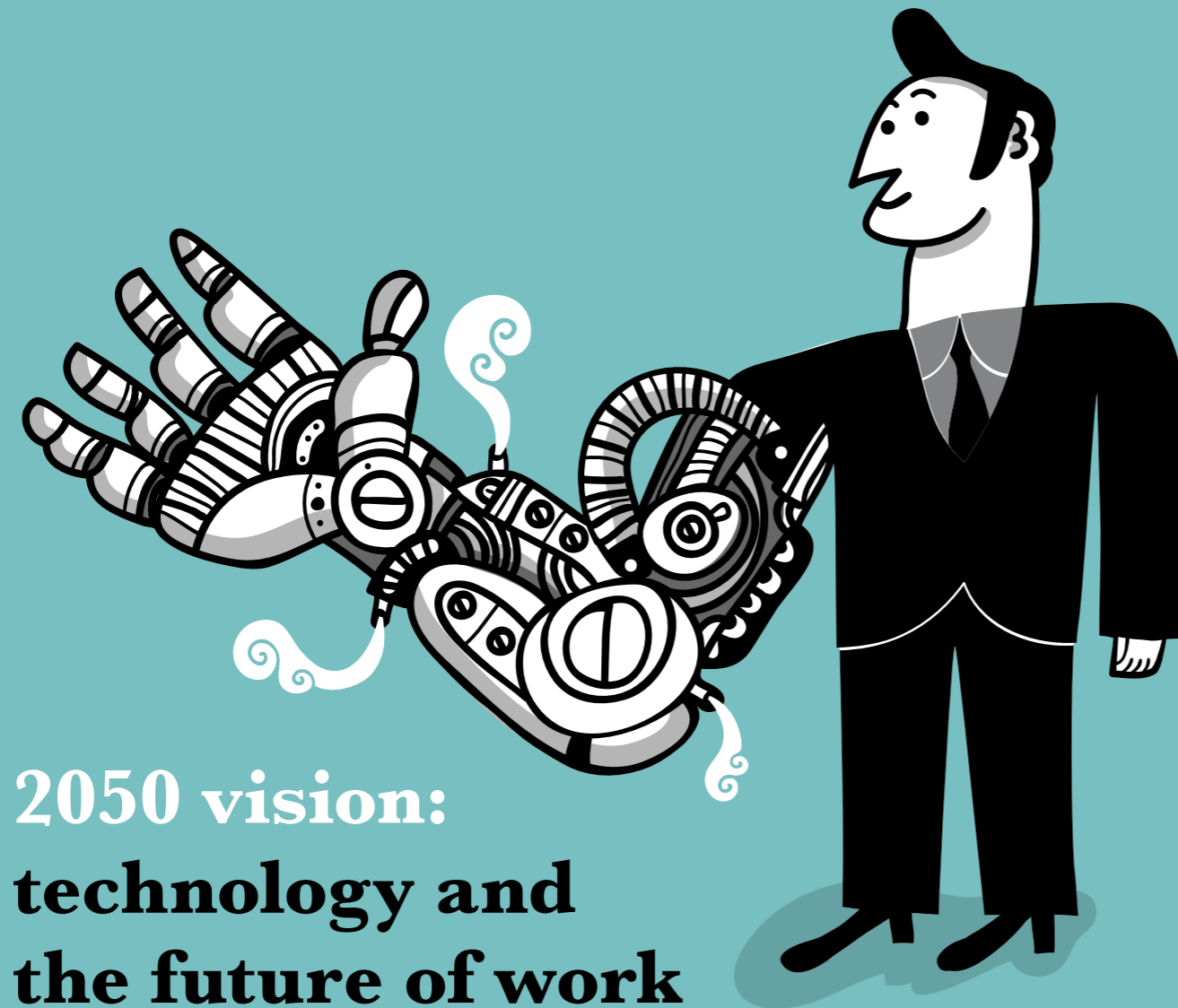
Mike Haffenden, Director of CRF and Strategic Dimensions, outlines three areas HR can improve and focus on to ensure the function remains future fit, aligned and adding value to the business. Related to this, Nick Holley reflects on his experiences as an employee, HR practitioner and Professor on the importance of understanding power, politics and influence within the organisation. Finally, Steve Wing gives some practical tips on getting the most value from an executive search firm.

CRF's research continues to bring new ideas and ways of working to our clients with a focus on practical applicability. Our agenda for the second half of 2017 includes a focus on Learning, Performance Management and Talent Analytics and we would be delighted to share our insights with you.

Thank you for taking the time to read *Progress* and we hope you find it useful and enjoyable.

Warmest regards,

Richard Hargreaves
Commercial Director



2050 vision: technology and the future of work

Almost every industry is now a technology business. So how technology develops in the coming decades will have a profound effect on companies everywhere, in every sector.

Peering into the far horizon is the aim of *Megatech: Technology in 2050* (recently published by Economist Books), a collection of essays that probe and predict the future from a variety of angles. Three big trends stand out.

First, expect the pace of change to speed up. Physics, according to Frank Wilczek, a Nobel prize-winner from MIT, has reached the stage where, increasingly, we could “replace experimentation with calculation”, enabling technological advances to happen more efficiently. In biotechnology, the

The rapid development of artificial intelligence means that machines will become the best at doing many jobs that once seemed certain to remain dependent on human judgment.

pace is quickening thanks to exponential improvements in the sequencing of genomes. And across the board, big data and machine learning promise to turbo-charge change. Science-fiction writers have coined an apt word for the era in prospect: the Accelerando.

Second, the barriers between hitherto separate industries will tend to collapse. Already, BMW is knitting together a car using a technique that would look more familiar in the textile industry. Medicine will increasingly merge with information science. When new materials mean that lighting no longer has to consist of separate fittings but rather illuminating films in ceilings, my *Economist* colleague Paul Markillie predicts that ceiling makers “need to think about becoming lighting engineers to avoid being disrupted by lighting companies becoming ceiling producers.”

Third, disruption will be intensified by the rise of the robots. The rapid development of artificial intelligence means that machines will become the best at doing many jobs - from analysing medical scans to taking investment decisions - that once seemed

Adaptability will become the defining aspect of successful organisations.

certain to remain dependent on human judgment. Fears that robots will take all our jobs are probably overblown. Over time, people will think up new roles, many of a sort that we can't even imagine today, and work out smart ways of working alongside machines. But the job-creation won't conveniently happen at the same pace, or for the same people, as the job-displacement. So we should brace ourselves for a bumpy ride.

How should companies prepare for this fast and furious future? Amid all the questions about how things may play out, Lynda Gratton, a professor at London Business School who directs the Future of Work Research Consortium, suggests there is one clear lesson: “adaptability will become the defining aspect of successful organisations.” In practice, that means making a number of changes to current ways of operating.

Firms will need to rethink traditional career ladders (broken by a hollowing out of middle-tier jobs), redefining what progression looks like. A more flexible approach to engaging with talent might involve cultivating broader networks and relationships with people beyond formal employees. Encouraging lifelong learning, much of it online, will be increasingly important. And firms should figure out ways in which machines can “augment” employees' efforts, rather than replace their work. Gratton argues that organisations should “reimagine traditional job descriptions and creatively ponder how a job can be enhanced by innovative ways to strike a balance between humans and machines.”

None of this will be easy. Even for the flexible, the pace of technological change is likely to be daunting. But it will also be thrilling.

Daniel Franklin, Executive Editor of *The Economist*, Editor of *Megatech: Technology in 2050*



Explore CRF's 2016 Conference Retrospective – ‘An Uncertain World: Planning for 2025 and Beyond’ – [here](#).

CRF will be exploring the future of work and jobs in our 2018 programme. To hear more, drop us a line [here](#).

To purchase *Megatech: Technology in 2050* [click here](#).

why leaders seeking innovation must first embrace failure

Every child learns at some point that failure is bad and dodging blame is the number one goal. “*I didn’t do it!*”...“*He started it!*”... “*It wasn’t my fault!*” reads as an all-too-familiar chorus of childhood.

By the time we’re working adults, avoiding association with failure is all but second nature. But this self-protective reflex harms the companies we work for. Organisations can’t learn from failures if those who work there don’t admit and analyze them.

In any industry where innovation matters, an ability to learn from failure is essential. And leadership makes it happen. To suggest that business leaders may need to encourage people to fail more often may sound counterintuitive, if not downright irresponsible. But I would argue that encouraging the right kind of failure in your organization is exactly what’s needed to spark innovation.

In my research, I’ve found that failures fall into three basic categories:

- 1. Preventable failures occur when people deviate from prescribed procedures in routine work, in manufacturing or services, often as a result of lack of training or inattention. These can be avoided through alert management and vigilant action.**
- 2. Complex failures occur when many interacting elements come together in unanticipated ways. High risk organizations like hospitals and nuclear power plants are particularly vulnerable to these kinds of failures because of the variability and complexity of the work. Calling such failures “bad” fosters a mindset that makes it harder to catch and correct small problems before they mushroom into serious failures. Small failures are inevitable in complex systems – but major failures and accidents aren’t.**
- 3. Intelligent failures are an inevitable byproduct of thoughtful action in new territory. Not only are intelligent failures not “bad,” they’re actually good! They provide valuable new knowledge. Discovering new drugs, creating a radical new business model, or designing an innovative product are tasks that require intelligent failures along the way to success.**

Successful organizational learning from failure requires reflecting openly on what happened (not on “who did it”). Furthermore, leaders should immediately recognize that if a failure is of the intelligent kind, it should be celebrated. Why? Not only to make sure people feel that failure is not stigmatized, but also to encourage people to speak up about a failing course of action sooner rather than later. It’s just plain human nature to cross your fingers and hope that more time or more resources are all you need to turn a failing project around. By celebrating intelligent failures, companies encourage timely reassignment of valuable resources to new innovation projects that may succeed.

Teamwork is essential for learning from failure, because understanding failure’s lessons requires integrating multiple perspectives from different people, professions, or departments involved in a failure event (or series of events). No matter what kind of failure occurs, learning is possible. Avoid playing the blame game – the pull to identify culprits rather than causes.

Embracing failure is a leadership issue. It takes leadership to set the stage for gleaning failure’s lessons. Too often, *all* failures in organizations are treated as if they were preventable failures. No one wants to be associated with a failure, because we fear that those who are will be seen as losers. But when you consider the three types of failures, it is illogical to conclude that failures are simply bad and failure-makers should all be shunned.

It’s up to an organization’s leaders – at the top, in the middle, and on the front lines – to create the psychological safety that helps people report, analyze, and learn from failures.

Amy C. Edmondson, Novartis Professor of Leadership & Management, Harvard Business School | [@AmyCEdmondson](#)



Amy is a keynote speaker at CRF’s 2017 International Conference in Amsterdam. [Click here for details.](#)

Find out more about Amy’s work from these two HBR articles:

[Strategies for Learning from Failure](#)

[Wicked-Problem Solvers](#)



future of HR: it starts with the business...

Last year we were disappointed (but not surprised) to read yet another document compiled by a group of HR gurus and thought leaders about ‘the future of HR’. It was ‘data-light’ but contained a liberal sprinkling of jargon and unsubstantiated opinion.

A cynic might say that their motivation was more to do with their personal and consultancy advancement than organisation performance improvement. It caused us to produce our own response – CRF’s *HR Manifesto*.

Our fundamental concern with the glossy slide-deck was that at no stage in the professionally packaged document was anything mentioned about ‘the business’, or the likely future conditions under which HR might need to operate. But HR doesn’t exist because it exists. It is there to provide

professional support to the enterprise it serves. We think this was a fundamental omission.

In our opinion, expressed in the manifesto, the world of fierce competition, globalisation, advancing technologies, changing social and political contexts, enhanced risks and complex demographics, compels us to involve and engage our people and create a clear and compelling vision with a relevant, realistic and focussed action plan.

This is difficult work and requires a fusion of high intellect, empathy, curiosity, business

knowledge, contextual awareness and professional expertise in principles and practices of people management. It is not a job for an inexperienced generalist who happens to be available. Nor is it a job for a third party who doesn’t have a clear and direct understanding of your own organisation. We would argue that the role of the HR leader has never been so important, but the value they deliver to the enterprise will depend on where and on what they focus.

Organisations need to innovate, define new organisation paradigms, involve and engage employees, build capability and create high-performance work environments. Only then will they create the agile, purposeful and forward-looking businesses we need in order to flourish.

But HR doesn’t exist because it exists. It is there to provide professional support to the enterprise it serves.

In a practical sense, for HR to continue to make progress we see three potential areas for improvement.

- Work on improving the context and environment in which people operate. Bad climates stifle good people whereas good climates get the best out of us all. Ed Lawler at the University of Southern California has over the years championed high-performance work systems and his work stands the test of time. Our work with Mee-Yan Cheung-Judge, Bob Keegan and Chris Worley is also highly relevant.
- Stay aware of external trends and threats, and bring the outside in. George Day and Paul Schoemaker at Wharton Business

Evaluation leads to learning and improvement and HR needs to get better at data-driven evaluation.

School have done great work in the area of environmental scanning. Their work continues to be very relevant for all organisations. Similarly, Mike Wade’s work on digital disruption makes for an unsettling read for most of us.

- Adopt an evidence-based approach to all HR work. Off-the-shelf fads and fashions and quick fixes rarely help. Change in organisations or people is rarely transformational but tends to be evolutionary. Not everything that’s delivered can be measured, but most things can be evaluated, if a clear and well-articulated set of objectives is set. Evaluation leads to learning and improvement and HR needs to get better at data-driven evaluation. For further information on evidence-based management check out Rob Briner’s work at the School of Business and Management, Queen Mary University of London, or Denise Rousseau’s work at Carnegie Mellon University. In a light-hearted but alarming and very impactful sense, read Ben Goldacre’s book “*Bad Science*”.

As we often hear, keeping up to date or networking is not easy, but in today’s turbulent times it is essential. It is not separate from work but part of it and it’s much more interesting than reading “stuff” from “thought leaders”.

**Mike Haffenden, Director,
Corporate Research Forum |
@C_R_Forum**



Read CRF’s *HR Manifesto*, outlining the steps HR can take to make an enhanced contribution to the business, [here](#).

A supporting CRF webinar on HR’s role and contribution to business can be [viewed here](#).

strategic learning from crises

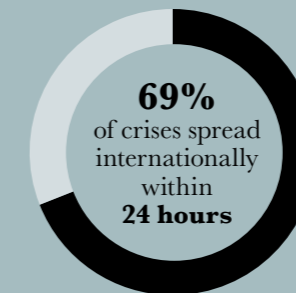
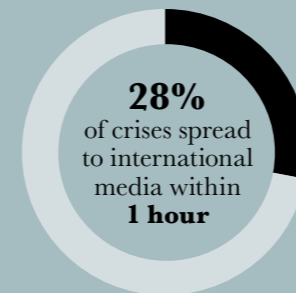
It's 27 years since Peter Senge's famous classic *The Fifth Discipline* popularised the ideal of becoming a "learning organisation". But scepticism remains whether a business case can be made in advance for the compelling need to become such an organisation.

Aside from finding visionary CEOs who 'get it', can HR or learning professionals prove it's essential?

The Cost of Failure to Learn

Perhaps we should concentrate more on failure to learn. We often work with clients in the emotionally charged atmosphere of learning from crises. In these situations it's not difficult to prove that something has gone expensively wrong; a failed product, an explosion, a financial scandal, plummeting levels of trust and a declining stock price are usually complemented by lawsuits, panic and career crises in the board room.

HR and learning professionals can leverage data like these as a rationale for investing in building organisations with a humble culture free of hubris that are well connected to many sources of error correction – "thinking slow" as well as "fast", as Daniel Kahnemann would put it.



SOURCE Freshfields: *Containing a Crisis* and *Knowing the risks, protecting your business*

Post-Crisis Learning

But what if it's too late and you have had a major crisis? Can we learn usefully after a crisis in a way that is helpful to the organisation of tomorrow? We believe so, and here's how to do it:

- 1. Look widely for feedback** – include former leaders, customers, regulators and other diverse perspectives.
- 2. Involve surviving leaders in the process** – it's a real time action learning process for them.
- 3. Mix different types of investigation** – we use many different ways to test findings and emerging hypotheses so our model isn't too simplistic.
- 4. Keep an open mind** – our job is not to blame but to see the whole system that enabled the crisis.
- 5. Co-create the final analysis** – half-finished and uncertain work is OK, as long as you don't let anyone avoid tough conclusions.
- 6. Frame learnings into immediate actions and changes.**

We like to make sure there is a "so what" that moves from root cause analysis into actions. These may include:

- cross-industry changes (such as advice on safety after the Piper Alpha disaster)
- cross-organisation changes (e.g. adding new values to underpin cultural change across a company)

- process or procedural changes that can be owned by specific departments (e.g. changes to authorisation processes after a fraud)
- individual issues or feedback that can be subjects of coaching (we encourage these from the CEO and top team down).

HR professionals can and should be involved at every stage in this process.

- HRDs and HRBPs can stimulate and support the desire to take on the project at all.
- Learning and OD professionals can be engaged in leading the work, especially where strong facilitation is required.
- And HR may be in the lead on implementation, particularly of changes impacting culture, values, behaviours, leadership or reward.

It may be that the starting point for becoming a learning organisation only comes after a disaster. Ideally this won't happen in your organisation, but if it does, remember not to waste the crisis. Especially if it isn't your own: you can learn a lot from watching others in your industry fail, and it's a lot cheaper and less painful.

Matt Nixon, Disraeli Group
Matt Nixon runs Disraeli Group |
A specialist leadership consultancy
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Matt is a keynote speaker at CRF's masterclasses on 4 July in London and 6 July in Berlin, entitled 'Learning – The Foundation for Agility and Sustainable Performance'.

[Find out about the London event.](#)

[Find out about the Berlin event.](#)

political savvy – living in the real world

Organisations aren't the pristine laboratories that many business schools and academics like to think they are. They are messy, dysfunctional places where egos and personal agendas play as important a role as strategy and financial performance.

In this environment how relevant are many of the business books we are encouraged to read that paint a picture of a logical environment where perfect markets drive rational decision making? Perhaps we should go back a couple of hundred years and read Machiavelli's *'The Prince'* or even a few thousand and read Sun Tzu's *'The Art of War'*.

These timeless works are grounded in the real world, where not everyone is pure of heart and driven by altruism. They challenge us to understand what drives people who may be very different to ourselves. They deal with issues that are as relevant today as they were then. They are relevant to the business in general but even more so for HR. The ability to get things done in this messy world populated by emotional, often seemingly irrational, and even narcissistic people is a critical skill that grows in importance the more senior we get.

So what are the lessons they can teach us?

Sun Tzu stated that *"if we know ourselves and know our enemies we need not fear the result of a thousand battles"*. I'm not saying that our colleagues are our enemies but every day can feel like a battle. If we are to succeed we need to get inside their world to understand what drives their decisions. This means spending time in the wider business not in our HR office, understanding who customers are, why they buy from us, how we make money and how things really get done. We need to understand what our key stakeholders care about. Put simply, they don't care about HR – why should they? They care about delivering their strategy and their numbers so we need to understand how we can support the delivery of strategy, how value is created and what HR can do to drive it. We need to talk the language of the business not the language of HR; the language of data, numbers and value.

The ability to get things done in this messy world populated by emotional, often seemingly irrational, and even narcissistic people is a critical skill that grows in importance the more senior we get.

We need to talk the language of the business not the language of HR; the language of data, numbers and value.

Only then can we engage the business in the people and organisational issues that underpin the delivery of strategy and the creation of value.

A few thousand years later Machiavelli taught us to see the world as it is, not as we are. He taught us to understand how our organisations really work and how decisions are really made. He taught us to understand what power is and who holds it. In the real world the answers to these questions aren't to be found in our logical organisational charts or written down in some manual or management book. They require us to navigate the complexities of our organisations and to develop a nose for what is really going on, and then use these insights to get things done.

I am not encouraging us to become Machiavellian in a negative sense of the word and we need to understand that these works were written in the context of imperial China and Renaissance Florence. But when we combine an understanding of the real world, which they talk about, with a core of integrity, we can succeed in a highly political environment.

We shouldn't be sucked into acting unethically. Equally we shouldn't be naive. Political savvy is neither. It's about getting things done in the real world.



Join CRF Learning's next HR development programme, *'Commercial Thinking for HR'*, led by Dr Rebecca Homkes, Teaching Fellow at the London Business School. For further details [click here](#).



Nick Holley, Director of CRF Learning, Corporate Research Forum
| [@Nick_Holley](#)

finding your next HR hire – the executive search route



Once a company has decided to go out to market to find a key hire, how do they choose the right executive search company to work with?

And as a candidate, how do you pick the right firm to represent you?

The following points will provide guidance for making the right decision.

The client perspective

Track record

Does the executive search firm have experience of finding candidates for the same type of role, in the same geography, salary level and sector? A reputable search company should be able to show evidence of similar roles they have filled and provide references from past and current clients.

Professionalism

The search firm will be representing the client during the search. How they approach the market, present the role, the company, the culture and how they interact with potential candidates will all have an impact on how the client's brand is perceived. The client should be able to gauge the professionalism of the search firm during the tendering process, the initial contact with the consultant managing the assignment, and the quality and accuracy of both the proposal and candidate briefing document.

The process used by the search firm

This starts at the initial meeting with the client. Do they have knowledge of current market conditions, including the calibre of candidates actively looking and salary levels of similar roles, so they can give the client an accurate estimation of time to hire, and highlight any potential difficulties the search will encounter? Are they knowledgeable of the current market conditions and the quality of candidates looking, and can they demonstrate an understanding of the company culture, the candidate profile and both the positive and negative aspects of the role? Can they show example CVs of candidates who fit the profile? Do they update the client regularly on progress and give feedback on how the role is seen in the market? Are candidates properly interviewed and briefed before meeting the client? Will they regret unsuccessful candidates in a professional manner, providing honest and sensitive feedback? This area is important because for every one successful candidate

there could be up to 50 candidates who are unsuccessful.

Other considerations

Fees are, of course, important but should not be the deciding factor when choosing a search firm. Quality is more important than cost when filling a key hire. Retained search firms are better placed to work on searches for salary levels at £70K and above. Anything below this figure would be better dealt with by a contingency approach. Finally, if the role is a specialist rather than general position then it is always advisable to choose a specialist company.

The candidate perspective

In most areas candidate considerations and client considerations dovetail exactly. Candidates should choose a reputable search firm with experience of placing people in roles similar to what the candidate is looking for. In addition there are a number of activities which should always happen.

- The interview with the search firm should only occur once there is a role to interview them against.
- A candidate's CV should never be sent to a prospective client unless the candidate has agreed for their details to be forwarded.
- Successful candidates should always have an initial conversation with the consultant, preferably face-to-face, in order to explain exactly the type of role, industry sector, location, salary level and culture they are looking for.
- Before a client interview the consultant should have briefed the candidate on the role, the HR and business context and a personality and style profile of the hiring manager.

Steve Wing, Director, Strategic Dimensions | @StratDimensions



Strategic Dimensions place senior HR professionals in permanent and interim roles across the UK and internationally. Visit their website to learn more.

Collaboration in a Competitive World:

DRIVING INNOVATION,
EFFICIENCY AND PRODUCTIVITY

Monday 2 – Wednesday 4 October 2017
Amsterdam | 9th CRF International Conference

Corporate Research Forum (CRF) is a leading network for multinational businesses, including 40% of the FTSE 100. CRF's annual international conference is one of the largest gatherings of senior HR Directors in Europe, delivering two days of intellectual challenge, thought-provoking insights and immersive learning.

The conference will address the crucial role collaboration will play in business success in the coming years – at both the individual and organisational levels. Chaired by Dr Margaret Heffernan, the outstanding speaker line-up includes:

- Professor Amy Edmondson, Harvard Business School
- Professor Rob Cross, Babson College
- Hamish Taylor, Innovation Consultant and Former CEO
- Alex Steele, Jazz Pianist and Consultant

Focused on finding practical and applicable solutions, the conference is the event of choice for those looking to be selective in their use of time and discerning in choice of fellow attendees. For more information, please click [here](#). Alternatively, please view the 'Conferences & Events' section on the CRF website.

WHY ATTEND?

Book your place at CRF's International Conference to:

- create new business relationships and enhance existing ones in order to explore new ways to collaborate
- understand the importance of collaboration, both within and across organisations, as well as cautionary lessons of 'collaboration overload'
- receive practical recommendations derived from engaging speakers and peer-to-peer discussions.

View the highlights and take-aways from previous CRF conferences [here](#).

REGISTRATION FEE

The conference is aimed at senior HR and business leaders currently working within corporate and private organisations. CRF members qualify for up to four places (based on membership type) as part of their annual membership.

To book your place at this first-class event please contact Lynn Little, Events & Membership Manager at lynn@crforum.co.uk or +44 (0) 20 3457 2640.

For further information on CRF please visit www.crforum.co.uk.

DATE

Monday 2nd - Wednesday 4th October 2017
Monday 2nd October (welcome drinks reception): 19.00 – 21.00
Tuesday 3rd October: 09:00 – 17:00 (followed by dinner)
Wednesday 4th October: 09:00 – 15:30

LOCATION

Okura Amsterdam,
Ferdinand Bolstraat 333,
1072 LH Amsterdam,
The Netherlands

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"Two days jam packed with thought-provoking, inspiring and disruptive content. The speakers were exceptional – bringing insight, perspective and challenge that enabled exciting and useful debate on the tables, in the breaks, over dinner and even on the plane home."

VAL GARSIDE, HR DIRECTOR
PENGUIN RANDOM HOUSE
(ATTENDEE AT 2016 CRF CONFERENCE)

Corporate Research Forum

Founded in 1994, Corporate Research Forum (CRF) is a membership organisation whose international focus is on research, discussion and the practical application of contemporary topics arising from people management, learning and organisation development. CRF has become a highly influential focal point and network for over 190 members representing a cross-section of private and public sector organisations.

CRF's goal is to be valued for excellence, rigour, relationship building and providing an independent view which, together, lead to measurable improvement in members' people and organisation performance.

For more information please contact Richard Hargreaves, Commercial Director, on 020 3457 2640 or at richard@crforum.co.uk.
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PARC

Performance and Reward Centre (PARC) is a membership organisation which enables HR and Reward Directors to engage with leading thinkers, expert practitioners and each other on key issues affecting today's performance, reward and governance agendas. Membership of PARC enables an organisation to improve their HR and reward strategy with a view to driving organisational performance.

For more information please contact Richard Hargreaves, Commercial Director, on 020 3457 2640 or at richard@parcentre.co.uk.
www.parcentre.com

Strategic Dimensions

Strategic Dimensions was established in 1995 to fill a clear market need for talented HR practitioners across all disciplines. We place senior HR professionals into a range of business sectors in the UK and internationally and have established an unrivalled network across the HR community and with consultants, businesses leaders and academics. Recognising that the world is very different today, we work hard at understanding the changing business landscape and ensuring that we are in tune with the issues facing our clients. Client and candidate care is our primary concern and the endorsements we have received over the years are testament to our focus on exemplary service levels.

For more information please contact Dan Caro, Director, on 020 3457 2650 or at dan.caro@strategic-dimensions.co.uk.
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