

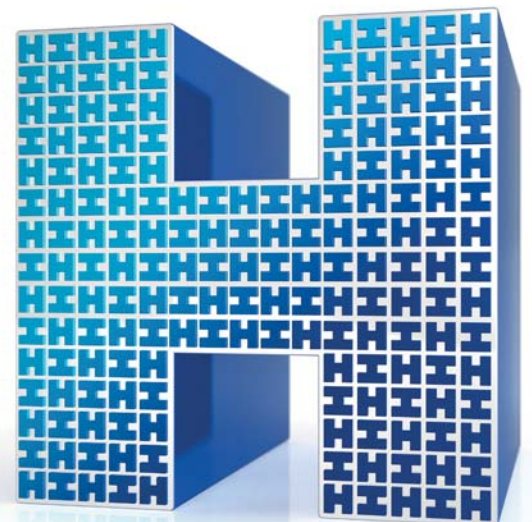


HAYS Recruiting experts
in Human Resources

DNA OF AN HRD

The makings of an HR leader in Asia

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INTRODUCTION



On behalf of Hays, I am pleased to announce another addition to our DNA series – DNA of a Human Resources Director (HRD) Asia.

Today's HRDs are operating in a world of continuous change. This makes attracting, motivating and retaining the right talent to achieve your organisation's strategic objectives and building a high performance culture more challenging and important than ever before.

As such, I am delighted to be releasing the third edition of our DNA series in Asia, following the DNA of a CFO and DNA of a CIO instalments. The purpose of this report is to provide aspiring HRDs with insights on how they can progress to the top in HR, based on the experiences of current HRDs from across Asia.

At this time of rapid change, it's no wonder that candidates frequently ask us about the path to success. How do I become an HRD? What do I need to do to transition from senior management to an executive role? Which skills should I be working on today so that I am ready for the opportunities of tomorrow? This report is designed to answer these questions.

Based on our network of top, highly motivated and incredibly successful professionals, we've been able to develop this report. I encourage all aspiring HRDs to use the lessons and advice from today's business leaders to your advantage.

Christine Wright
Managing Director, Hays Asia

Thank you

As part of this project, we wanted to go beyond our research and analysis and talk to people in the field who have gone through the journey themselves. Talking to many HRDs across Asia has helped us develop a report that is both insightful and unique to Hays.

We would like to thank all those HRDs who have contributed to helping us create this report. Your insight, advice and willingness to share your experiences provides invaluable information and awareness to HR professionals about the career path and the challenges, obstacles and fundamental steps necessary to become an HRD in Asia.

We would also like to extend our thanks to the HRDs who are profiled throughout the report. You'll find their unique views, gained from their own personal journey to HRD, very insightful.

Disclaimer: While every care is taken in the collection and compilation of data, this report is interpretive, indicative and not conclusive. This information should be used as a guide only.



ABOUT THIS REPORT

What does it take to become a Human Resources Director (HRD) in Asia?

This report is designed to give you insight into what it takes to achieve a leading role in Human Resources (HR) in Asia. It is based on a survey and one-on-one interviews with HR leaders.

In this report, we identify paths aspiring HRDs can follow to reach their career ambitions. First, we look at the backgrounds of current HRDs. Next, we look at the steps taken by HRDs to develop their careers and how this has helped them to progress through the ranks. Hereafter, we consider the skills needed for an HRD to succeed. We then explore the challenges HRDs are facing, both in their respective industries and in their careers. Finally, we look holistically at how HRDs manage to balance work and life.

We hope the insights contained in this report will help any aspiring HRD map out their career path and achieve their career goals.

Survey methodology

A total of 570 HR leaders were surveyed to produce this report. Questions were related to education and qualifications, career path, international experience, skills and attributes, responsibilities, challenges in the HR field and personal life. We also conducted five in-depth interviews with HRDs, whose insights are shared throughout this report.

Our expertise

At Hays Human Resources we've been recruiting HR professionals for nearly 50 years globally. We source talented professionals at all levels, and we looked at the commonalities and trends that our HRD placements share.

About our respondents

Out of 570 respondents, 34 per cent worked in mainland China, with the majority based in Shanghai. 21 per cent worked in Japan, 20 per cent in Malaysia, 17 per cent in Singapore, seven per cent in Hong Kong and one per cent in other Asian countries.

While all of our respondents were working in Asia, only 36 per cent worked for a company headquartered in Asia. 27 per cent of the respondents' companies' headquarters were in North America, 26 per cent in Europe and 11 per cent elsewhere. 87 per cent were commerce and industry* companies, either listed (56 per cent) or non-listed (31 per cent).

45 per cent of respondents worked for a company with over 1,000 employees, while only 25 per cent worked for a company with fewer than 250 employees. The turnover of the majority (35 per cent) of all companies was over 500 million USD, although 32 per cent preferred not to provide these figures.

59 per cent were female and 71 per cent were between 36 to 50 years old, of which 26 per cent were 41 to 45 years old.

Job title

We exclusively refer to Human Resources Directors (HRDs) throughout this report, though the titles of people who reached this position vary widely. 38 per cent of our respondents are addressed as HR Director or Director of HR, 20 per cent Head of HR, nine per cent (Senior) Vice President of HR and 33 per cent hold other titles, including Chief HR Officer, GM HR and Divisional HR Manager.

*For the purposes of this survey, commerce and industry includes any sector, i.e. Financial Services, that is non government related.



SURVEY FINDINGS

There is not a clear path to a senior role in HR. HRDs come from a variety of educational backgrounds and have followed different career paths. However, common characteristics are abundant. Most HRDs agree on the importance of networking and keeping up-to-date with industry changes. It is also important to be versatile and develop yourself in a broad way to be able to handle the wide array of challenges an HRD faces. The key findings of our survey, outlined below, help to explain just what makes up an HRD's DNA.

HRDs come from different backgrounds

Our survey indicates that HRDs come from diverse backgrounds. While it is essential to pursue an education, only a small percentage studied Human Resources for their first degree. Additionally, more than half of our respondents worked outside of HR for a part of their professional career.

Develop a broad base of skills

An HRD's job is never the same. The industry is dynamic, and balancing the interests of the organisation as a whole with those of individual employees often means treading a fine line. HRDs must develop both business and interpersonal skills to navigate challenges and succeed in the position. Getting international experience is also considered highly beneficial to your career.

Education

Only 16 per cent of HRDs hold a bachelor's degree in Human Resources, while 31 per cent hold either a Business, Commerce, Finance or Economics degree.

Commercial awareness

As an HRD, you should get to know the business inside-out. Be commercially aware is what 51 per cent of HRDs offer as their number one top piece of advice.

Females between 36 and 50

Women make up the majority (59 per cent) of HRDs in Asia. Meanwhile, 71 per cent of all respondents were between 36 and 50 years old, and of those, 26 per cent were between 41 and 45 years old.

International experience

81 per cent of HRDs who worked abroad believe that this has been of considerable benefit to their career, and an additional 16 per cent see 'some' added value coming from their international experience.

Be versatile and manage industry challenges

HRDs face a wide array of challenges, relating both to their particular industry and their own career. They have to keep their employees engaged and at the same time deal with organisational politics. Furthermore, the HRD's role is constantly changing, so they must be highly versatile to succeed.

Business challenges

Keeping employees engaged and retaining them, aligning strategy with budgets, company cultures and a challenging economic environment are all big challenges HRDs deal with on a daily basis.

Be proactive

Being proactive is the most important personal trait an HRD should have. 59 per cent of HRDs believe that this has significantly helped them succeed during their career.

Draw inspiration

The most influential leader for HRDs is Steve Jobs, followed by Richard Branson and Jack Ma.

Organisational politics

44 per cent of HRDs feel that having to deal with organisational politics is a challenge. As an HRD you are at the heart of the organisation and have to manage different parties' interests.

Networking

Building a broad and knowledgeable professional network is key for career advancement. 88 per cent of HRDs are active on LinkedIn.

Life outside the office

In their free-time, HRDs enjoy socialising with friends and family (73 per cent) and playing sports (59 per cent).

Build a network and keep up-to-date with industry changes

HRDs believe that in order to develop your career, you should build an extensive network and always stay on top of industry and legislative changes. Getting international experience is also considered highly beneficial to your career.

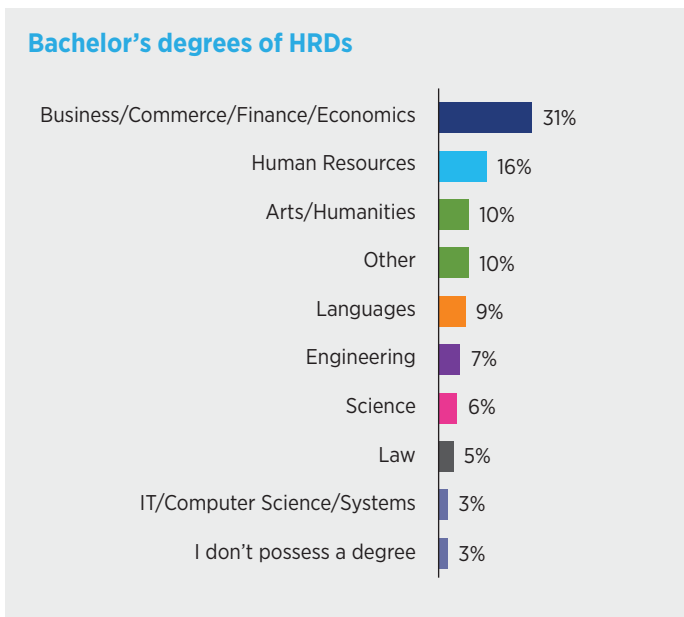
Maintain a work-life balance

Being an HRD often requires putting in extensive hours. 46 to 55 hours per week is the norm, but more is not uncommon. Despite these demands, most HRDs are happy with where they are and would choose to embark on the same career path again if they had the chance to do it all over again.

HRDS COME FROM DIFFERENT BACKGROUNDS

HRDs draw upon a wide variety of professional and educational experiences to make it to the top. Our respondents have taken diverse - and often times unexpected - routes to their current position.

While women are underrepresented in many top corporate positions, this is not the case for those working in HR as our survey indicates that 59 per cent of HRDs in Asia are female. The majority of HRDs are aged between 36 and 50 (71 per cent), with 26 per cent being between 41 and 45 years old. Only eight per cent of respondents are 35 or younger and 18 per cent are 51 or older.



Tertiary education is important to HRDs, as 97 per cent hold at least a bachelor's degree. However, early study choices don't seem to restrict your chances of becoming an HRD as only 16 per cent of respondents decided to study HR when first attending university. Instead, the majority of HRDs hold business, commerce, finance or economics bachelor's degrees, but other specialisation areas such as arts, humanities and languages are not uncommon either.

This shows that there is not just one way to become an HRD, and this is emphasised by the fact that more than half (52 per cent) of our respondents have worked outside of HR at some point in their career.

Shahzad Umar, HR Director at Nestlé in Malaysia, is just one of many whose education was not in the HR field; his major was in Engineering. When asked what made him switch to HR, he says that he enjoys seeing people achieve on a personal and professional level. "For me, witnessing the change and progression is the most fulfilling part."

Next to possessing a bachelor's degree, 32 per cent hold a master's, 17 per cent a postgraduate degree, 33 per cent an MBA and three per cent a doctorate. Furthermore, 36 per cent hold additional HR qualifications or certifications such as those obtained from the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), Human Resources Certification Institute (HRCI) and SIX Sigma.

HRDs are able to transfer the insight they've gained studying and working in fields not directly relating to HR to their current position. Experience in different professions and industries can help prospective HRDs better understand the various business functions and departments that constitute an organisation.

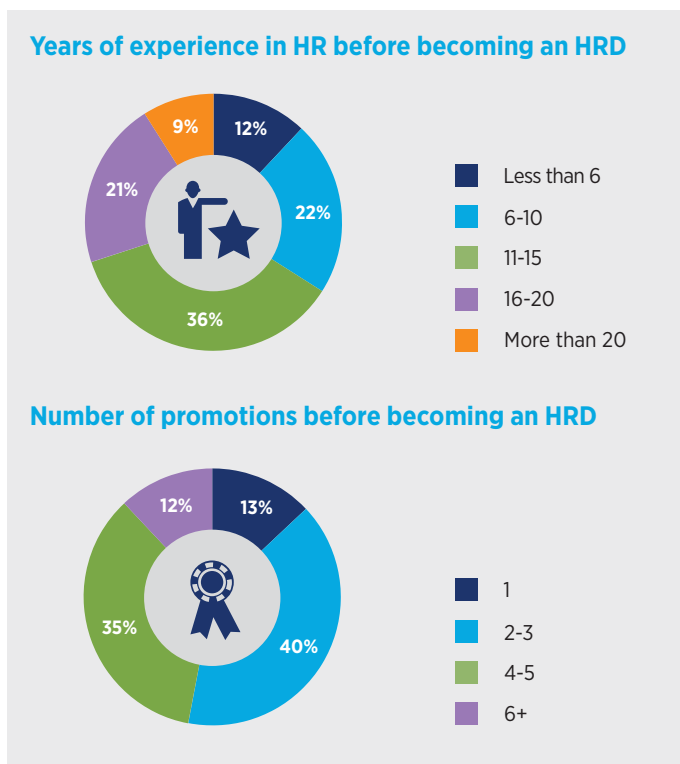
This holds true for Xiaoguang Sun, VP Human Resources, Youku, Alibaba Entertainment Group in mainland China. "A hurdle for HR associates to navigate is the differences in culture, pace of an organisation and personalities which all vary from company to company, industry to industry."



Typical career path

Most of our respondents (86 per cent) had over ten years of experience working in HR, of which 24 per cent had been working in the sector for over 20 years. Before reaching their current senior position, only 12 per cent had less than six years of experience working in HR. The majority (36 per cent) reached this position after working between 11 and 15 years in HR, while it took 30 per cent of respondents longer than 16 years to finally become an HRD.

Depending on the size of the organisation, it generally took two to three promotions for the majority (40 per cent) or four to five promotions (35 per cent) to become an HRD. 12 per cent of respondents required six or more promotions.



Finally, most HRDs worked for multiple organisations during their career as only 12 per cent worked for the same company all throughout their career. As HR is one of the few professions where one can move between industries, it is possible and arguably advantageous for an HRD to do so. Xiaoguang Sun believes this to be valuable for career development. “It is beneficial to possess cross-industry experience as the key expertise and competencies of leading an HR department are transferrable”.

Not everybody likes the uncertainty that comes with job hopping and Shahzad Umar is proof that doing so is not necessary to reach a senior role in HR. He has been working for Nestlé ever since graduating from university. “I don’t recommend the practice of ‘job hopping’, however, I do agree that moving between industries is helpful because that would help one to understand the dynamics of an organisational footprint and the implications of HR strategy executions.”

International experience

One way to develop your career according to our survey is to gain international experience. 45 per cent of respondents considering working overseas say it is a must for career development.

However, HRDs in Asia do not work outside of the continent often. Only 29 per cent of respondents have worked outside Asia at some point in their career, of which 65 per cent did so for more than two years. The most popular destination was North America (43 per cent), followed by Europe (31 per cent), the UK (22 per cent) and Australia and New Zealand (21 per cent).

An astounding number of respondents (97 per cent) indicated that their experience outside of Asia has been beneficial to their career.

Wendy Montgomery, Head of HR Asia Pacific at Red Hat in Singapore, agrees. Before moving to Singapore, she worked in the UK, Gibraltar and Germany. “Working in Europe has given me valuable experience in learning about different labour laws and employment legislations. I would recommend anyone to live in a different region as it provides you with the opportunity to develop your diversity of thought and exposure to different cultures.”

Whilst only 29 per cent have worked outside Asia, 47 per cent of HRDs are currently considering working overseas. Reasons for wanting to go abroad vary:



HRD PROFILE



Xiaoguang Sun
VP Human Resources,
Youku, Alibaba
Entertainment Group,
Mainland China

“The best way for HRDs to continue to develop is to observe, study and ask questions from those around you.”

Career path

Xiaoguang fell into HR by chance despite studying the discipline at university. At the time, HR was a relatively new major, and Xiaoguang and his classmates had no idea back in the mid-nineties how significant the profession would later become in China. This meant that for many who studied HR during this period, most would end up working in a completely different profession.

His first role after university was as an International Trade Officer. However, the trade industry suffered a downturn around 2001, and this provided the impetus for him to seek a career with a leading multinational. A role on offer by Epson China as a Training & Development Supervisor was too good to turn down and eventually led him into a long-lasting career in HR.

It was at Epson where Xiaoguang's eyes were opened to the attractions of becoming an HRD. His role in the HR department enabled him to obtain the necessary exposure to the inner workings of how HR functions work and how it adds value to each of the business units. He quickly found himself in a strong position to add value to the business and this confirmed his interest to progress his career further in HR.

After leaving Epson, he advanced through the ranks at notable multinationals such as Ericsson, where he was Senior HR Director, Head of HR Strategy, Head of Talent Acquisition and Head of Strategic Workforce Planning. His next role saw him assume the reins as Senior HR Director at Mars Inc and Head of the Centre of Excellence functions. In April 2015, after 14 years in HR, his continued growth saw him land a role at one of the most exciting and dynamic multinationals in the world; Alibaba Group. Despite the demanding nature of this role, he is also a visiting professor at Sichuan International Studies University.

Get hands-on experience

Throughout his career, Xiaoguang has worked across various industries, such as telecommunications, FMCG and IT. While for many professions this would be considered a disadvantage, he believes this does not hold true for HR. “I believe that it's beneficial to possess cross-industry experience as the key expertise and competencies of leading an HR department are transferrable. A hurdle for HR associates to navigate is the differences in culture, pace of an organisation and personalities which all vary from company to company, industry to industry.”

Xiaoguang maintains that it is absolutely critical for an HRD to understand how a business operates from the ground up, including understanding what is going on in various business functions. “By fully understanding the business inside-out, HRDs can do their job better and set and design strategic programmes, such as fundamental leadership programmes. Furthermore, they will be in a better position to participate in strategic planning if they have expertise in other functions within an organisation.”

As a word of advice, he adds that the formative years in the industry are the most important in one's quest to become an HRD. “Those years form the foundation from which one progresses and can identify opportunities for exposure to hands-on tasks.”

Learn from those around you

In order to develop yourself, Xiaoguang believes that you should always be curious, learn from those around you and network. “The best way for HRDs to continue to develop is to observe, study and ask questions from those around you.” For example, as he sees so many outstanding entrepreneurs at

Alibaba who have previously led start-up teams, he is afforded a firsthand look at what makes these individuals tick.

Throughout his career, he has delivered numerous speeches on HR, which have given him the opportunity to network with attendees from a wide range of industries. As a result, he has been able to encounter a mix of executives from different backgrounds, often with different perspectives on how to create a successful business. This has provided him with insights about different ways of thinking, which he feels is invaluable knowledge.

As a final example on the importance of networking, he reflects on a point in his career when he became disillusioned with the industry. It was during this period that Xiaoguang received advice from a colleague, namely that he should make a plan for where he saw himself in the next 10 to 15 years. “I took the advice, which revitalised me and my outlook. This pivotal moment gave me the impetus to continue growing and following a career path within HR.”

Skills required to succeed as an HRD

Xiaoguang feels that for anyone wishing to become an HRD, they must have strong leadership qualities and exceptional business acumen. “I was able to harness these qualities by ensuring I had a strong understanding of how each of the different companies I worked at operated in their specific industries.”

“Furthermore, an HRD should have the courage to make a decision even though it may not be popular or well received by those in the organisation. If your character is one that wishes to appease everyone that is around you, you will not have any desire to make any changes, which is likely to curb your professional development.”

Another skill that Xiaoguang believes is necessary to succeed as an HRD is to be able to look at the bigger picture. HRDs need to balance the interests of the C-suite and board with those of employees. The approach that he usually takes is to look at the impact of decisions on the organisation's long-term future and growth, which places him in a better position to manage the interests of all parties.

Work-life balance

As Xiaoguang sometimes works 70 to 80 hours per week, he cherishes every moment he gets to spend with his family. But he feels that the heavy workload is a small price to pay to hold such an important role in a multinational organisation. “One of the best things about being an HRD is the ability to shape people's careers. And for my own personal career, the best thing about being an HRD is the ability to create my own destiny.”

DEVELOP A BROAD BASE OF SKILLS

HRDs face many challenges coming from different and sometimes unexpected areas, which often require hard decisions. In order to deal with these issues accordingly, aspiring HRDs need to develop multiple skillsets.

We asked our respondents to list up to three skills that they believe are most essential to succeed as an HRD. Ultimately, six skills clearly stood out among the rest.

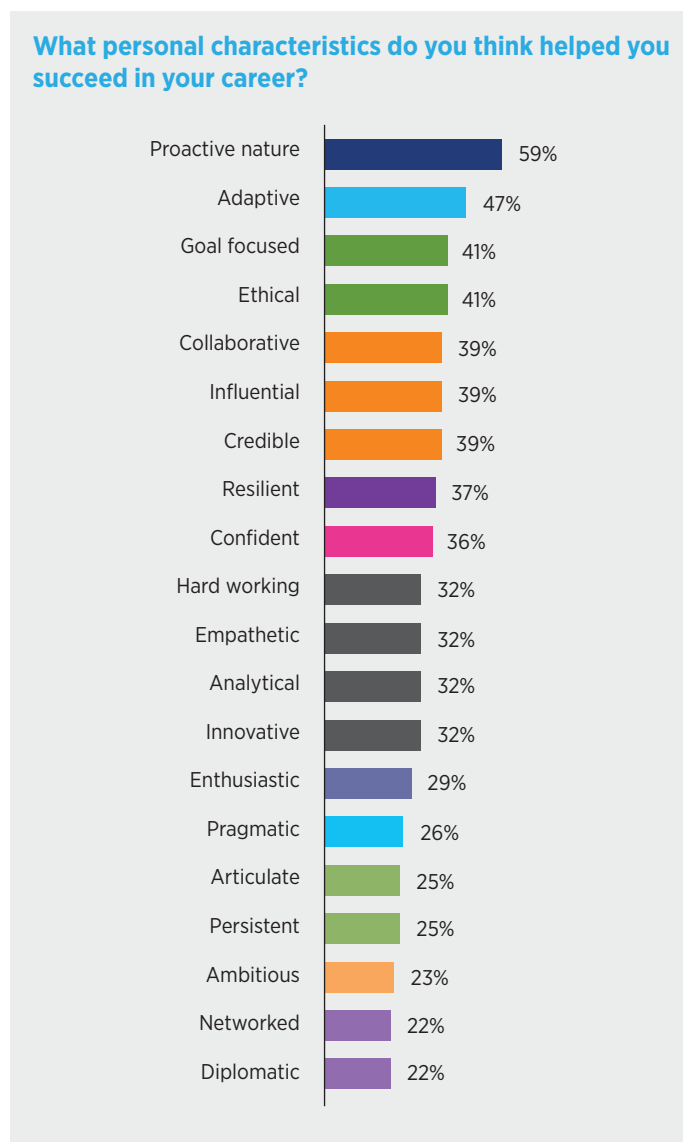
If one aspires to become an HRD, the most important skill to have is strategic planning (53 per cent), while change management is also high on the list (26 per cent). Xiaoguang Sun agrees with both of these. “HRDs are required to look at the bigger picture when balancing the interests of the C-suite and board with employees. This requires taking a view that if any periods of change or difficult decisions are to be implemented, HRDs must look at how such decisions will ultimately add value to the organisation’s long-term future and growth.”



Personal characteristics

The list of personal characteristics that our respondents think helped them during their career is extensive. The most prominent however, was having a proactive nature. Shahzad Umar of Nestlé even states that this is ‘crucial’ for aspiring HRDs, and 59 per cent of our respondents agree with him that it helped them during their career.

Further findings also show how versatile an HRD needs to be. As we will see in the next section, an HRD faces numerous challenges during his or her career. In order to deal with all of these accordingly, having a wide range of personal traits is essential. In this sense, it is understandable that being adaptive is second on this list, chosen by 47 per cent of respondents.



Words of advice

In both our survey and our one-on-one interviews, we asked HRDs to share tips with the next generation of HRDs.

In the survey, HRDs were asked to list up to three tips that they believe are the most useful for anyone aspiring to become an HRD. HRDs provided a variety of recommendations, but many agreed on two points. One needs to be commercially aware (51 per cent) and establish stakeholder engagement (41 per cent).

Xiaoguang Sun agrees. “The key skills for me in becoming an HRD were having strong leadership qualities and exceptional business acumen. I was able to harness these qualities by ensuring I had a strong understanding of how each of the different companies I worked at operated in their specific industries.”

Wendy Montgomery, Head of HR Asia Pacific at Red Hat in Singapore, also advises HRDs to remain on top of things. “To be a great HR professional, you need to understand the business you support. It’s not enough to just be a specialist in HR. HR associates must know how each of the different departments supports the business whether it’s finance, product, or marketing. Knowing this will enable you to be a competent and strategic HR business partner that the profession calls for us to be.”



We can see from the survey that no two HRDs are the same. When asked for a final word of advice to someone starting out their career in HR, we received different responses from our interviewees.

Clear and simple advice

“I would advise aspiring HR professionals to invest the time in working hard and gaining practical experience.”

Ricky Long
Director People and Performance Asia at Colliers International in Hong Kong

Know yourself in order to succeed

“All experiences are individual in nature. Any aspiring HRD or person in general should focus on being the best at what they do and the opportunities to grow and progress will come.”

Shahzad Umar
HR Director at Nestlé in Malaysia

The importance of formative years

“Those years form the foundation from which one progresses and can identify opportunities for exposure to hands-on tasks.”

Xiaoguang Sun
VP Human Resources, Youku, Alibaba Entertainment Group in Mainland China

Think of yourself as an HR professional

“You should be able to create a vision and get your colleagues to buy into that vision. Besides this, I also advise aspiring HRDs not to shy away from consulting others for advice. If at times you can’t make your own decisions, do not be afraid to seek input and feedback from others who could be better placed to make informed decisions.”

Wendy Montgomery
Head of HR Asia Pacific at Red Hat in Singapore

Networking

“I think building relationships and doing well in whatever you are doing today will build your tomorrow.”

Ai Miyakawa
Head of HR at Cisco Systems in Japan

HRD PROFILE



Ricky Long
Director, People and Performance Asia
Colliers International,
Hong Kong

“One should never assume, but develop a thick skin, ask the right questions, do more of what is best for the business, be collaborative and be able to lead change.”

A passion for people

After starting his career as a management trainee in the hospitality industry, Ricky was presented with the opportunity to choose between HR and marketing for his next career move. For him this was not a hard decision. “My passion for people triggered me to choose HR.”

He has never regretted his decision as he is still working in HR and now almost 30 years later, he holds the position of People and Performance Director for Asia at Colliers International and is still following his passion - people. In this role, he has developed a strategy that aims to improve the performance of their people to drive the business forward.

Canada

Early in his career, Ricky moved to Canada, where he pursued an HR qualification. He obtained a Certified Human Resources Professional (CHRP) qualification, a nationally recognised level of achievement within the field of HR. However, he says, while it is mandatory to have a qualification, there is no specific qualification that would make or break you in terms of reaching an HRD role.”

He worked hard in building his professional network through volunteering at HR associations and soon afterwards, he succeeded in finding an HR role at Holiday Inn Canada. “My hard work and fate landed me the job at Holiday Inn. Based in Kitchener, this was a fantastic opportunity for me as the location is known to be the headquarters for major insurance players and I enjoyed five years of success in this role.”

Looking back at his time in Canada, he views his experience abroad as extremely beneficial to his career. “My time in Canada was hugely beneficial because of the wider exposure, experience of different cultures, people and best practices. I worked in Canada during the

recession, which I see as a great learning experience.”

Back to Hong Kong

Before he moved to Canada, Ricky had a short career stint in Hong Kong. This was after his sociology and urban planning studies and his management trainee programme, where he became HR Officer at New World Hotel. After that, he joined Cathay Pacific where he worked closely with the Industrial Relations Director, which he described as an eye-opening experience.

After returning from Canada in the mid-nineties, he took on his first managerial role as HR Manager at Motorola. After becoming the HR Manager for the manufacturing team in 1997, he took on a new challenge in 1998 and moved into a regional role. At this time, Motorola was already innovative in its HR model and use of technology. As Regional HR Business Partner for the heads of departments in the region, he would work closely with the business, understanding their needs and translating their requirements into effective solutions.

Ricky’s position at Motorola was categorised as ‘In Business HR’, though he eventually found that this role was becoming too distanced from the skills he wanted to nurture. “It was my first managerial role in Hong Kong and I wanted to get more hands-on experience. So I moved onto another role to get more involved in work on the ground, to develop stronger technical experience and skills.”

Work hard and remain curious

Ricky believes that this is the most effective way to build up the necessary skills and experience. “Don’t just talk the talk, but do the job. To build up the necessary skills you need to put in hard work, be proactive, learn on-the-job, be agile and adaptive in taking on different challenges and be dedicated.”

He also suggests embarking on a new role with a vision of what you want to achieve and how you want to develop yourself in order to contribute to the company and at the same time, achieve your own career goals. This approach lends itself to a win-win situation.

When asked for the best piece of advice ever given to him, he says that someone once told him, “You cannot be strategic unless you know the technical work.” He adds that aside from the technical experience, personal characteristics that can help you succeed are your personality, drive, willingness and belief in learning, as well as a good attitude and business sense.

After leaving Motorola, Ricky joined Sybase, a database management firm. Here, he was hired as the first Regional Senior HR Manager responsible for 300 staff in Asia covering 12 locations. The wide exposure and challenges saw him remain with Sybase for six and a half years, where he progressed from HRD to senior HRD. After a short spell at SAS, he rejoined Sybase a year later and stayed for another three years, building and implementing a competency framework across the region.

Ricky’s next role was at Atmel Corporation, a US listed firm with around 7,000 staff globally. Here, he supported the Global HR Business Partner and was involved at a strategic level, engaging senior stakeholders. He reported to the Global VP of Human Resources and took over responsibilities of the Global Head of Learning & Development in 2012. “This was the peak of my career as I was driving numerous initiatives developing leadership excellence at the executive level.”

There’s no single pathway to HRD

Most recently, Ricky moved to Colliers International. While his career has taken him to many places, he wouldn’t necessarily

advise people to follow the same path. “Success is achieved in different ways for different people. I would advise aspiring HR professionals to invest the time in working hard and gaining practical experience.”

“One should never assume, but develop a thick skin, ask the right questions, do more and of what is best for the business, be collaborative and be able to lead change. HRDs need to balance the interests of the C-suite with those of employees and the way I developed these skills was through my passion for learning, taking on challenges and having a can-do attitude.”

In order to balance these interests, it is important for an HRD to understand the inner workings of running a business. “Successful top level managers always stay very close to the business and are detail oriented. You need to know your stuff to be able to lead, trust and delegate to your team.”

Network

As a final word of advice, Ricky recommends aspiring HRDs to grow a network and build relationships. “I use social media sites such as LinkedIn and attend networking events. Every Christmas, I take the opportunity to send out greetings to most of the people in my network as a way of keeping in touch. Over the years, I have developed close relationships with mentors where when I ask for their opinion on a topic, their reply is almost instant. This is something I greatly appreciate and I myself, will offer help and career advice when asked.”

BE VERSATILE AND MANAGE INDUSTRY CHALLENGES

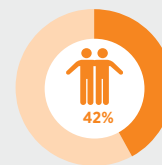
HRDs face a wide array of business challenges. When asked for their opinion on the factors that will present the biggest business challenges to them in the coming 12 months, we received various answers and not one challenge appeared to be more significant than others. This shows that working in HR is highly versatile and that being an HRD can be very demanding.

The biggest challenge expected in the coming year by HRDs was employee engagement (42 per cent). Other challenges include aligning strategic requirements with operational budget and workforce (41 per cent), company culture (38 per cent), retaining employees (38 per cent), dealing with the challenging economic environment (37 per cent) and recruiting and attracting new talent (36 per cent).

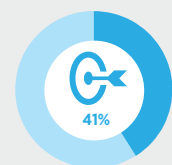
Keeping employees engaged is seen as the biggest challenge, as a large part of an HRD's job is to ensure employee satisfaction and ultimately retention of top talent. "We need to care about the employees and at the same time care about the overall company success, so balancing that and treating people with dignity is a really important quality for a Head of HR," says Ai Miyakawa, Head of HR at Cisco Systems in Japan.

The versatility required to work in HR is again demonstrated by looking at the professional challenges HRDs are facing on a personal level. Our survey indicates that most HRDs view achieving company objectives as their greatest challenge (19 per cent), followed by achieving support from the board to implement HR strategies (15 per cent), demonstrating ROI from the HR department (nine per cent), assessing new technologies (eight per cent), managing work-life balance and finding time to pursue own career development (both seven per cent) and keeping up-to-date with new technology and managing a larger and more diverse team (both six per cent).

What factors do you believe present the biggest business challenges to HR Directors over the next 12 months?



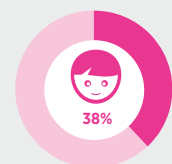
Employee engagement



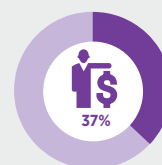
Alignment of strategic requirements with operational budget and workforce



Company culture



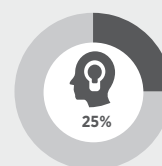
Employee retention



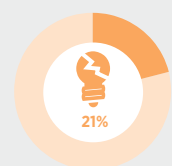
Challenging economic environment



Recruitment and attraction



Skills and knowledge gap of my team



Skills shortages

The future of an HRD's roles

When asked about what HRDs believe would become a bigger part of their role in the coming five years, we received varying answers.

Our survey indicates that HRDs expect identifying and retaining key talent and succession planning to be the biggest part of an HRD's role in the next five years (58 per cent). This is no surprise, given that employee engagement is seen as the biggest challenge they expect to face.

The responses we received from HRDs confirm that working in HR demands versatility. 55 per cent of HRDs expect that designing and managing organisational change will play a bigger part of their work in the near future, while they also need to become more commercially aware (50 per cent). They will also be expected to be more innovative (41 per cent) and take on more of an advisory role (37 per cent).

Furthermore, they expect to place a higher focus on returns on HR and transformation projects (46 per cent), compliance and regulations (36 per cent), ensuring an inclusive and diverse workforce (33 per cent) and sustainability and corporate social responsibility (32 per cent), among others.

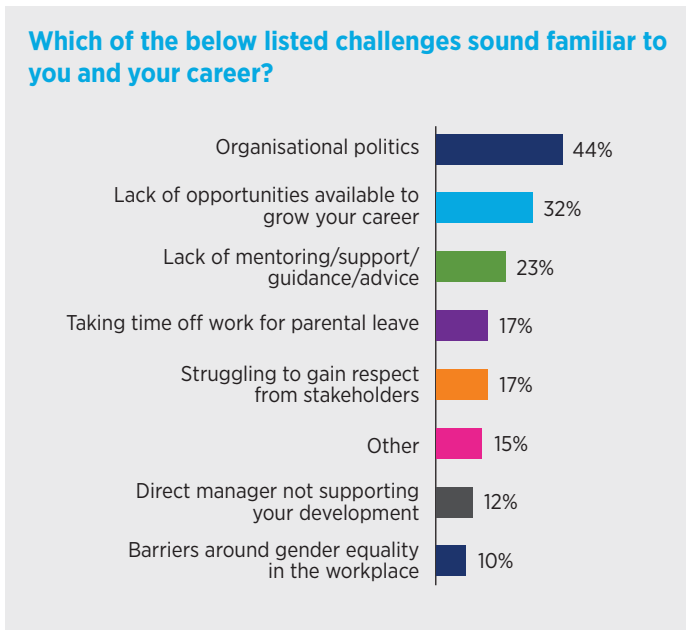
One thing aspiring HRDs can take away from this is that one should be prepared and willing to have a lot of diverse work on your plate and that working as an HRD will never be boring.

Which of the following will become a bigger part of an HRD's role in the next five years?



Career challenges

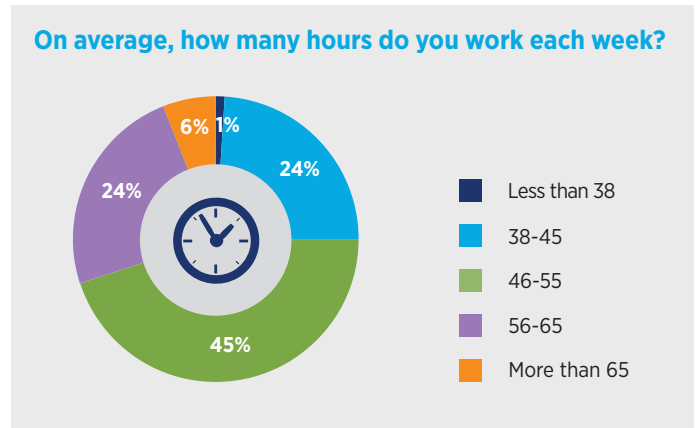
Looking at factors that challenge their careers, a total of 44 per cent indicated that they see organisational politics as a challenge. Besides this, other challenges are a lack of opportunities to grow one's career (32 per cent) and a lack of mentoring, support, guidance and advice (23 per cent).



Besides this, HRDs often don't hold a seat on the Board of Directors. Just a mere 17 per cent hold a seat on their own company's board, and a further nine per cent hold seats on other boards. Although HRDs often lack a seat on the board, young HRDs are increasingly influencing organisational change. Wendy Montgomery has observed the development of the HR field firsthand. "I admire how HR has evolved into the function it is today. It's seen as a real profession with specific HR qualifications providing candidates with a concrete foundation to their HR career."

Another challenge that sounded familiar to 17 per cent of our respondents was taking time off work for parental leave. Part of being an HRD requires hard work and putting in significant hours. 75 per cent of HRDs work a minimum of 46 hours per week, while 30 per cent work more than 55 hours per week on average. Wendy Montgomery has to communicate with offices within different time zones, which poses a challenge: "This means many late night calls and achieving a lot of your goals and objectives outside of traditional office hours. I try to maintain a flexible approach to my workday that allows me to take time out and meet the needs of my family."

Ai Miyakawa agrees that this is a challenge. "While a work-life balance may not be achievable every day of the week, HRDs should look to work reduced hours one week after working long hours the previous."



HRD PROFILE



Ai Miyakawa

Head of Human Resources
Cisco Systems G.K.,
Japan

“Becoming Head of HR is a passing point and not a career goal. What’s important is how you grow into that role and what you do with the opportunity you get through that exposure.”

The best career advice Ai Miyakawa ever received was to take risks and never fear. As Head of HR of Cisco Systems G.K, the Japanese arm of the largest networking company in the world, Ai is proof of what can be achieved with that fearless approach.

“I think I’m probably one of the youngest heads of HR in Japan in a mature company,” she says. “If there is an opportunity, I would say definitely take it. You may make mistakes as I do, but you get the opportunity to learn and grow from the experience which is the most important thing.”

Grabbing opportunities with both hands and building on the potential recognised in her by her superiors, Ai is leading the way for fellow young female executives to follow.

Young and experienced

A 14-year career in HR might be relatively short compared to other heads of HR, but Ai’s varied experience has given her a platform to progress in her career. “In my career, I have been exposed to some very difficult situations and have learnt to deal with conflicts and difficult questions.”

As Head of HR, you need to be prepared for these kinds of scenarios, which Ai says are the best part of the role. “Becoming Head of HR is a passing point and not a career goal. What’s important is how you grow into that role and what you do with the opportunity you get through that exposure,” she says. “The challenges you encounter will help you develop and hopefully lead you to further career progression.”

HR has been a passion for Ai since her college days. After studying psychology at university, she found her interest lay not with the clinical aspects of the field but in organisational areas.

She began her career in HR operations and payroll before

moving into compensation and benefits. “I really enjoyed compensation and benefits and that’s partly where my heart is still, but if I look at my long-term career, I thought, at some point, I need to switch my career to that of an HR business partner.”

Ai was originally HR Business Partner at Cisco nearly three years before becoming the Head of HR in July 2016.

Setting direction

After working in the IT industry for quite a while, Ai recognises its unique characteristics. “Change is happening all the time. Where we are doing well this year might not be successful next year so we have to keep adapting.” She believes this skill is critical in the next generation of HR professionals. She feels that rather than being a control or management function, HR needs to be a business partner in guiding the company and holding a place on the board.

Ai is involved extensively in changing the mindsets of employees who know they need change, but don’t know how they will adapt or react to it. “Support might be in the form of a training programme or a message from a leader, but HR needs to be in the front seat driving change, so knowing the business is critical.”

Building relationships

Aspiring HR professionals also need the ability to build relationships, whether it’s with the business, managers or staff. “As an HR function, we have to make a lot of hard decisions but that doesn’t mean that we disconnect emotionally. We need to care about the employees and at the same time care about the overall company success, so balancing that and treating people with dignity is a really important quality for a Head of HR.” For Ai, this means listening to people, quickly understanding situations, and communicating effectively.

While HR acumen and functional skills are valuable attributes, she admits there is no single path to becoming a Head of HR. “Ultimately, you need to understand how HR functions work and be open to different ways of thinking, but what is most critical is the mindset that you are not just HR but a business leader. Therefore, understanding the business challenges, how a business leader thinks, and bridging the gap will truly add value. By doing that, you will give additional insights to business leaders for them to be truly successful.”

Similarly, moving across different industries might well be useful to becoming a better HR professional as it brings exposure to a variety of challenges. In the IT industry, you can boost your agility and adaptability. The pharmaceutical industry provides opportunities for you to develop other skills due to the likelihood of mergers and acquisitions, which occur regularly.

Keep a close eye on the market

Always keen to develop her skills, Ai is building a network as she settles into her new role. She also keeps a close eye on market updates and HR issues. “The market is changing all the time. Any hot topics should be on your radar.”

Being on call both day and night is a common occurrence for heads of HR, which makes it difficult for Ai to maintain a work-life balance. “There are certain requirements that come with the job, especially when you are dealing with your President or the C-suite,” she admits. Ai has a tendency to check emails on her smartphone throughout the evening, which highlights the difficulties in switching off.

While a work-life balance may not be achievable every day of the week, she believes you should look to work reduced hours one

week after working long hours the previous whenever possible. You shouldn’t make a habit of working long hours all the time.

Network

For Ai, experience has shown career progression is aided by building a good relationship with your managers. “It’s important that you do well in your current role in order for your next role to open up. Every time I moved role or changed company, it was always through somebody I knew really well through work,” she says. “Somebody out there was looking at the work that I did previously and thought that I would do well in the new role.”

With Ai’s heart set on assuming a regional role in the future, she still seeks to impress each day in the workplace. “I think building relationships and doing well in whatever you are doing today will build your tomorrow,” she says.

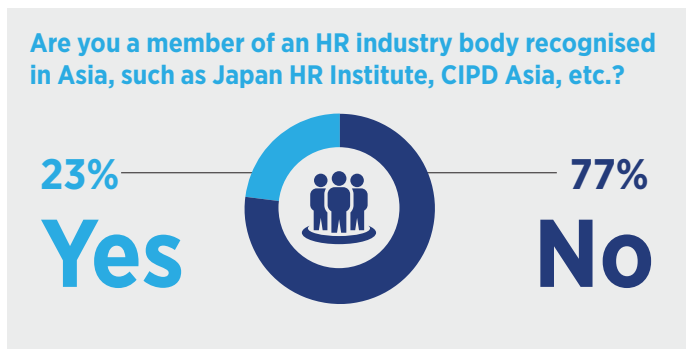
BUILD A NETWORK AND KEEP UP-TO-DATE WITH INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENTS

After building a solid background and obtaining the relevant qualifications, it is crucial to keep developing your career if one aspires to become an HRD. According to our survey, it is important to build a network and keep up-to-date with the latest industry and legislative developments.

HRDs surveyed have taken different steps to develop their careers up to the point where they are now. Based on career development steps taken by HRDs in the past two years, it is important to:

- Attend networking events
- Keep up-to-date with the latest industry and legislative developments
- Outperform your targets
- Undertake training to understand functions outside of HR

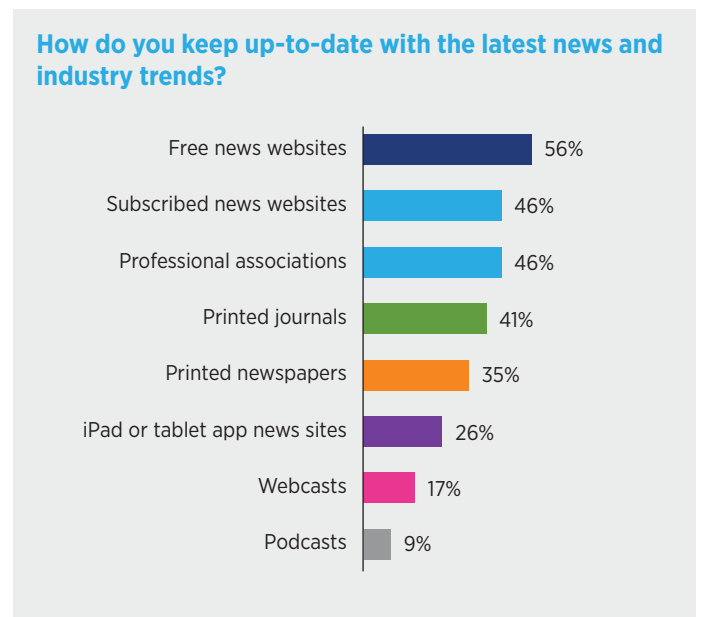
Attending networking events is the number one career development step taken by HRDs (56 per cent). Ricky Long of Colliers International in Hong Kong agrees. "I use social media sites such as LinkedIn and attend networking events. Every Christmas, I take the opportunity to send greetings to most of the people in my network as a way of keeping in touch. Over the years, I have close relationships with mentors where when I ask for an opinion, their reply is almost instant. This is something I greatly appreciate and I also freely offer my help and career advice to others."



Mostly, HRDs get in touch with other HRDs at external events; either at networking events (73 per cent) or industry or technical events (57 per cent). Another common way to get in touch with peers is through social media (41 per cent). Only four per cent of respondents indicated that they don't network with other HRDs.

By far the most important social media platform used by HRDs is LinkedIn, which is used by 88 per cent of respondents. Other popular platforms are Facebook (47 per cent) and WeChat (40 per cent). However, these figures represent the fact that Facebook is banned in mainland China and WeChat is the most popular social media platform. When looking at mainland China only, 91 per cent of HRDs are active on WeChat. Looking across Asia, 65 per cent of HRDs use Facebook as a way to stay in touch.

Second on the list of career development steps taken by HRDs is keeping up-to-date with the latest industry and legislative changes (49 per cent). To do so, HRDs use a variety of resources as shown in the chart below:



HRD PROFILE



Shahzad Umar
Human Resources
Executive Director
Nestlé Malaysia
Singapore

“I enjoy seeing people achieve on a personal and professional level. For me, witnessing the change and progression is the most fulfilling part.”

From engineering to HR

Shahzad doesn't hold any qualifications related to HR. In fact, he holds an engineering degree and started his career at Nestlé as a trainee engineer in 2001, and it is at Nestlé where he has spent his entire career. When asked about whether he would recommend taking a similar career path, he remarks that he doesn't recommend the practice of 'job hopping'. However, movement across job families surely supports in broadening one's horizons and gaining a better understanding of the value chain.

Very early on in his engineering trainee program, he accepted his first HR related position where he assumed the role of a Technical Trainer for a factory. After completing his first year in the company, he was transferred to another location and was tasked with the objective of setting the HR function for this factory. Not many people will consider making a switch from engineering to HR, but Shahzad enjoys what he is doing. "I especially enjoy seeing people achieve on a personal and professional level. For me, witnessing the change and progression is the most fulfilling part."

Shahzad mentioned that understanding the business is important. However, at the same time it's equally important to know the context within which the business operates and the dynamics of an organization, as these factors play a significant role in determining the HR strategies of the organization.

Pakistan and Thailand

After two years as HR Manager of a factory, Shahzad moved over to the Corporate Office of Nestlé Pakistan and headed the Recruitment & Organizational Development team. Then in 2008 he was sent on a one year mission to Thailand as Compensation & Benefits Manager

for Nestlé Indo-China, covering five countries: Thailand, Vietnam, Myanmar, Cambodia and Laos.

In 2009, Shahzad was transferred to Malaysia and took charge of the Organisational Development and Training & Learning Department for Nestlé Malaysia & Singapore. He stayed in this role for three and half years. In late 2012, he returned to Pakistan, where he was appointed HR Head for Pakistan and Afghanistan and stayed there for another few years.

Reflecting on his overseas assignments, he believes that these experiences outside of his home country, Pakistan, have been extremely beneficial for his career. "Working abroad helps with self-reflection, obtaining experience in a wide variety of scenarios and nurturing your own skills. My role in Thailand in compensations & benefits was actually a step down with regards to my job grade and total package but, as I needed the experience in the C&B domain, it was a very meaningful exposure for me."

After three and half years into his role in Pakistan, Shahzad received a call from his manager asking him to come back to Malaysia and become HR Director for Nestlé, an offer which he duly accepted.

Understand inner workings

Shahzad wouldn't necessarily advise aspiring HRDs to follow a similar path or build up their skills in a similar way. "There is no definite way to reach HRD, as there are so many different paths to achieve your goals."

One of the more difficult tasks for an HRD is to balance the interests of the C-suite and board with those of employees. In order to do this, he believes that it is very important to be an insights advocate. "You must learn the skills to effectively convey the messages of what the organisation is thinking and how you can communicate those thoughts to the employees.

You have to know how to gain consensus from both parties."

Understanding the inner workings of running a business is essential in this, and he believes that for any HRD this is the most important thing one has to understand. He is wary of the situation that most line managers would consult Google for people issues rather than talking to HR managers, because they think HR is not practical enough and doesn't understand fundamental issues. By having a thorough understanding of the inner workings of running a business and an organization, an HR professional can instil confidence.

Be observant

While most HRDs enjoy networking, Shahzad hasn't done much of it in his career. He believes in different ways of reaching your goals. "Aspiring HRDs must think of employability from the sense they are marketable. They must have the willingness to learn, be it from observations or from books or by meeting people."

He believes in different ways to build up the necessary skills and experience that would make you a suitable candidate for HRD. "The way I built up my profile and the necessary skills needed was by gaining those critical experiences that any organization would value for sure in an HRD."

He believes that any HRD must have good communication skills, while also being able to know how to inspire the organisation. He adds that any HRD also needs to know how to convince their peers and what's more, they have to be observant and have the ability to self-reflect.

Advice for aspiring HRDs

Working as an HRD means putting in long hours. Shahzad doesn't believe in having a work-life balance; instead, he believes in a 'work-life blend' and "everyone

has his/her own blend". "Time has to be utilised according to your personal needs."

He also shares some insights others once have given him. "A piece of advice that I have been given during my career is that 'done is better than perfect'. I feel that continuous improvement is an important mindset to have and one should always look for opportunities to improve themselves."

As a final word of advice to people starting off in HR, he wants to share that "you should really know yourself". "All experiences are individual in nature. Any aspiring HRD or for that matter any person in general should focus on being the best at what they do and the opportunities to grow and progress will come."

MAINTAIN A WORK-LIFE BALANCE

HRDs work long hours. 46 to 55 hour work weeks are the norm, and one is more likely to work more than less that amount. Despite this, most HRDs are happy with where they are and would choose to become an HRD again if they had to start their career again.

“One of the best things about being an HRD is the ability to shape people’s careers. For my own personal career, the best thing about being an HRD is the ability to create my own destiny,” says Xiaoguang Sun.

When putting in this many hours and holding this many responsibilities, it is important to keep a good work-life balance. HRDs in Asia tend to be very active once they leave the office. In their spare time, they like to spend their time socialising with friends and family (73 per cent). “It is just a small price to pay to hold such an important role in a multinational organisation. Despite the working hours, it means that I cherish each and every moment I get to spend with my family,” says Xiaoguang Sun of Alibaba Entertainment Group.

Another popular activity HRDs like to do in their spare time is playing sports (59 per cent), while 48 per cent of our respondents are also big fans of traveling around the world. Less common choices are attending cultural events such as theatres (22 per cent), taking adult learning classes (15 per cent) and singing, acting or public speaking (eight per cent).



Ai Miyakawa has been exposed to difficult situations and has learnt to deal with conflicts and very difficult questions. “As a Head of HR, these scenarios are likely to increase, which to me is the best part of the role. Becoming a Head of HR is a passing point and not a career goal. What’s important is how you grow into that role and what you do with the opportunity you get through that exposure,” she says.

According to Ricky Long, “the best thing about being an HRD is that you get to experience the ins-and-outs of an organisation. It is a very dynamic role and you are often making recommendations that influence the entire organisation and its people.”

Favourite leader

As a final question, all HRDs were asked who their favourite leader was. While respondents draw inspiration from a variety of figures, these are the leaders who have made the biggest impression on HRDs. Are you aspiring of becoming an HRD? Consider what makes these people so special and learn from them.

Steve Jobs
Apple 

Richard Branson
Virgin Group 

Jack Ma
Alibaba 

Jack Welch
GE 

Bill Gates
Microsoft 

Tony Fernandez
AirAsia 

HRD PROFILE



Wendy Montgomery

Head of HR Asia Pacific
Red Hat,
Singapore

“It’s not enough to just be a specialist in HR. HR associates must know how each of the different departments supports the business whether it’s finance, product or marketing. Knowing this will enable you to be a competent and strategic HR business partner that the profession calls for us to be.”

Wendy Montgomery has been told that she is not your typical HRD. When asked whether she would choose to become an HRD again if she had the option, she is undecided as her career progression within HR wasn’t planned.

She obtained her postgraduate diploma in HR at a time when there were no specific HR qualifications on offer. If anyone wanted to work in HR during that period, they would generally obtain a qualification in business administration.

“I admire how HR has evolved into the function it is today. It’s seen as a real profession with specific HR qualifications providing candidates with a concrete foundation to their HR career. To be a great HR professional, you need to understand the business you support. It’s not enough to just be a specialist in HR. HR associates must know how each of the different departments supports the business whether it’s finance, product, or marketing. Knowing this will enable you to be a competent and strategic HR business partner that the profession calls for us to be.”

Career path

Wendy started her HR career in the British Army, being stationed with the Gibraltar Regiment. After working delivering National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) in Germany as a Trainer, she moved to the UK to work for Hays IT (SAP division), where she recruited SAP consultants for the Big 6 in the IT space. In 1999, she moved to Singapore to become a Recruitment Manager, South Asia for Siebel. This lasted only for three weeks, as her boss at the time asked if she could take on the additional role of HR Manager, South Asia, and this is where she embarked on the path to becoming an HRD.

Since working for Siebel, she has worked in Singapore for

International SOS, ESPN STAR Sports and Vistaprint before joining her current employer Red Hat, where she is Head of HR, Asia Pacific.

Having worked in four different countries and on two different continents, she believes this international experience is invaluable. “Working in Europe has given me valuable experience in learning about different labour laws and employment legislation. I would recommend anyone to live in a different region as it provides diversity of thought and gives you exposure to different cultures.”

In her current position, she has to communicate with offices all around the world, which poses a challenge to her work-life balance. “At the start of the day in Singapore, the US will still be online while at the end of the day Europe is waking up. The more senior you become, the more you have to work across time zones. This means many late night calls and achieving a lot of your goals and objectives outside of traditional office hours. I try to maintain a flexible approach to my workday that allows me to take time out and meet the needs of my family.”

Be hungry to learn

Wendy has worked across several industries such as media, medical services and software. She believes there are both advantages and disadvantages to remaining in the same industry. “One obvious advantage is that you are able to gain a deep understanding of that particular industry and grow a strong network. The disadvantage is that you are unable to develop diversity of thought that can help you make better decisions.”

Furthermore, she feels that it is absolutely necessary to understand the inner workings of running a business. “You will have no idea how to advise the business if you don’t understand its challenges, market or financial model.”

When asked how she built up the necessary skills to succeed as an HRD, she says that she has benefited from her roles in fast-paced and dynamic organisations that were ready to transform. “In particular, I have enjoyed several transformational roles when the business was ready to move from a tactical and operational focus to a more strategic and business partnering function. I was able to drive change, implement new systems, redesign HR functions and educate the business on how HR can be a partner, rather than being directed.”

Working in a more dynamic and fast-paced environment provides opportunities to learn more and faster and Wendy would advise aspiring HRDs to avoid falling into a trap of ‘coasting’ along at a slower pace, which curbs one’s potential for development and growth within an organisation.

Furthermore, she says that she has always been hungry to learn and has always had a passion to make positive contributions to the organisations she has worked for. If she is not able to contribute or view results, she would not be satisfied – no matter how much she is paid.

Manage interests of all stakeholders

Wendy succeeded as an HRD by having determination and an ability to influence. She has been challenged frequently by her CEO and, without having confidence in what she was trying to communicate, she would have doubted whether or not she made the right decisions – which is always what she aims for.

“I have always been mindful of setting expectations and ensuring that I am able to deliver what I said I would. Not delivering successful outcomes would, in my opinion, result in lost credibility and damage to my personal brand.”

She stresses it is also important to take an approach that balances the interests of both individuals and organisations. “It’s important to maintain a neutral viewpoint and establish what is fair and respectful to both sides.”

Final words of advice

The best advice given to Wendy was not to jump too fast when it came to making decisions. “It’s better to think it through and not force a solution.” This is a piece of advice she still follows.

Wendy would encourage anyone to keep up-to-date with technology and build themselves an effective network of contacts. “Throughout my career, I have been offered roles as a result of recommendations from my network. I recall an example recently when I used my network to connect with a consultant who works at KPMG. The outcome from the meeting was that both of us made plans to build a community with like-minded professionals.”

She continues, “Keep up-to-date with technology and what new trends or products are being launched. It also pays to get a mentor so you can learn from their knowledge and insights and what has made them successful. You should also get yourself out there – volunteer to speak at events; you can start small to gain confidence. It’s important to network and meet other like-minded HR professionals so that you can learn what they are doing in their organisations.”

“I would advise you to think of yourself as a business person who is an HR professional. You should be able to create a vision and get your colleagues to buy into that vision. If at times you can’t make your own decisions, do not be afraid to seek input and feedback from others to help make better informed decisions or drive better outcomes.”

OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS



HRDs come from different backgrounds

Getting a degree is important. However, early career choices do not appear to influence your chances of becoming an HRD. Only a small percentage of our respondents studied HR for their first degree. Many others followed relatively unrelated studies as economics, languages or law. Furthermore, our survey indicates that more than half of HRDs worked in different fields during their career. Don't be discouraged if you are considering a late career switch, opportunities will still come to you.



Build a network and keep up-to-date with industry developments

Just like in any profession, if you are in HR, you need to constantly develop yourself in order to reach senior positions. The most important career development step taken by HRDs is networking. Many of our respondents indicated that they were able to reach senior positions due to their connections and and greatly value the networks they've built. Secondly, as the HR environment is constantly changing, it is important to keep up-to-date with all changes at all times. Only by doing so, will you be able to succeed as an HRD.



Develop a broad base of skills

Being an HRD implies being busy with many different subjects. You will face a wide array of challenges, such as balancing the interests of the organisation with employees, challenging economic environments and organisational politics. In order to deal with all of those appropriately, you need to build up the relevant skills. You need to be able to plan strategically, influence stakeholders, communicate effectively and be proactive, adaptive, goal focused and ethical. Furthermore, you need to have commercial awareness.



Be versatile and manage industry challenges

Some key personality traits an HRD should have is the ability to be adaptive and versatile. Not only are there many difficult tasks that an HRD faces, they change over time as well. In the coming five years, expect to see identifying and retaining key talent and designing and managing organisational changes as a bigger part of an HRD's role. Furthermore, our respondents expect to see a greater need for commercial awareness and an increased focus on returns on HR projects, while HRDs also need to be more innovative. For any aspiring HRD, it is essential to stay on top of these changes.



Maintain a work-life balance

HRDs work long hours. Most HRDs work between 46 to 55 hours per week, but a large proportion of our respondents put in more than that on average. These long working hours are not a burden to the vast majority of our respondents as they are following their passion and enjoying the job. Despite this, it is important for successful HRDs to balance their many professional obligations with a vibrant social life. Spending time with family and friends, staying active and playing sports and attending cultural events are some of the activities HRDs like to engage in outside of the office.

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