

TRANSCONTINENTAL MEDIA – Evolving Towards An HR Business Partner

For most growing organizations, there comes a point in time when the Human Resources (HR) function must transition from transactional fire fighters to proactive business partners. While this type of transition is a common one, it is none-the-less difficult. Henry David Thoreau once said, “things do not change; we change.” The challenge for organizations lies in supporting transformation at the individual level so that it becomes evident at the organizational level. However, many organizations struggle to successfully make this transition. Let’s take a closer look at how one organization along with an external organizational development consultant made it work.

A GROWING ORGANIZATION

Transcontinental is a printing and publishing business headquartered in Montreal, Quebec, Canada. It is comprised of two printing sectors and one publishing sector (Transcontinental Media). Transcontinental Media is Canada’s leading publisher of consumer magazines and the second largest publisher of local and regional newspapers. Its foundation was established in 1979 through the acquisition of one weekly business newspaper and one magazine. A steady stream of acquisitions throughout Canada over the last two decades has made it the fourth largest print media group in Canada with annual sales topping the \$500 million mark. Between 1996 and 2003 Transcontinental Media grew from 250 to 2800 employees.

As a result of growth through acquisitions, the organization was made up of a number of independent units throughout Canada. Most acquired businesses

retained much of their local policies, infrastructure, cultures and programs. The organization’s HR professionals tended to work in silos, were privy to little business information and were focused mainly on local administrative issues related to recruitment, compensation and employee relations in their respective geographic areas. As a result of two major acquisitions in 2000 and 2002, the development of a “one company” HR philosophy became apparent. An internal HR audit, conducted by members of the HR team in early 2003, confirmed the need to better align the HR function and coordinate activities and standardize processes in order to support the organization’s growth objectives.

For Katya Laviolette, who was hired in May 2003 as Vice-President, Human Resources at Transcontinental Media, two things became apparent in her first months of leadership. First, the organization had grown too large to maintain a

fragmented approach to HR. In order to continue growing, acquiring and successfully integrating, the culture needed to shift from that of a collection of small businesses to a unified publishing company. Second, the future of the business would depend on superior human capital. Transcontinental Media’s HR organization would need to become a world-class partner to the business in order to attract, develop and support talent. This would mean expanding and growing the responsibilities of the HR professionals from a focus on the technical aspects of HR (recruitment, compensation and employee relations) to include the more strategic aspects of HR (change management, communications, organizational and leadership development). The HR organization decided to use the following model by David Ulrich as a framework to explain the vision of HR and make explicit the changes required in the role of HR professionals in supporting and achieving the organization’s vision and objectives.



MODEL FOR CHANGE

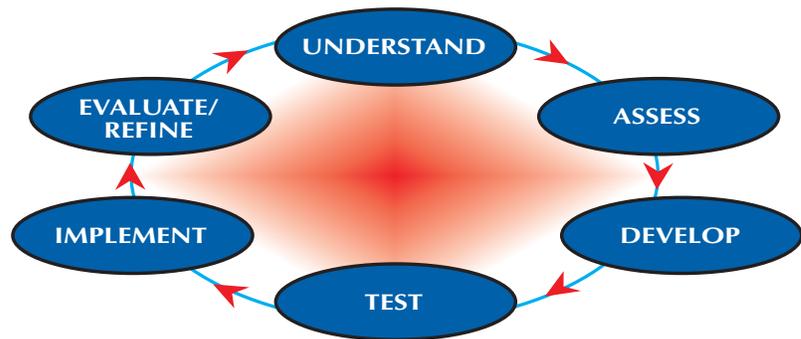
To aid in this transition Lavolette, engaged Beverley Patwell of Patwell Consulting Inc., an organization development consultant, to help develop their change strategy. Together, and in conjunction with the HR team, they developed a collaborative change process which built on the current strengths and values of the organization. This model and its transition and implementation process enabled the organization to begin developing competencies that would make it self-sustaining as opposed to being dependent on external consultancy.

In order to achieve their objectives each level of the organization that was directly or indirectly impacted by the changes, was consulted and or involved in the

change process. For Transcontinental Media this meant that the all three levels of organization were active players and participants in various parts of the change process (Corporate, Sector and National HR Team). Collaboration was the key to the success of this project.

The development process consisted of six

basic phases: Understand, Assess, Develop, Test, Implement and Evaluate/Refine. As we will see, this process was used within 2 phases: **Phase 1:** Understanding and Strategy Development and **Phase 2:** Execution. Each cycle identified and addressed learning opportunities in the areas of the individual, team, structure, culture and organization.



PHASE 1

UNDERSTANDING & STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT

Below is a summary of the activities undertaken and the results achieved in each phase of the cycle during the first rotation.

UNDERSTAND

- Completed a review of an HR Audit earlier in the year.
- Katya Lavolette (VP HR) held individual meetings with the National HR Team, Corporate HR, and local business leaders from every level of the organization to build relationships, understand the business as well as the HR challenges/objectives.
- Beverley Patwell (external consultant) held individual meetings with Katya Lavolette, key members of the National HR Team and business leaders to gather data on their strengths, business challenges, cultural dynamics and opportunities for growth.

ASSESS

- Analyzed data gathered in the “Understand” phase.
- Identified the HR organization’s primary opportunities for growth in order to become a more unified team of HR professionals and to expand the role of the HR professional to include competencies in the areas of strategic thinking and change management (Ulrich Model).

DEVELOP

- Articulated vision of the future (Ulrich Model) and gained buy-in with business leaders at both corporate and sector levels.
- Developed and implemented the first HR National Team meeting with the following results:
 - Helped the group get to know Katya Lavolette, their new leader;
 - Created a common understanding of business challenges/opportunities driving the need for change;
 - Created a shared vision of the future;
 - Built relational ties across geographical boundaries by involving entire team;
 - Created the first HR Operating Plan linked to business strategy.

TEST

- Reviewed the National HR Team's draft of the joint HR Operating Plan with corporate and business leaders and made appropriate modifications.

IMPLEMENT

- Implemented, monitored and evaluated the progress of the HR Operating Plan. Corresponding individual action plans were executed over an 8 month period.

REFINE & EVALUATE

- Recognized, rewarded and celebrated new behaviors and achievements of operational objectives.
- Performed periodic reviews of individual action plans and group successes against goals established and identified in the HR Operating Plan.
- Conducted a post-offsite survey to define and prioritize individual skill development needs for HR team members.

PHASE 2

EXECUTION

Below is a summary of the activities undertaken and results achieved in each phase of the cycle during the second rotation.

UNDERSTAND

- Reviewed the assessment of the first HR National Team Meeting & the groups' expressed interest in developing their competencies in the areas of coaching, influencing and consulting.
- Held individual meetings with functional experts within the HR team, in addition to HR managers, local business leaders and corporate leaders to understand the impact of the first change cycle as well as and learning opportunities.

ASSESS

- Synthesized data gathered in "Understand Phase" to set priorities for the second HR National Team Meeting to address the following: developing individual strengths and areas for improvement and re-articulating shared vision and operational objectives.

DEVELOP

- Developed and implemented a second off-site with the following results:
 - Created fundamental awareness of individual strengths and opportunities for growth particularly in the areas of consulting and influencing skills;
 - Strengthened and displayed individual capabilities by involving HR team members in the design and delivery of the HR National Team Meeting;
 - Further built relational ties across geographical boundaries by involving the entire National HR Team;
 - Created a second HR Operating Plan linked to business strategy.
- Modelled a consulting process for the team by using it to create and implement the offsite.

TEST

- Reviewed the National HR Team's draft of the HR Operating Plan with corporate and business leaders and made appropriate modifications.
- Obtained feedback from HR Leadership Team and other key stakeholders as well as internal clients.

IMPLEMENT

- Worked on HR Operating Plan and corresponding individual action and development plans and implemented the actions over a 12 month period.

REFINE & EVALUATE

- Recognized, rewarded and celebrated new behaviors and achievements.
- Performed periodic reviews of individual action plans and group successes against goals outlined in HR Operating Plan.
- Conducted a post meeting survey that defined and prioritized individual skill development needs for HR team members.

RESULTS/INTEGRATION

The process described above has helped the organization establish a shared vision for the role of HR. This vision is owned by HR professionals across the organization, championed by senior management and understood by all business partners. Professionals at the local levels are now more responsible and accountable for the strategic and change management aspects of HR as well the technical aspects of HR.

Furthermore, each HR professional has developed their own learning plan that incorporates the technical, strategic and change management competencies required for their success. The HR competencies have increased across the board. As a function, HR is being called upon to participate in various strategic initiatives. The HR team is now able to set their own performance measures and assess their results.

Going forward, the National HR Team has established quarterly meetings to review their progress and work on individual development needs. Finally, a regular annual meeting has been established to structure their HR Operating Plan and focus on continued HR Business Partner training and development.

CONCLUSION/KEYS TO SUCCESS

For Laviolette and Patwell, there are a few key lessons they have gleaned from their success in jumpstarting this transformation.

VISION OF THE FUTURE - On reflection, Laviolette and Patwell both agree that defining a clear vision based on good organizational data was critical. However, it wasn't just having the vision that made the intervention successful. Key success factors included:

- Linking the HR vision to the strategic priorities of the business and having senior leaders champion and reinforce the vision.
- Building an HR Operating Plan in collaboration with the National HR Team helped create buy-in and momentum for their work.
- Tracking and measuring results on a regular basis reinforced their progress on a individual, team and organizational level and was highly appreciated by every member of the National HR Team.

PATIENCE & POSITIVISM - The bottom line is that no matter how quickly we need to change; change requires patience, a positive vision, and a concrete plan. Leaders must ensure that small but important and visible signs of change are apparent to the organization – especially early on. Key success factors included:

- Celebrating and recognizing quick wins.
- Providing recognition (group or individual) for successful interventions and achievements of critical milestones.
- Identifying and dealing hands-on with varying levels of resistance.
- Being aware that individuals deal with change in different ways and require varying levels of support.
- Taking the time to develop a customized HR approach, as opposed to replicating an approach from previous experience.

COLLABORATIVE PLANNING & TRANSPARENCY – The change process involved a partnership that was strongly rooted in an organizational culture that valued collaboration. Key success factors included:

- Including everyone in the design and planning process of the interventions (2 HR National Team Meetings, Competency Development, Developing the HR Operating Plan, Developing and monitoring performance measures and individual and team learning/development plans).

NON-DEPENDENCE - Patwell's approach to consulting asserts that in order to affect permanent change within an organization, the system cannot become dependent upon the external consultant. Rather, the consultant is there to model and provide the process for learning and in this case, some of the content early on. Through this process, the organizational system takes on ownership and becomes responsible for its own learning.

CLIENT FOCUS - As with any change initiative, it is imperative that the consultant begin by developing a strong understanding of the cultural, business, technical and individual context in which she/he will be working. Key success factors included:

- Tailoring the intervention to the culture in order to develop the right strategy to ensure sustained change.
- Staying constantly attuned to what the client needs by obtaining sound and current data throughout the life of the project.
- Being aware of your Use of Self and monitoring your own strengths and learning opportunities.

READINGS, TOOLS & REFERENCES

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



KATYA LAVIOLETTE, Vice-President, Human Resources of Transcontinental Media, holds a Bachelor of Commerce from University of Alberta and a Masters in Industrial Relations from Queen's University. She has overall accountability and responsibility for the Human Resources function for Transcontinental Media and acts as a consultant to senior management on human resources, internal communications and organizational development matters that impact the business.

Throughout her career, Katya has been responsible for succession planning, industrial relations, organizational development and the strategic development of human resources. Before joining the Transcontinental Media team in May 2003, she worked in senior human resources positions for Canadian National, Pratt & Whitney Canada and Bombardier Aerospace.

Active in the professional community, she is a member of the Ordre des conseillers en ressources humaines et en relations industrielles agréés du Québec (CIRC/CHRP) and, in 2000, she co-chaired the Governor General's Canadian Leadership Conference for Quebec. Katya was also the recipient of the Cameron-Wood Prize in Industrial Relations and the Queen's University/IRC Press Prize for her article entitled, "A Framework for a Formal Mentoring Program."



BEVERLEY PATWELL, CHRA is President of Patwell Consulting Inc. She is an organizational development practitioner and Executive Coach with over 20 years of experience in developing and implementing organizational development and change management solutions to meet business needs in private and public sector organizations. Before launching Patwell Consulting Inc., she was the Director of the Aerospace Enterprise Resource Planning Change Management Program and Manager of Global Organizational Development at Bombardier Aerospace.

Her clients include Ogilvy Renault, Via Rail, Molson Inc., Transcontinental Media, Province of Ontario Ministry of Public Safety and Security: Correctional Services, City of Ottawa, Cryocath Technologies, Mitel Corporation. Beverley is also a lecturer at the McGill International Institute; Advanced Leadership Program, Irish Institute of Directors Program, and Coaching and Mentoring. She has also taught at Concordia University and currently mentors students in the MA Human Systems Intervention Program.

Beverley is also a member of the Board of Directors for LaPasserelle, a Montreal based not for profit organization that helps people 40 years and older find employment.

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