1. Introduction

EM Forster wrote a fabulous book called 'The Machine Stops'. He wrote it in 1909 about a future world where people sat, alone, in their rooms, communicating with their friends and family and lecturing via their screens to thousands of people around the world. Food, drink and other goods were delivered directly to their rooms. If they did venture out of their underground lairs, they were transported vast distances, by air, around the globe. In 1909. Sounds familiar?

That book has changed how I look at society, work and leadership. You really do need to look back to look forward.

2. Looking back… 1913 to 2013

In the run up to the CIPD's centenary year of 2013, I was reflecting on how much working life had changed since 1913! Many houses didn't have running water, infant mortality was very high and there was little leisure time as people worked very long hours for little pay. If you were in work, you didn't have a state pension or maternity benefits until 1913. If you were unemployed, 1913 was the first year where you would start receiving the benefit.

It was in this climate that the Welfare Workers' Association was created with a membership of 34. In 1939, it became the Institute of Personnel Management and following the merger with the Institute of Training and Development in 1994 and the Royal Charter in 2003, the CIPD now has 135,000 members worldwide.

At the CIPD Council meeting at the end of 2012, CIPD was described as a ‘force for good’. I am sure that CIPD's Chief Executive, Peter Cheese, would concur that our origins from 1913 were focused on being that ‘force for good’ 100 years’ ago. Some, of course, don't agree but more on that later.

I've worked for nearly 30 years in and around the NHS, first in administration and line management in obstetrics and fetal medicine, then as an interim HR practitioner now as an OD consultant, troubleshooter and interim workforce director. 10 years' ago, Dean Royles, then Deputy Director of Workforce at the Department of Health, asked me to research the factors that made a good HR function and those that made a great HR function.

What are the factors which make an HR function Great?

My research, based on Jim Collins' work 'Good to Great' found that a Great HR function needs to do the transactional work excellently whilst also being able to
transform services given the complex agenda in the NHS. From this, I identified three key elements to the **Great HR function**:

- transactional – i.e. day to day, administratively focussed activities
- interventional – i.e. top-down, management led policies, processes and interventions
- transformational – i.e. driving and bringing about change to improve services by working holistically and in partnership

From the interviews I carried out back in 2004, it was clear that a combination of these factors could combine to help an HR function move from ‘good to Great’....

- get the basics not just right, but excellent
- interlink organisational and HR strategy
- provide clear and strong leadership and vision
- generate and lead debate – using others’ language
- diagnose and solve problems
- measure success as a lever for change
- release the potential in staff and managers
- know when to let people go

From this, I then delved into the archives of the Institute of Directors and found a great article giving some top tips on how to be that perfect HR director.

**Top tips on how to be that perfect HR director leading a Great HR function**

- Get to know key players and be an ace influencer
- Know the difference between managing and directing
- Bone up on finance
- Generate and lead debate – use others’ language
- Use boardroom body language
- Be open, accessible and realistic

None of this is rocket science and to be honest, has a lot changed since 2004 in terms of how people see HR, the skills required to do a good job and whether we should have a seat at the Board table or not?

Another piece of research I’m doing with NHS Employers – the national employers organisation for the NHS – led me to this summary of people management and development over the last century. Look at the changes to our professional name/title/moniker.
I remember one of my exam papers for my IPM Stage I asking me to reflect on and debate ‘HRM – old wine in new bottles. Discuss.’ That was in 1991. We could keep going on and on demanding a place at the Board table, changing our titles, labels and our language but I think we’ll just keep sounding whiny, continue to be reactive and be perceived as an administrative burden who polices staff and doesn’t add value to the bottom line.

Let’s look at where we are now and where we want to be.

3. Here and now – 2014

At the CIPD London centenary dinner and inaugural conference at City Hall in September 2013, we reflected on where we’d come from and where do we go next as HR leaders. Wendy Cartwright, ex HR Director of the Olympic Delivery Authority, Anne Gibson, HR Director at Norfolk City Council and Darren Hockaday, HRD at London Overground presented their ‘pearls of HR wisdom’.

‘Pearls of HR wisdom’

They recommended that HR leaders should demonstrate a new style of leadership – not command and control – but one which leads people and culture to drive sustainable performance. How would they do this? By being authentic, values-led, congruent and consistent, engaging and empowering.
They implored HR leaders to listen to their people and not use loads of jargon, not just ‘tell’ but share, engage and connect. They all saw HR as the ‘glue’ – and the heart and soul of the organisation.

However, they also cautioned us by telling us to resist tinkering systems and processes and recommended that we try standing in the shoes of the CEO and really try to get under the skin of what they’re feeling, experiencing and – most importantly, find out what keeps them awake at night. When I do organisational or board reviews, that’s one of my first key questions that I ask my clients. It’s fascinating that a lot of HR functions that I go into as a troubleshooter, OD consultant or interim director, don’t know the answer to that question, or want to ask it!

**High Impact HR Leadership**

In March 2014, I facilitated an event on High Impact HR leadership for the CIPD HR Leaders’ network. Wendy, Darren and I reprised our session from the CIPD Centenary conference where I also spoke about this model that I have used for some years now.

I believe that to be an HR leader with high impact you must truly, madly, deeply enact, build experience in and offer these 3 key areas of competence. Without them, I argue, you can’t have that seat at the Board table, you won’t influence effectively and you will be perceived as a ‘dark bureaucratic force’ (Hammonds, 2005. www.fastcompany.com/53319/why-we-hate-hr)
HR as a function, and its’ leaders, has had a right old bashing in the last couple of years. HR directors have been castigated for not being commercial enough and when they are commercial, they are seen as hard and uncompromising. Ram Charan, management and leadership guru, recommends that the role of Chief People Officer should be eliminated and that the HR function should be split – into administration (HR-A) and leadership and organisation (HR-LO).

He suggests that the former should report to the Chief Finance Officer (who should see compensation and benefits as a talent magnet, not just a major cost) and that the latter should report to the CEO and focus on improving people capability in the business and should be led by high potential talent from the line where ‘one way or another, it will have to gain the business acumen needed to help organisations perform at their best’. (Charan, July 2014. www.hbr.org/2014/07/its-time-to-split-hr)

So, what will HR leadership look like in the next 20 years?

4. **2020 and beyond.**

**The world we live in – in the future**

To start with, let's look at the context in which we live and work.

It has been said that we live in a VUCA world – a world that is volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous.

I have been doing a lot of work recently on the future of society, work and HR as a function – be it looking at almhouses of the 21st century, leadership development in the NHS in London or the strategy for national professional development of HR leaders in the NHS.

I recently carried out some research with the NHS London Leadership Academy on society in 2034, what leadership challenges will we face and what skills, knowledge and behaviour will be needed to deal with these challenges? (Tybura and Archard, 2014. Frame our Future – the future of healthcare leadership in London. London Leadership Academy Reference Group. September 2014)

In summary, the key findings showed that:

- There was a distinctly dystopian view of society and its’ challenges in 2034, with inequality increasing, particularly around income and health and housing being a specific concern in London

- Technology would be a key lever for change – but participants found it difficult to envisage what London would look like in 20 years’ time given the exponential changes that had been happening in the last 20 years

- Increasing ‘virtualisation’ in terms of organisational and health system modelling, management and care giving was a given for most focus groups
• Polarisation of society – be it around economic disadvantage, age, worklessness, politics, was also a given for all focus groups.

• Medical breakthroughs around the genome project, implants and sensors which could potentially allow more personalised care and more self-diagnosis fed into the debate of organisational and role design in the future.

• Patient leadership was also high on the agenda and the need for leaders in the future to move away from command and control to a more distributed leadership model, (interestingly the word compassion only came up three times in the data).

• Leaders will need to be self-aware, flexible and adaptive in their style to be able to lead in a volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) environment, whilst working in a more collaborative way to lead change

• Being an inspirational but also motivational leader, with the ability to influence others outside of their area of direct authority, and managing a dispersed, diverse workforce in many locations were seen by many as some of the significant challenges for leaders of the future

• Politics is seen as an important issue for London, and having leaders who can manage both the smaller interpersonal politics of organisations as well as the big politics of working in the capital is a challenge for future system leaders

• Becoming commercially and financially more savvy, with marketing and negotiating skills and the ability to work with a range of commissioners and providers both beyond and without organisational boundaries were also seen as crucial areas of expertise.

• As we move to a more virtual world with the increasing pace of personal technology, social media and access to big data in 2034, leaders will need development in different skill sets from today.

The recent report from the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills (Research Paper 134, 2013. Hollowing out and the future of the Labour Market) echos our findings of polarisation as it highlights the ‘hollowing out’ of work in the future – an increase in low skill jobs, a massively decreased medium skilled jobs through outsourcing and automation and a higher number of high skills clusters. What will HR leaders need to do, say and influence to deal with this wicked problem in organisational design and talent management?

Lynda Gratton also describes how we are going to live a ‘Hundred year life’ where we will need to work for 80 years, ‘the collaborative imperative’ where virtual collaboration is becoming and will be a way of life and ‘talent innovation’ which focuses on the generational differences between X, Y, Z and the millennials. (Gratton, 2013. www.lyndagrattonfutureofwork.typepad.com (Gratton, 22.10.13. Leading in complex times.)
As Rick says in his blog ‘unless your organisation gets hip to all of this, daddio, the Millennials won’t want to come and work for you! (www.flipchartfairytales.wordpress.com/2014/10/31/2026-and-all-that)

HR leaders of the future

So, what will HR leaders of the future need to have in terms of skills, knowledge and behaviours?

Curiosity

Let’s start with the CIPD Professional map. I know it’s being updated at the moment – which is great, so long as it won’t be ‘old wine in new bottles’. Again. However, there is one competency in it that I always test when I’m selecting HR professionals. Curiosity.

As a profession, I don’t think we’re curious enough. Like Charan’s view earlier, I think that the best HR leaders are those that have worked in the line, in the business, rolled their sleeves up and really, truly understand what it’s like to work on the production line, or out with customers, or on the wards. The curiosity that I displayed as a young line manager was nurtured by my director, but frowned upon by my immediate line manager. Leaders at all levels should be curious and enable their staff to also be curious and develop themselves and their services.

Authenticity

Gratton advocates leaders to be themselves but also to temper this with ‘custodial responsibility’ who can be ‘entrusted with growing and passing on to future generations of employees and shareholders the value that past generations sowed’. This echoes the competency of ‘personal impact’ in my earlier High Impact HR model. She also talks about the need to keep your ‘eyes wide open’ and have ‘no illusions’ about the context and pressures within which organisations operate and aim to succeed. This should support your authenticity and influencing as a leader. (Gratton, 2013. www.lyndagrattonfutureofwork.typepad.com (Gratton, 22.10.13. Leading in complex times.)

Synthesise and provocate

Peter Cheese, at last year’s LSE conference, said that HR professionals of the future will need to be ‘synthesisers’ – who take in information from a variety of sources, interpret it and put it into context and ‘provocateurs’ – who use that information to challenge and start debates. HR leaders need to be comfortable with figures, data and information. They also need to be able to tell a story with it using plain speaking and language that people understand and can see the vision and how to get there.
Article for Croners HR Strategy Briefing

Business acumen

A key component of my High Impact HR model, business acumen – or in other words, really getting under the skin and truly understanding your business – whether it’s about running trains on time, running a hospital/public service or putting on the next Olympic Games, will be crucial for HR leaders in the future. At the CIPD annual conference in 2014, Darren Hockaday from LOROL and Sue Swansborough, HRD at General Mills presented a fascinating session on ‘creating impact and additional revenue through HR’. How do they do that? They are both passionate about their businesses. They didn’t really talk about technical HR – they talked about train performance, measuring commercial performance in terms of P&L and nourishing lives (GM is one of the world’s largest food companies), authenticity in recruitment and retention so that they reduced turnover and brought in fabulous talent and reflected on how to energise your HR team in delivering commercial challenges. That is true business acumen.

Political savvy

The last component of my High Impact HR model is the one that will completely and utterly make or break the perception of an HR leader. My preferred term is ‘positive Machiavellianism’. We all know that organisations – and individuals - have a ‘shadow side’. In the future, HR leaders will need to be exceptionally politically savvy – if you look at the NHS Leadership Academy research above – as organisation design changes, more disparate and remote stakeholders are managed virtually and funding gets even tighter, it will take a certain type of resilient, focused and astute leader to navigate their way through that complex terrain.

Have some serious fun

Last, but not least, I think the HR leader of the future should lead some serious fun.

Gratton (ibid) advocates ‘creating playfulness’ where we need to define work and play and look at where does it start and end.

At the HR Vision conference recently, Roman Rackwitz, founder of Engaginglab compelled delegates to ‘make learning fun again’ by creating a sense of competition in the workplace and as ‘fun can’t be commanded but you can design for it’.

At the last awayday I facilitated with a workforce directorate recently, I suggested to the design team that we should ensure, as one of our key outcomes of the day, that we should all experience and build some serious fun. As I was their new Interim Workforce Director, who they didn’t know very well, they really weren’t sure whether I meant it or not. I did and we had a great awayday.
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Julia is a Fellow of the CIPD, Chair of the SE Thames branch and Lead Facilitator of the CIPD London Branch Chairs' Group – a local branch partnership of 7 London CIPD branches. She sits on the Board of Trustees of a Southwark almshouse charity and mentors a number of senior HR leaders - and management trainees as she sees them as the leaders of the future.

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