

The Ultimate Guide to **Future-Proofing** Your Leadership Team

Morgan Latif is a specialist leadership search and development consultancy serving the Life Sciences and Industrial sectors. Through talent acquisition, we empower our clients to achieve their change management, diversity and transformation goals.

Given the unprecedented challenges facing organisations over the medium to long term, we have compiled this guide to future-proofing leadership teams, comprising five key areas of focus and the practical steps required to achieve each. In this guide, we cover:

1. Effective implementation of leadership coaching
2. Improvements to leadership onboarding
3. The promotion of teams with diverse, complementary skill sets
4. Successful digital leadership strategy
5. The value of having HR leaders at board level



INTRODUCTION

The world is changing at a rapid pace. New technologies like AI and machine learning are radically enhancing or changing a wide range of jobs; in a world of 24/7 connectivity, people are naturally seeking out flexible working to improve their work-life balance; and a desire for greater individual responsibility and less bureaucracy has prompted many organisations to move towards a flatter management structure.

Factor in unprecedented ongoing business challenges, such as the fallout of Brexit and the coronavirus pandemic, and it becomes ever clearer that leadership teams simply must adapt. The leadership profile of tomorrow will be completely different to how it looks today.

Given the speed at which these changes are taking place, organisations that are yet to start future-proofing their leadership teams risk being left behind. With that in mind, Morgan Latif have picked out five key ways in which organisations can future-proof their leadership teams:



Two-thirds enjoy improved work performance, relationships and communication skills.

1. IMPLEMENTING LEADERSHIP COACHING

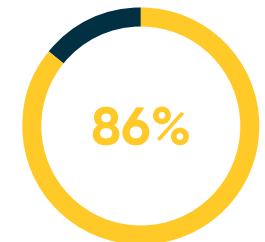
It is important to note that “future-proofing” does not necessarily mean ripping up the rulebook and starting again from square one. Instead, it requires taking whatever actions are needed to cope with and adapt to as-yet-unforeseen developments and innovations. Regarding leadership teams, the steps toward future-proofing will naturally vary from one organisation to another. Some may require radical personnel changes. But the majority will need to:

- Hire new talent in key roles
- Provide support for existing leaders to help them adapt to new structures and systems of working

Much of this support should come in the form of coaching – a practical strategy that helps people achieve self-identified outcomes. The results of coaching can be substantial. Indeed, [research](#) has found that four in five people who receive coaching feel more self-confident, while two-thirds enjoy improved work performance, relationships and communication skills. Furthermore, 86% of companies report that they more than recouped their investment on coaching.

The specific benefits of coaching are wide-ranging, and naturally depend on the agreed objectives of any given coaching relationship. But, as research from ILM has demonstrated, coaching offers a range of factors that are of direct benefit to organisations looking to future-proof their leadership teams, including:

86% of companies report that they more than recouped their investment on coaching.



Improving overall performance:

Ultimately, any individual or organisation investing in coaching expects to see improvements to performance. A study published in the [International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring](#) discovered that the majority of leaders who receive coaching enjoy increased self-awareness, greater confidence – coupled with a decrease in self-limiting beliefs – and improved self-leadership, allowing them to set more effective and realistic personal goals. This can help them to perform at a higher level.

Implementing organisational change:

Identifying the steps needed to future-proof a leadership team is only the start; implementing those changes can be a far greater challenge. But **three-quarters of people agree that coaching helps teams when implementing organisational change**, according to research from ILM

Easing transition to a new role or employer:

Future-proofing a leadership team may necessitate hiring new talent, adapting people's roles to help them cope with new ways of working, and promoting A-players from within an organisation. Each of these situations presents numerous challenges to the individual involved from forming productive new relationships to understanding and navigating internal politics. But nine out of ten leaders surveyed by Morgan Latif agreed that coaches help with the transition into new leadership roles.

Supporting adoption of technology & new systems of working:

Building a leadership team capable of overcoming future business challenges will invariably mean introducing new processes, systems and technological innovations. Again, coaching can be a major help for leaders faced with the prospect of adopting new tech and ways of working.

75%

75% of people agree that coaching helps teams when implementing organisational change



HOW TO DO IT

For leadership coaching to be effective, organisations must identify the right coach. Not only do they need to be an excellent fit for the company, but also for the individual(s) being coached. There are four key elements to consider in finding a coach who will be a great fit:

Chemistry:

Do they gel with the person they will be coaching? Can the two parties communicate effectively? Can they be open and honest with one another?

Background:

Do they understand the industry? Have they coached people in similar roles before? Do they possess skills that the person they are coaching is seeking to attain?

Expertise:

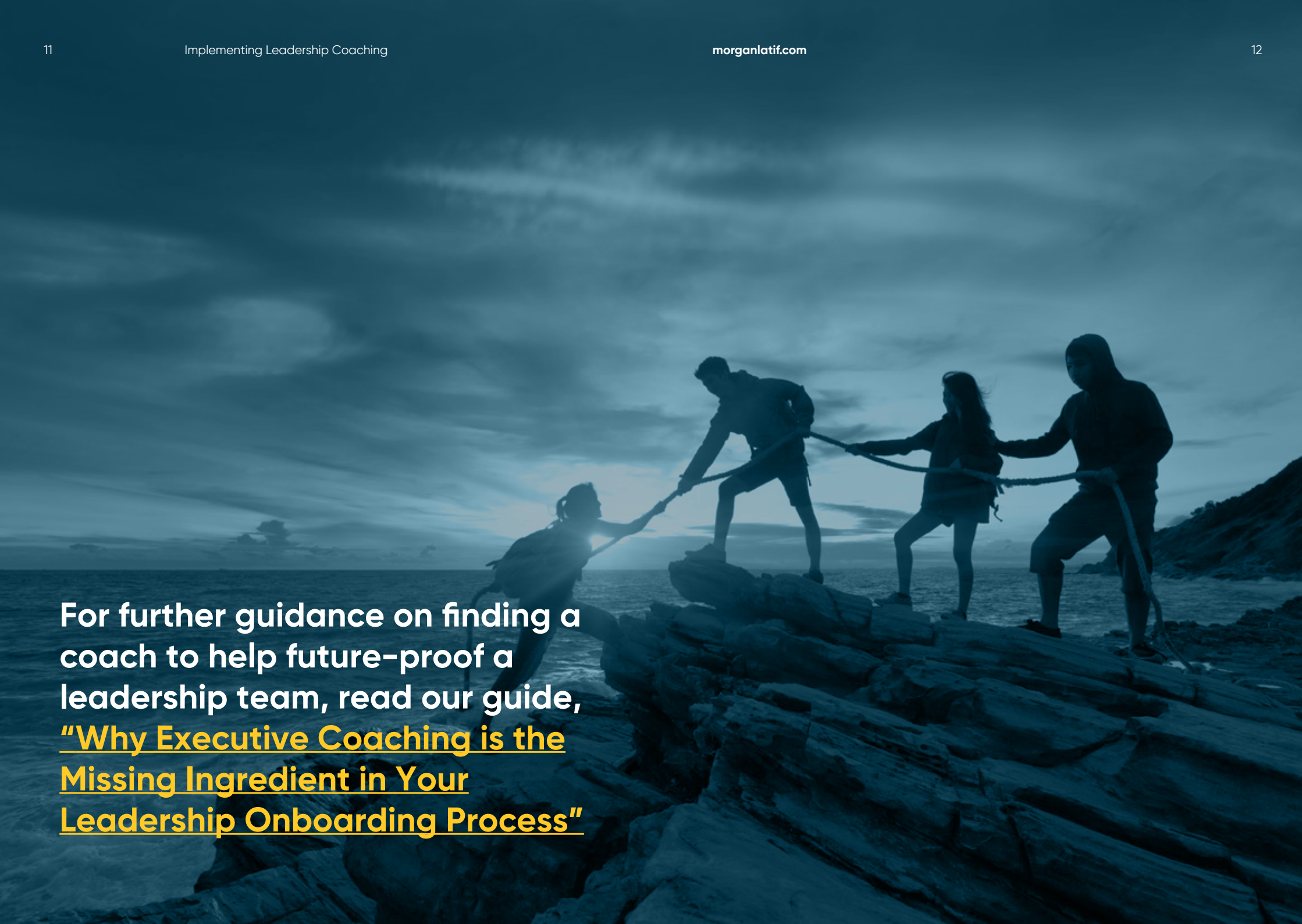
What is their specialty? Do they have specific experience of supporting leaders to navigate and adapt to significant organisational change?

Process:

Can they provide clear detail around how they support leaders to achieve specific objectives?

Listen to our podcast - [Coaching You Through Crisis](#) - with Navid Nazemian, a PCC (ICF) accredited Executive Coach who gives further insight into how to select the right executive coach.





For further guidance on finding a coach to help future-proof a leadership team, read our guide, [**"Why Executive Coaching is the Missing Ingredient in Your Leadership Onboarding Process"**](#)



Real-world costs of replacing people who leave the business – estimated to be up to 213% of annual salary at senior and executive level.

2. IMPROVING YOUR ONBOARDING PROCESS

Even the most experienced leaders will struggle at some point during the first year in a new role. Yet standards of onboarding vary widely from one organisation to another. Organisations that get it wrong can expect to see significantly higher levels of staff turnover, which is a major drain on the business – both financially and in terms of lost knowledge and skills.

The vast majority of large companies are well-equipped to handle the administrative side of onboarding new leaders – but while useful, this practical approach does little to address the challenges that come from adapting to a new organisational culture and building relationships with new colleagues.

Research has shown that nine in ten HR executives believe their organisation effectively introduces new leaders to admin processes. Yet fewer than one in three feel that they succeed in their cultural familiarisation efforts. Furthermore, two-thirds of senior execs who had recently taken up new roles said their understanding of how the organisation works was poor.

Clearly, this has major consequences for companies striving to hire and retain the talent required to future-proof their leadership team. If new leaders feel disconnected from their organisation and unable to make the necessary changes to ingrained systems of work, they are unlikely to remain with the organisation for a long period of time. This is particularly concerning given the substantial real-world costs of replacing people who leave the business – estimated to be up to 213% of annual salary at senior and executive level.



HOW TO DO IT

As outlined in the previous section, coaching can be a highly effective tool for organisations looking to improve their onboarding process. But coaching is just one part of the solution. The following broad steps can help organisations to create an onboarding process that better fits the needs of new leadership hires:

Build a robust plan:

Every leader should start their new role with ideas about what they want to do, from reviews they plan to perform, to processes they plan to implement. But no leader should be responsible for their own onboarding. Before each new leader joins an organisation, a full schedule of key onboarding meetings should be outlined, along with agendas and objectives for each.

Get feedback and iterate:

As with any aspect of future-proofing, developing an effective onboarding process requires an iterative approach. New leaders should be quizzed on their experiences throughout onboarding, helping organisations to identify and implement improvements and efficiencies.

Deep-dive into key topics:

The onboarding process should provide new leaders with a general overview of the many and varied details they need to know about the business. But it also needs to go in-depth on subjects that are pertinent to the leader in question; this could include anything from product development to manufacturing processes.

Prioritise face-to-face sessions:

Leaders need credibility to achieve results – and credibility is best built in person. Prioritise one-to-one sessions rather than group meetings, and ensure they get face time with all fellow leaders and direct reports as soon as possible. At time of writing, organisations worldwide are battling the impact of the coronavirus pandemic, but remote working technologies – Microsoft Teams, Skype, Slack, Zoom, etc. – can keep new leaders in front of their teams and other key stakeholders.



3. PROMOTING DIVERSITY

A future-proof leadership team must be a diverse leadership team.

Diversity has been shown to have a significant impact on business performance.

Research found that companies in the top quartile for racial and ethnic diversity are 35% more likely to generate returns that exceed their industry average, while those in the top quartile for gender diversity are 15% more likely to do the same.

But promoting diversity is about more than just financial performance. Diverse, inclusive teams are better able to think and act "outside the box", which can be crucial to driving substantial change within a leadership setting. As Maria Ferraro, Siemens' Chief Financial Officer of Digital Industries and Chief Diversity Officer, explains:

"Diversity and inclusion are not only nice to have; they are crucial for the success of our businesses. Diverse teams are more successful overall because they ultimately drive more creative and innovative solutions."

What's more, diverse leadership teams are – inevitably – better placed to understand and address the needs of demographically and geographically disparate customer bases. As the world becomes ever-more connected, leaders will need to position their organisations to effectively service wide-ranging markets. As Mattel, the multinational toy manufacturing and entertainment company, puts it:

"We understand that a culture rich in diversity is key to business success. It allows us to better understand the business opportunities in various markets around the world, and develop products that resonate with consumers in diverse cultures."

HOW TO DO IT

Few companies actively seek to build non-diverse teams. More often they simply lack an understanding of how to tap into more diverse talent pools. What's more, unconscious biases – around everything from age and gender to weight and disability – mean that interviewers are often inclined to hire a certain type of person.

Even those who have been trained to reject subjectivity are not immune from unconscious bias. In a landmark [Yale University study](#), male and female scientists were asked to review job applications from identically qualified male and female students; both men and women were more likely to hire the male candidate, while also rating him more competent than his female counterpart. They were even willing to pay the man \$4,000 more than the woman.

While the specific steps required to promote diverse leadership will naturally vary from one organisation to the next, the following general points are widely applicable:



Define diversity:

The word “diversity” is most frequently applied to gender, race and religion, but this only tells part of the story. Other aspects – such as age, disability, personality and sexual orientation – are equally significant, and should not be overlooked.

Set clear success criteria:

When building a talent pipeline, be specific about what a “good” or “great” candidate looks like, and discard irrelevant criteria that may have clouded previous hiring decisions.

Think about the team, not individuals

It is impossible to build a diverse team while only thinking on an individual level. Rather than focusing on individual brilliance, seek out people with complementary skill sets and personalities. Any other approach runs the risk of hiring more of the same type of talent.

Assemble a diverse interview panel:

It becomes far harder for organisations to recruit diverse talent with homogenous interview panels. [Intel](#) saw its diversity numbers improve significantly after requiring that all interview panels include at least two women and/or members of underrepresented communities. Before the measure was introduced, 31.9% of new hires were either women or people of colour. Within two years, this proportion had increased to 45.1%.

Retain diverse talent:

Diversity efforts must not focus simply on the recruitment process; it is vital that equal attention is paid to retaining diverse talent. As well as making the necessary adjustments to onboarding processes and investing in leadership coaching, organisations should ensure that new hires have regular opportunity to vocalise the challenges they are facing and identify solutions.

A woman in a white blouse and dark pants stands in a meeting room, presenting to a group of people seated around a table. She is holding a marker and pointing towards a whiteboard. The whiteboard contains a diagram with a pie chart, a line graph, and various handwritten notes and numbers. The room has large windows in the background.

At Morgan Latif, we help our clients to unlock the business benefits of diverse leadership teams. Need our help? [Let's chat.](#)

4. ADDRESSING DIGITAL LEADERSHIP SUCCESSFULLY

AI, machine learning, big data analytics, blockchain. These are not new innovations, but their impact on companies will grow exponentially over the coming decade as new use cases are identified and barriers to adoption are overcome. Naturally, leadership teams have a key role to play in driving this process forward.

Some of the impacts of digitalisation will vary from industry to industry, whereas others will apply to organisations across all industries. For instance, manufacturers are already adapting to the challenges and opportunities associated with 3D printing, while every business should be taking steps to leverage and benefit from the myriad insights (and opportunities) offered by big data. But for organisations to thrive in an increasingly digital world, they must address and promote digital leadership – that is, build a leadership team capable of delivering digital transformation.

The benefits of strong digital leadership are wide-ranging, but they include:

Boosting productivity:

From project management to collaboration and communication, a host of digital tools aim to increase workplace productivity. Automation eliminates time-consuming, repetitive tasks, freeing up workers to focus on adding genuine value. But without appropriate digital leadership, workforces may find it difficult – or even impossible – to fully leverage these benefits.



Promoting digital culture:

People are naturally resilient to change. Even though digitisation offers major benefits in the medium to long term, the short-term pain of adapting to new tools and systems can be a major source of friction. This friction simply does not exist in organisations with a strong digital culture.

Growing revenue:

Digital leadership can have a major impact on revenue, opening up new revenue streams and business models that allow organisations to reach new customers. It enables legacy businesses to replicate start-up behaviours. For instance, US conglomerate Honeywell took the decision to reduce its industrial end markets from eight to six, with a fresh focus on leveraging digital solutions and using data to inform future strategy. It also introduced new customer-facing technologies, including Internet of Things-based devices and services. Over the following four years, the company's price per share almost doubled, while revenue climbed to a peak of nearly \$43 billion.

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HOW TO DO IT

Digital transformation must begin at leadership level, with senior figures agreeing on a shared vision and being prepared to challenge ingrained behaviours. While the specific steps required to deliver this transformation will vary widely from one organisation to the next, in general they will encompass the following:

Improve digital literacy:

90% of CEOs say that digital business models are disrupting or changing their organisation, yet 70% believe they do not possess the necessary skills, leaders or business structures to adapt. Not all effective digital leaders are digital natives, but at the very least they must be prepared to fully immerse themselves in the digital realm and understand the benefits of new innovations.

Build a clear strategy:

Digital transformation is a substantial undertaking, disrupting existing business models, processes and common practices. As well as identifying the numerous changes that must be made to enable transformation, leaders must have the strategic skills to execute their vision – and they must be prepared to commit the necessary resources to make it happen. Ultimately, the digital transformation must enable the wider organisational strategy. Having a separate "digital strategy" that does not align with company goals is of little value.

Clearly communicate the digital vision:

Digital transformation cannot be confined to the boardroom. For an organisation to achieve its digital vision, leaders must be able to clearly define the project and what it means for people at all stages of the business. Benefits must be quantified, the likely duration must be outlined, and the desired or expected impact must be understood and remembered.

Encourage risk-taking:

Leadership teams that are strongly risk-averse are poorly placed to deliver digital transformation. They must be prepared to make bold decisions, prioritising speed and innovation over deeply ingrained business practices. Or, as Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg puts it:

"The biggest risk is not taking any risk. In a world that is changing really quickly, the only strategy that is guaranteed to fail is not taking risks."



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For further guidance on how to deliver a digital transformation project, read our guide:

["5 Steps to Providing Effective Digital Leadership"](#)

5. ELEVATING THE ROLE OF HR

Two threads connect each of the themes discussed in this guide: talent and culture. HR departments are absolutely integral to both of these factors. They are experts at attracting and hiring top talent, and they know how to define, develop and implement a positive company culture that stands the test of time. A number of companies now have an HR representative at company leadership or management board level, but we would empower them to go a step further by having a former HR executive on the supervisory board or board of directors.

Research shows that less than 3% of directors on Fortune 1000 boards are either current or former senior HR executives. This is starving leadership teams of vital expertise. DJ Schepker, assistant professor of strategic management in the Darla Moore School of Business at the University of South Carolina and research director of the school's Center for Executive Succession, explains:

“Directors with HR expertise bring in the ability to ask questions that others won’t think of, especially about culture. In today’s environment, that’s probably the top issue that boards are focused on.”

It is important to remember that HR leaders are business leaders. Their skill sets allow them to manage crises effectively; drive positive change; and help their organisations secure exceptional talent. It is in the best interests of businesses to effectively leverage these skills by elevating HR leaders to senior decision-making positions.



HOW TO DO IT

Elevating HR leaders is not necessarily a step that can be made immediately. It is not necessarily a matter of strategic planning; it also depends on the availability of suitable HR talent, either within or outside the business. Yet there are many things that HR leaders themselves can do to change the course of their career:

Seek out senior roles in smaller organisations:

While board-level positions may not be available within an HR leader's current organisation, they should seek opportunities to take up more senior roles elsewhere. The experience gained from becoming the CEO of a smaller organisation will prove extremely valuable down the line.

Take advantage of opportunities to upskill:

Professor [Dave Ulrich](#), professor of business at the Ross School of Business, University of Michigan and co-founder of The RBL Group, says that HR leaders are often let down by a lack of understanding of business language, financials, stakeholders, and the wider industry. Upskilling – with a focus on business acumen – can therefore stand HR leaders in good stead for taking on greater authority. There are various routes available for upskilling, from enrolling on an MBA or online programme, to taking part in internal training sessions or working with an executive coach.

Broaden their experience:

Working in new functions gives HR leaders the opportunity to acquire new skills and knowledge beyond the human resources niche. This, in turn, will strengthen their chances of securing a more senior role going forward.

Be more vocal and proactive:

HR professionals are traditionally less vocal when it comes to making business decisions or challenging current strategy. They must be prepared to be proactive and make themselves heard.

Make the right connections:

HR leaders must think more strategically about their professional networks, seeking out the right connections in the right places, and making their case for top-level jobs.



Supervisory board members can take steps to change their hiring strategy to help them unlock the benefits of elevating HR leaders.



Take a deep-dive into this topic by reading our article: ["Why HR Leaders Deserve a Seat On the Board."](#)

Morgan Latif can help you build a future-proofed leadership team

Future-proofing a leadership team is no simple task. It is not just a case of promoting and hiring people with the requisite skills; those people need the vision, expertise and focus to deliver substantial change across the whole organisation. If the business is not able to adapt to new innovations and the practicalities of a changing workforce, the leadership team is not future-proof.

Morgan Latif can help. We represent leaders who are experienced in and passionate about delivering organisational change. Our approach to executive search is centred around building leadership teams that help organisations plan effectively for the future:

We go beyond the professional to the personal, finding life-changing roles for leaders and coaching them through the challenging onboarding period and beyond;

Accuracy and efficiency drive our process; 90% of the leaders we put forward make it to interview;

We help our clients to unlock the business benefits of building diverse leadership teams;

We offer a market-leading warranty, guaranteeing employee tenure and performance for up to 12 months;

We have built a superb talent network, fostered over more than two decades serving the life sciences and industrial industries.

To find out more about how we can support you in building a leadership team capable of navigating challenges and capitalising on opportunities for the next decade and beyond, [get in touch with our team.](#)



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