



## A Five-Year Plan for Change

Continuous improvement cultures can deliver superior results over time, if the improved performance is based on cultural change, which means new norms for how people respond in your workplace. Your plans to change your culture must be extensive and far reaching to allow for sufficient changes to previous ways of working. Change can be quite challenging.

Lean HR applies the same seven lean principles of customer focus, broad participation, continuous improvement, process management, problem solving, visual measurement, and inspired leadership to each aspect of HR programs and practices. The repetition is what creates alignment of messages, which in turn builds enough momentum so that employees are clear about how they need to modify their behavior to new expectations. The process of changing the role of leadership to drive improvement is daunting, and it requires a tremendous amount of dedication to the cause.

The process of HR working as a partner in the organization's overall business strategy can begin with questioning or understanding what a leader is seeking to achieve in the next year (or some other period of time). Then, ask this same leader how he or she would like it if HR could do the following:

- Ensure that the people being hired are best able to achieve those results.
- Develop and conduct training so the leader can develop key behaviors in his or her people, to best achieve those results
- Create accountability systems that the leader can use to work with people to best achieve those results.

- Create recognition systems to best support those results, which the leader(s) will handle but that HR will support.
- Support rewards programs that promote or reward the goals the leader wants to accomplish.
- Create celebrations that promote the behaviors to accomplish these goals.
- Support the measurement systems of the leader(s) to ensure people understand the goals.
- Surface issues that help improve results.
- Understand how the leader is held accountable and is actively supporting these same objectives.

If an HR professional could accomplish all of the above, leaders would consider that person to be an obvious value to them and an integral part of supporting their effort to align the human capital of the organization in a direction that supports the goals. Each HR practice needs to support an overarching goal of the leadership. Once aligned, HR can provide significant momentum, alignment, and support to achieve those goals. Only through a partnership orientation can these efforts truly work.

## **Considerations for a Five-Year Plan**

Lean HR speaks to a wide variety of changes in the human resources area, so it's important to keep in mind that a critical error would be to take on too many changes at once. The timeframe for transforming the HR department is generally a five-year plan. The attached five-year plan should give you an idea of how you can phase in your initial plans, in transitions, to improve how your organization optimizes people, while strengthening the skills of your HR staff members at the same time.

Moreover, the purpose of the five-year plan is not to lay a precise roadmap that you must follow, but to alert you that you need to make a series of choices about which core HR program to put into effect, and in the sequence that will work best for your organization. Your choices involve not only which HR program to institute, but which employee group to address with the changes. The five-year plan<sup>[1]</sup> covers how to make changes for each core HR process against varying factors of employee groups and level of maturity for the improvement efforts.

Some organizations find that beginning with senior management makes the most sense because they can then provide the leadership needed for success. Other organizations find that beginning with non-managers will bring about enough momentum to sustain a change and bring others along later. Still other organizations find that beginning with middle management as leadership for the majority of the people is critical to establishing a new foundation for daily work flows.

The five-year plan is not just a matter of the HR strategy and related timeframes, but it should also take into account the maturity level of the improvement effort. If your improvement effort is in a beginning stage, organizations will often focus on training first and build in accountability and reward systems later. If your improvement effort is mature (i.e., more than 10 years old) you might have a more comprehensive approach that targets more areas in a five-year timeframe to bring the HR systems up to speed with the changes that have already been happening. Again, there is not a generic answer to these issues, but they are factors to consider in laying out your plans.

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