

# Lessons from the World's Top HR Leaders

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By James Martin



Which companies are best in class in HR today? This can be a difficult question to answer. Much of a company's success in HR depends upon the unique needs of the organization. But when we interviewed chief human resource officers (CHROs) from eleven of the world's most admired companies, we discovered key insights that cut across industries. Although the CHROs faced different business challenges, the same themes kept emerging.

Here are six things all of these companies do:

## Consistent and disciplined management attention to the talent pipeline

In every discussion we had, CHROs told us how engaged the CEO and leadership teams were with the talent management agenda. At every one of these organizations, leadership took the talent pipeline seriously and consistently made it a priority. Nestlé's board meets regularly to discuss top talent. BMW and Comcast commit to circulating talent to help enhance individuals' experience and prospects. Goldman Sachs and Ralph Lauren make sure that their business leaders spend time spotting and cultivating talent.

## Listen to colleagues at all levels

Another theme that emerged was paying close attention to the insights of employees at all levels of the organization. One example of this is Bosch. The company allowed younger employees to share their unique skills by implementing reverse mentoring on social media.

## Support innovation

While nearly every company today says they want to innovate, the message to "be more innovative" often competes with rigorous short-term targets and key performance indicators.

HR can play a role in helping to mitigate these competing imperatives. For example, when Bosch wanted to focus on agility and entrepreneurship, HR was able to substantially reduce the number of key performance indicators reported to the Board. By focusing metrics on a few areas, they helped encourage creativity.

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## Provide insight

Many companies are now investing in more sophisticated employee analytics. Integral to this is asking the right questions so that the analysis produces actionable data. At Comcast, a detailed review of unplanned employee absence yielded strategies to recoup almost 1,000 annual job hours back into the system. “HR needs to think about the business impact and analysis of these issues that we haven’t focused on in the past,” Comcast CHRO Bill Strahan said.

## Support development

Businesses and markets are changing quickly. To keep up, development opportunities need to go beyond traditional training. At ABB, leaders can move to different business units as well as different countries. The company has a strong recognition that staying in one place for too long can lead to staleness and the risk of plateauing.

## Changing approaches to performance management and compensation

Managing performance and compensation is also changing. Ralph Lauren has made its performance review process simpler, with less paperwork and more emphasis on meaningful conversations. BMW also has a simple construct around appraisal which focuses on managing a business, managing others and managing yourself.

Interested in more lessons from these top HR leaders? [Read the full paper here.](#)

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