Leading Now, Leading the Future: What Senior HR Leaders Need to Know

Executive Summary
About SHRM

The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) is the world's largest association devoted to human resource management. Representing more than 250,000 members in over 140 countries, the Society serves the needs of HR professionals and advances the interests of the HR profession. Founded in 1948, SHRM has more than 575 affiliated chapters within the United States and subsidiary offices in China and India. Visit SHRM Online at www.shrm.org.

About This Report

In June and August 2008, the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) convened groups of HR practitioners, consultants and academics with subject matter expertise in a variety of HR functional areas to identify the knowledge, skills, abilities and attributes that are most important for the role of the successful senior HR leader. A qualitative research approach used in this study yielded rich, in-depth responses, resulting in a better understanding of what these KSAs look like at the senior HR leader level. This report summarizes the overall findings about competencies for successful senior HR leaders and presents highlights from the conversations that took place during the study. The top eight identified competencies are discussed in order of overall ranked importance for successful senior HR leaders.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

2 Executive Summary
4 Profile of a Successful Senior HR Leader
5 Leading Now: Knowledge, skills, abilities and other qualities senior HR leaders need to have to be successful
15 Leading Globally: Additional competencies needed by successful senior HR leaders in global organizations
19 Leading the Future: Emerging competencies needed by successful senior HR leaders in five years
23 Conclusions
25 Appendix
25 Methodology
27 Endnotes
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Competencies have been defined as “the knowledge, skills and abilities required to perform a specific task or function.” In addition to the transactions and tasks associated with the various functional areas in HR, there are other leadership knowledge, skills and abilities that senior HR practitioners must demonstrate in order to successfully perform their roles. These may range from soft skills such as collaboration and resilience to more strategic skills and abilities such as forecasting and seeing the big picture. Achieving competency in these areas is essential for the individual’s professional progression, particularly the development of competencies associated with leadership roles.

Research into competencies needed for the human resource profession has resulted in the creation of a few general HR competency models, including the Human Resource Competency Study (HRCS) developed by Dave Ulrich, Wayne Brockbank et al, the U.S. government Office of Personnel Management’s “Human Resources Competency Model” and various competency studies released by academic researchers (e.g., Tett et al). There are also competency models for specific functional areas of HR, such as the American Society of Training and Development’s training-focused competency model. In addition, a number of research efforts have established competencies for general leadership roles in the business world. However, there is a dearth of competency research specifically focusing on HR leadership and the knowledge, skills and abilities needed by senior-level HR professionals with decision-making authority.

How do HR professionals differ among themselves once they reach the leadership level? What characteristics distinguish them at that level, and which ones further differentiate the most successful senior HR leaders, those who are role models within the profession and whom aspiring senior HR professionals should emulate? These are the questions that SHRM set out to answer.
During the evolution of the study, several themes emerged about the competencies required of a successful senior HR leader:

1. Should leadership competencies include attributes and/or personality traits?
2. Are senior HR leader competencies substantively different from general leadership competencies and/or those required of business leaders in other professions?
3. Do senior HR leaders need to have a depth of HR knowledge?

The eight most important leadership competencies for senior HR professionals reflect knowledge, communication, approach to getting things done and professional reputation.

Top Leadership Competencies for Senior HR Professionals

1. Knowledge: Business, HR and organizational knowledge
2. Strategic thinking and critical/analytical thinking
3. Leading change
4. Effective communication
5. Credibility
6. Results orientation/drive for performance
7. Ethical behavior
8. Persuasiveness/influencing others
PROFILE OF A SUCCESSFUL SENIOR HR LEADER
LEADING NOW
Knowledge, skills, abilities and other qualities senior HR leaders need to have to be successful

1. Knowledge: Business, HR and Organizational Knowledge

According to Lawler et al, business understanding is a key business partner skill for HR. Thus, it is not surprising that business knowledge—an understanding of the operations and processes of how business is conducted—along with technical HR knowledge and organizational knowledge was ranked as the most important competency for senior HR leaders. There is a high expectation that HR professionals at the senior level will have a broad comprehension of business and finance principles, market and/or industry cycles and how human capital fits into that.

According to HR practitioners, consultants and academics, business knowledge at the senior HR leader level exhibits as such:

“In addition to understanding the business itself, senior HR leaders are going to have to understand the economics of the business, learn how to read a profit and loss statement, create a budget, and understand cost centers and profit centers.”

“The more senior you get, the more you have to understand how the business works, what the important business drivers are and how you can link the people processes and programs to make the business successful. That’s not just the business—you have to understand the industry, have a global perspective, understand how things work in a bigger sense than what your goal is.”

“If HR is helping to design the business, then it is critical for it to know how to improve operational efficiency, to understand how people contribute to value creation and to know basic business principles. Operational leadership is going to help senior HR leaders really understand how the business runs and be able to consult with and help the other operational and functional leaders achieve the goals that they want to achieve. That’s how you distinguish between a highly effective and moderately effective senior HR leader.”
“The more senior you get, the more you have to understand how the business works, what the important business drivers are and how you can link the people processes and programs to make the business successful.”

Organizational knowledge encompasses understanding the business issues that are specific to the organization—for example, its operations, core products, consumers, needs and challenges. Also included in this competency is sensitivity to and empathy for the issues that line operations within the organization face and an awareness of the impact of human capital issues on the organization as a system. In addition to having general business knowledge, senior HR leaders are also expected to demonstrate organizational knowledge. In a recent SHRM survey, 96% of HR professionals agreed that their organization’s HR function/department understands the core of their organization’s business. Further, senior HR leaders’ organizational knowledge may be differentiated as such:

“Successful senior HR leaders are definitely in touch with the business as a business, not only their own profession. They are very much in tune with the operations of the business and very familiar with the financials of the business. They’re certainly actively involved with their partners in other functions.”

“In order to be able to understand the organization, senior HR leaders don’t necessarily have to know everything up front, but they have to be curious enough and confident enough to ask questions so that they can learn how all of the pieces intricately fit together. That way, when making suggestions or being an advocate or giving voice to whatever the issues are, they are cognizant of how that particular change is going to potentially impact the whole system—not just the specific thing they’re doing.”

“It’s not just business acumen, but the ability to, when people sit down with you with their problem, understand their side of the business and what the workflow is like for them.”
Strategic Thinking and Critical/Analytical Thinking

Much emphasis has been placed on HR evolving in a more strategic direction to achieve greater input into organizational decisions and, therefore, greater influence over business operations. HR professionals who responded to a SHRM survey about strategic HR management reported that the vast majority of HR departments that had a strategic plan in place were involved in implementing and creating organizational strategies and were increasingly more focused on strategic interests. Strategic thinking can be defined as seeing the big picture, having a long-term line of sight and understanding the interconnectedness of decisions and activities within the various lines of the business. Critical/analytical thinking, consistently among the most important skills for workers at all levels, involves seeking information and using that information to inform decision and resolve problems. Workers are expected to bring these critical/analytical thinking skills to their first job experiences and hone and develop them over time. Not surprisingly, the ability to analyze information and apply critical thinking also figures prominently among the competencies required of the most successful senior HR leaders. Strategic thinking and critical/analytical thinking emerged as the second most important competency for successful senior HR leaders.

“A senior HR leader has to be a strategic thinker—one who is able to look ahead, anticipate challenges and address issues that benefit the organization, enhance the organization or resolve potential problems.”

“The strategic/analytical thinking competency includes the curiosity, the questioning, and willingness to ask questions and not have a preconceived idea about the answer.”

“It is a very complex analytical process, and it requires outstanding listening skills so that senior HR leaders are not only asking those right questions, but they’re also actually hearing and processing and understanding the answers they get. Then they can analyze how this fits in the big picture of the organization to try to help the organization meet its ultimate goals better and maybe resolve the conflicts or problems that they’re encountering.”

“Strategic and critical thinking skills encompass understanding strategically where the company is going and how HR plays into that, and understanding how things that happen externally in the environment will impact HR—staffing levels, compensation, benefits, trends and so on.”
Leading Change

Leading change is complex, requiring a mastery of a variety of skills, including communication, persuasion and responsiveness, in order to chart the course for organization stakeholders to navigate a shift in business processes, priorities, roles and expectations. Traditionally called upon to manage the people-related processes associated with broad changes within organizations, HR is increasingly involved with developing change initiatives prior to the change being introduced at the organization-wide level. According to a recent SHRM study, 84% of HR departments agree that they facilitate change within the organization.”

Identified as one of the top competencies for successful senior HR leaders, leading change at that level was described as follows:

“Leading change has a lot of complexity. It encompasses persuasiveness. It encompasses communication skills. It shows that you’re an authentic leader. There are integrity components, trustworthiness.”

“You can’t make a CEO change something, you can’t make the top executives who don’t report to you change the culture of the organization. You need to demonstrate to them that they want to make the change.”

“In many business environments, things are constantly changing. Whether internally or externally, there are threats in the environment that force the business to look at things in a different way—and this changes the roles of the employees. Management needs to be able to figure out a way to manage that change so that employees feel comfortable with their new roles or with the way the organization is moving, whether or not they feel that they have a part in it.”

“To me, a reason leading change is more important in HR than in other functions is that you don’t see an accountant trying to change the organization. How is an effective HR leader different than other leaders? It’s all about change.”

84% of HR departments agree that they facilitate change within the organization.

Effective Communication

Effective communication, which involves not only being able to verbally or in writing convey messages in terms that make sense but also actively listening to others’ interpersonal communications, is an essential skill for senior HR leaders. This includes communication with top management in the organization, with rank-and-file employees and often with the community in which the organization operates. In fact, communication is so important that it ranked as one of the top five aspects of employees’ job satisfaction. Effective communication, which was in and of itself identified among the top competencies for successful senior HR leaders, may also be a component of other important competencies for senior-level HR leaders. A senior HR leader who has mastered the tenets of effective communication will more persuasively make the business case for new ideas and strategies and be more likely to achieve buy-in and support from stakeholders on organizational initiatives. How does a successful senior HR leader practice effective communication?

“Senior HR leaders must be able to communicate in a way that will be heard.”

“It is critical to know how to communicate the needs and the strategy of HR in a way that a non-HR person understands and relates to. A lot of times HR people are seen as very ‘touchy feely’ and emotional, and then when they express the needs of the people—the employees—it comes out that way. If you’re a finance guy, you may not relate to or understand this emotional, personal message. The HR leader needs to be able to communicate in a way that he or she is able to influence the other senior executives.”

“One of the things I’ve found through experience, and one of the things I try to counsel my students on, is the importance of interpersonal communication skills. If HR leaders don’t have a facility for talking and communicating with various levels of the organization, their effectiveness is going to be affected.”
Credibility

Credibility, or being perceived by others as having the knowledge and experience to back up one’s authority, represents an important attribute for successful senior HR leaders. Credibility can be built through effective use of other skills and tools, such as interpersonal communication. To become recognized as a key player in the development of organization strategy and have influence on decisions and business results within the organization, the HR function/department must demonstrate its credibility to various stakeholders. What does credibility mean at the individual level for the HR professional in a senior leadership role?

“Credibility is knowledge of the laws and knowledge of the whole HR spectrum.”

“You get to this level by making mistakes and learning from those experiences because that’s what gives you credibility in the eyes of junior people within the HR organization and with the line operations.”

“If they don’t have the knowledge base, they won’t have the credibility. I’ve seen companies where they stick people in HR who don’t have any HR experience—because they’re good with people. But at the senior level, HR professionals have to know the law.”

“The credibility also goes to your personal way of handling things so that you’re consistent and people believe you.”
Metrics and measurement are important, but it’s how leaders use them that really makes a difference. They use metrics to reward people for excellence and then encourage everybody else to get to that standard—and they’re clear about what those standards are within their organization. We see real leaders in human resources much more focused on rewarding excellence to help drive performance.

Results Orientation/Drive for Performance

Results orientation and a drive for performance encompass the ability to link processes and practices to positive outcomes and to demonstrate the value that HR brings to the organization. Among organizations that have formal systems in place for collecting HR metrics, more than one-half of HR professionals (52%) reported that their HR department formally calculated the impact of HR activities on business performance. Further, overall 87% of HR professionals agreed that their organization’s HR department was involved in implementing strategies and processes to drive business results, and 81% agreed that their organization’s HR department was involved in creating those strategies and processes. At the senior leader level, HR professionals must be able to link activities to demonstrable business outcomes and, moreover, to actively set the path for and maintain an expectation of achieving the desired results.

“The results orientation track for performance is an important role that HR has in the organization. Sometimes, HR people can get so engaged in the ‘feel good’ stuff that they forget that the real reason HR exists is for results.”

“Senior HR professionals must have a great ability to hold people accountable and get results.”

“If they have direct reports, they need to have the management competencies to get results through their people.”
“The senior HR professional really needs to be able to balance the interest of the organization with being able to tell truth to power and say, ‘We’re going down a path that’s unethical and going to result in repercussions, and this is why we need to avoid taking that position.’ If you can’t step up to power, then you’re not serving the organization well.”

**Ethical Behavior**

Ethics can be defined as a perception of the moral appropriateness of individual and/or group conduct or behavior. According to SHRM’s report titled *The Ethics Landscape in American Business*, “in a business environment, the rules or standards of ethical behavior govern the conduct of company officers, directors and all employees—including HR professionals.” In the wake of highly publicized corporate scandals and during times of growing concern about corporate behavior, there is increased expectation for ethical leadership. HR often finds itself in an ethics steward role within organizations. According to a recent SHRM study, 76% of HR professionals felt that they were well prepared or very well prepared to handle situations with the potential to result in violations of the organization’s ethics policies or even lead to a violation of the law. Demonstrating ethical behavior emerged as one of the top competencies for senior HR leaders. Ethics at the senior HR level was described as such:

“Senior HR practitioners need to have an ethical and values-based framework that they work from and that is apparent to others in the organization.”

“...what I would expect of really senior HR people is a sense of personal ethics. HR needs to be out there protecting the employee. When the company says, ‘We’re having trouble, let’s downsize by 20%,’ HR needs to say, ‘No, that’s the wrong thing to do. We’re going to pay for it later. All the evidence shows we’re better off finding other solutions.’ And they should walk away, if necessary, from an organization that refuses to do the right thing.”
Persuasiveness/Influencing Others

Persuading or influencing others is the art of using interpersonal skills to convince others to share one’s perspective or way of thinking. About three-quarters of HR professionals agreed that their organization’s HR function/department contributes to the strategic vision and has a direct impact on business processes (79% and 75%, respectively).” Having gained a “seat at the table,” HR must be able to use that position to have an effective impact on decisions and processes within the organization; thus, the ability to persuade and/or influence others rounds out the top eight competencies for senior HR leaders.

“A senior HR person has to have superior interpersonal skills and political savvy, because quite often you’re supporting a VP or maybe even a CEO, and having those great interpersonal skills and the ability to influence without power are key.”

“Successful senior HR leaders must have the ability to have tough conversations with all sorts of people, not just the C-suite level but their peers and people who are in positions below them, too. By ‘tough conversations,’ I mean really having an emotionally difficult conversation and win them to your way of thinking, get their influence and trust.”

“The qualifiers at that higher level are the persuasiveness, influencing and coaching. I see those as subsets of communication but almost like a higher-level skill set relative to communication.”
LEADING GLOBALLY
Additional competencies needed by successful senior HR leaders in global organizations

The world and the business climate have witnessed rapid globalization in recent years, which has required human resources to shift its perspective in many key areas and operations of business, such as talent sourcing. Senior HR leaders operating in global organizations may face different demands and challenges than their counterparts in organizations with a single-country focus.

What competencies are needed by successful senior HR leaders in global organizations? For the purpose of this study, global organizations were defined as those that view the world to be a single market, with this perspective guiding organizational strategy, including talent management and mobility. This is qualitatively different from an international organization that has market presence in other countries but whose products and organizational strategy are primarily domestically oriented.

In addition to the eight core competencies for HR practitioners in a senior leader role, two main areas of knowledge, skills and abilities were identified as particularly important for senior HR leaders employed by global organizations: global mindset and flexibility/adaptability.
Global mindset includes an awareness of cultural differences and an awareness of your own lack of knowledge about some cultures. You may not know all the laws, but if you are aware that there are differences, then you are open to discovering and figuring out these differences instead of assuming that you know it all based on your experience in another country or culture.

Global Mindset

Global mindset for HR professionals can be defined as an overarching way of thinking about the nature of doing business and includes an understanding of and sensitivity to cultural differences among workers in other countries and legal issues inherent in operating a business multinationally. Overall, the biggest difference between competencies required of senior HR leaders working for a global organization and general competencies of the senior HR leader role is a shift in perspective to include an increased global mindset. This includes both what is known about conducting business in other countries as well as the awareness that there are inherent human capital issues that may not be fully known or understood. For the senior HR leader in a global organization, having a global mindset may include an understanding of labor relations and unions in other countries, laws and regulations around doing business in those countries and cultural aspects of the workforce that may affect total rewards design and employee relations.

“Global mindset encompasses professional and legal knowledge about regulations of the country—perhaps not in detail, but enough to be aware of the aspects you have to focus on or be able to ask for help as you develop the practices or policies in the local context.”

“In the tight labor market around the world, what catches my attention are those companies that have the reputation of being the best employers to work for. They really pay attention to what the priorities are for employees from, say, China, Japan, Malaysia, Singapore—compared with those in the United States or Canada—and then they focus on those details to customize or individualize benefits programs. Having this reputation can help employers retain employees and, more importantly, recruit employees from very tight job markets.”

“HR professionals at the senior level coming from corporate need to understand the leadership and the adaptability; they need to learn how to lead, influence and appreciate the culture in which they are working. This is a big issue.”

50% of HR Professionals agreed that the continued expansion of global business and increased interdependence of countries and cultures are likely to have a major strategic impact on the workplace.

Workplace Forecast (SHRM, 2008)
Flexibility/Adaptability

Flexibility/adaptability for HR is the ability to adjust the approach as required by shifts within the organization and in the external business environment. An increased flexibility and adaptability are viewed as important competencies for senior HR leaders in a global organization. These include a willingness to adapt to current situations and projected changes in the organization and business environment by being flexible with work arrangements and how business is conducted, as well as flexibility in one’s role as a senior HR leader and one’s interactions with organization stakeholders. As one HR practitioner described it, a successful senior HR leader must have “a willingness to dance” if dancing is part of the culture of doing business in the other country.

“Senior HR leaders must have the attributes of being flexible and open-minded, ready to accept new ideas, cultures, language and so on. These individuals must have strong analytical and research skills and know where the business and profession are going and what the best practices are—not only with the daily routines of hiring and firing employees but also when it comes to out-of-the-box emerging issues—for example, how to manage an Asian workforce, work/life balance issues or workforce diversity in a global workforce.”

“One of the areas that still needs some work from a global perspective—and this could be where an HR leader could be very effective—is helping supervisors and managers understand that just because you can’t see the person doesn’t mean he or she is not working. When you’re working virtually or at home and you can’t see that employees are physically at their desk, there are other ways of trusting and knowing that people are getting the work done.”
LEADING THE FUTURE
Emerging competencies needed by successful senior HR leaders in five years

In the coming years, a number of trends are anticipated to have an impact on the workplace, among them the economic downturn, shifts in worker demographics such as the aging population and retirement of the Baby Boom generation, shortages of skilled workers, increased globalization of the workforce and business market, increased outsourcing/offshoring of jobs and security threats to technology. Looking ahead five years, will changes in the business environment require new set of competencies for senior HR leaders?

According to HR practitioners, consultants and academics who participated this study, the next five years will not bring a dramatic shift in the core competencies required of senior HR leaders. There was a general agreement that the competencies identified as most important now are “fundamentals” that will remain very important in the not-too-distant future. However, other participants in the study argued that some skills and abilities will increase in saliency and a few additional competencies may also be required as a result of changes in the market, workforce or technology. Two skills that figured prominently in the discussions are global intelligence and technological savvy. The most successful senior HR leaders of five years from now may need to master these skills, in addition to today’s competencies.

Leadership Competencies Senior HR Professionals Will Need in the Future

- Global intelligence
- Technological savvy
Global Intelligence

Global intelligence is similar to global mindset and involves an understanding of and skills related to cross-cultural/cross-national issues. With globalization on the rise, senior HR leaders will need to shift competencies to include an emphasis on global skill sets.

“I would like to expand the cross-cultural competencies, making certain we are able to get the most out of diversity within the organization—not necessarily having diverse employees assimilate, but knowing how to get value out of diversity.”

“Global intelligence and global mindset—in essence, they’re the same thing. In fact, I’m recently thinking that diversity might be called cultural intelligence.”

Technological Savvy

As advances in technology change the nature of doing business, work processes and the workforce itself will adapt. Senior HR leaders will need to develop their knowledge of the unique solutions and challenges that new technology will bring to the organization and understand how talent management will be affected by a technologically enhanced business environment.

“There’s a cluster of knowledge, skills and abilities around the ways in which many organizations are getting more virtual, whether it’s outside the formal boundaries of the organization or whether the organization itself is becoming more distributed and virtual. I’m not entirely sure how that affects the set of...
competencies for today, but it’s clear that the KSAs reflecting this increasingly virtual workplace will be a necessity in the future. It’s going to have a big impact on the kind of knowledge senior HR professionals need.”

“Technology competencies include remote management—building trust when you are not dealing face-to-face with your employees.”

“Technological competence is going to be critical. With the increased use of virtual teams, an HR director will have to have some mastery of technology that permits him or her to communicate and collaborate with work teams.”

“The economic downturn, shifts in worker demographics, shortages of skilled workers, increased globalization and security threats to technology were among the TOP-RANKED TRENDS most likely to have an impact on the workplace in the coming years.

“Senior HR leaders must be able to embrace technology and understand its role in the organization and how it’s going to change collaboration, communication, etc.”
CONCLUSIONS

Identifying the competencies required of the most successful senior HR leaders is important for understanding what sets apart superior performance for that role. This set of competencies may serve as a benchmark for HR leaders at the senior level as well as provide a guide for HR professionals who aspire to the senior leader level. The competencies also provide a framework for understanding the expected contribution of the senior HR leader’s role or function within the larger organization currently and five years from now, as well as what is required of senior HR leaders in a global organization.

First and foremost, successful senior HR leaders are expected to bring a high degree of knowledge to the role. This includes literacy in the language of business, a broad understanding of financials and a firm knowledge of human capital management issues and their effect on business operations. Beyond understanding these issues generally, senior HR leaders should be well-versed in their specific organization’s core business issues and able to understand multiple perspectives within the organization.

At the senior HR leader level, reputation matters. The most successful senior leaders are cognizant that HR is an influential force in shaping the organization’s culture and that the behavior of top management, including HR leaders, serves as a model for the rest of the organization. To this end, it is particularly important for senior HR leaders to consistently demonstrate ethical behavior throughout their decisions and actions on behalf of the organization and in their interactions and communications with stakeholders. Effective communication is another key competency for senior HR leaders, and it underscores several other competencies, including credibility, persuasiveness/influencing others and leading change. The combination of these competencies contributes to an HR leadership that is credible, consistent and characterized by integrity and authority.
Finally, senior HR leaders’ approach to their work reflects another cluster of competencies. They must embody a strategic approach to their thoughts and decisions about the organization and keep a higher view and long-term perspective in mind. Further, critical/analytical thinking skills continue to be important at the senior HR leader level. It is expected that at this level, those skills will encompass actively seeking information, being able to analyze and interpret it, and understand how it fits into the wider picture of the business environment and how it relates back to the organization and various lines within. Successful senior HR leaders must also be oriented toward setting goals and holding people—and themselves—accountable for achieving results.

The knowledge, skills, abilities and attributes outlined in this summary form the eight core competencies currently required of successful senior HR leaders. These, along with global mindset and flexibility/adaptability, represent competencies needed by their counterparts at global organizations. Forecasting ahead five years, although there may not be dramatic shifts in the competencies required of senior HR leaders, HR professionals at this level would be well advised to increase their mastery of global intelligence and technological savvy in response to ongoing trends that are shaping the way business operates.
APPENDIX
Methodology

Participants
SHRM conducted a series of 90-minute focus group sessions with HR subject matter experts. International HR practitioners, consultants and academics were included in the focus groups, ensuring that global and academic perspectives were represented in the conversations and factored into the quantitative results. Outside of the United States, respondents’ countries of residence included Canada, Germany, Israel, Mexico, Australia and the United Kingdom.

The first round of focus groups was conducted with members of the 2008-2009 SHRM Special Expertise Panels who attended SHRM’s Annual Conference in Chicago, Illinois, in June 2008. Approximately 83 Special Expertise Panel members elected to participate in the focus groups. Participants were randomly divided into eight focus groups, each led by a SHRM staff member who had received facilitation training.

The second set of focus group sessions was conducted with members of the HR academic and consulting community who attended the 2008 Academy of Management (AOM) meeting in Anaheim, California, in August 2008. Beginning in July 2008, HR academician focus group participants were recruited through postings on the AOM HR Division listserv. In addition, participants were recruited on-site at the AOM meeting. A total of 37 HR academics and consultants participated in three focus groups during this event.

Process
Although the definition of a senior HR leader can encompass a variety of job responsibilities, reporting structures and titles, this study set out to determine what is needed to successfully perform the job responsibilities of senior HR leaders who have decision-making authority with impact at the organizational level.
The main questions addressed in the study were:

- What skills, knowledge, attributes and other qualities does a senior HR leader need to have to be successful?
- Thinking about a successful senior HR leader in a global organization, what competencies stand out or are necessary for this role?
- Thinking about ongoing trends in technology, industries, the marketplace, workforce demographics and globalization that will affect the HR profession, how will they impact the competencies needed by senior HR leaders in the next five years? Will anything change?

SHRM developed a list of senior HR leader competencies. The knowledge, skills, abilities and attributes included in the competencies list were identified through review of literature about leadership and senior HR job responsibilities. Study participants were presented with this list and asked to identify seven “important” and three “very important” competencies for successful senior HR leaders. The assigned importance ratings were weighted and tallied to produce overall rankings of each competency in order to provide a picture of the competencies that are currently most important for senior HR leaders.

**Analysis**

Rankings of the individual competencies were obtained by tallying the number of times each competency was selected as “important” or “very important.” A weighting factor of 0.7 was applied to ratings of “important” and 1.0 to “very important.” The summed weighted tallies across focus groups for each competency were divided by the total number of participants in the list selection exercise to arrive at the overall mean importance rating for each competency.

The quantitative results from 64 participants from six of the Annual Conference focus groups and 37 participants from all three AOM focus groups are represented in the discussion of top-ranked competencies for successful senior HR leaders.
Endnotes


19 SHRM’s Special Expertise Panels include: Corporate Social Responsibility; Employee Health, Safety and Security; Employee Relations; Ethics; Global; Human Capital Measurement/HR Metrics; Labor Relations; Organizational Development; Staffing Management; Technology and HR Management; Total Rewards/Compensation and Benefits; and Workplace Diversity.
Project Team

Project leader: Amanda Benedict, survey research analyst
Evren Esen, manager, Survey Research Center
Steve Williams, Ph.D., SPHR, director, Research

Project contributors: John Dooney, SPHR, manager, Strategic Research
Lisa Orndorff, SPHR, GPHR, manager, Human Resources
Deborah Keary, SPHR, director, Human Resources
Lee Webster, director, HR Standards
Jennifer Schramm, manager, Workplace Trends and Forecasting
Nancy Woolever, SPHR, manager, Academic Initiatives
Debra Cohen, Ph.D., SPHR, chief knowledge officer

Copy editing: Katya Scanlan, copy editor
Design: Blair Wright, senior graphic designer