



CRITICALEYE
The Peer-to-Peer Board Community

LEADING A

HIGH-PERFORMING

GLOBAL TEAM

In a rapidly globalising workplace, the role of HR leadership in fostering an inclusive and culturally diverse team has never been more critical. Criticaleye's **Bridgette Hall** explores the importance of cultural awareness, strategic foresight and emotional intelligence in today's shrinking world



The world is shrinking, and yet businesses are expanding. To succeed, companies need leaders who can navigate this complex landscape. But what does it take to build a winning team that thrives across cultures?

In this interconnected landscape, success hinges on strong HR leadership with a global perspective. Forging a dynamic leadership team that thrives across cultures requires more than just experience. It demands a strategic approach that combines foresight, cultural awareness and a deep understanding of talent.

Leaders need to navigate diverse work styles and time zones, the emotional intelligence to bridge cultural gaps and the awareness to cater to the needs of a geographically scattered team. Understanding the nuances of communication styles, work preferences and even humour across regions is paramount.

Values and Strategy

It is not just about having people in different countries; it is about fostering a sense of shared purpose and collaboration. By defining universal values and principles in the organisation, the CPO of a global company can set clear expectations for behaviour and a unifying thread for all employees. Striking the right balance between global consistency and local differences in a global company requires focusing on the business strategy.

When **Helen Webb**, CPO at WHSmith, took on the role at the UK-headquartered retailer around a year ago, work was

“The HR structure follows the business structure and the business structure follows the business strategy closely”

Joydeep Bose

needed to build a more global leadership team: “There was no common ground or strategy and there were no shared frameworks,” she recounts.

“So, whilst I had people who were doing great jobs, I’ve had to start really from ground zero to create what is a global leadership team.”

Establishing a common value system and aligning individual goals with the overall business strategy ensures everyone is rowing in the same direction. At global data company dunnhumby, CPO **Denise Sefton** discusses her priorities when it comes to leading a global organisation: “You have to provide some consistency, some commonality and some global practices.”

The key to a successful global HR team lies in understanding the business strategy and using that to shape your people strategies and goals. This means identifying what the business

needs HR to deliver as a partner, then comparing those needs with HR’s capabilities to create a ‘joined-up plan.’ This collaborative process involves open communication about what HR can and can’t realistically deliver.

“You need to ensure that you’re focusing on the right things that will make a real difference to move the business forward,” says **Denise**.

“I set my HR strategy every year based on the business strategy. None of us turn up to work and operate in a silo. You’ve got to take the business strategy and ask: ‘what are the top five key things we’ve got to deliver as a business and what’s our role to deliver them?’”

In crafting Olam International’s HR strategy, Olam ensures that its HR function mirrors the structure of the organisation. With a global footprint spanning 64 countries, revenues exceeding SG\$48 billion and a workforce of over 45,000, Olam strategically places HR heads in major markets, assigns HR business partners to each global business and establishes centres of excellence in key areas of the human resources practice.

“The HR structure follows the business structure and the business structure follows the business strategy closely,” explains **Joydeep Bose**, Managing Director & Group CHRO of the Singapore-based business.

“Each market is sufficiently empowered to make decisions on its own. At the centre, we ensure to drive synergy across a central process and make sure we leverage our core assets across the different markets.” >



By focusing on strategy, HRDs can transform a dispersed global HR team into a strategic, unified force that effectively supports the company's global business goals. This demonstrates the importance of fostering a shared vision, aligning with business needs and creating a collaborative structure for success.

Leading with Empathy

Promoting inclusion on a global scale transcends the mere adoption of tools or processes; it necessitates cultivating a culture of respect that embraces diverse ideas and perspectives from every corner of the world. It's about fostering an environment where individuals from various cultural, geographical and linguistic backgrounds feel empowered to contribute their unique insights.

"We're a UK-based business, but what I tried to drill into my team is that we don't have the right to say what happens everywhere," **Helen** states.

The focus should be on sharing resources and empowering local teams to leverage their unique strengths. It's not about dictating practices, but collaboration and mutual respect, she explains.

"We don't have a monopoly on good ideas. What we have is a monopoly on resources, and we have to help everybody else. And that's kind of a mindset shift for the organisation."

Understanding and appreciating differences within the broader organisation is essential. By embracing these principles and fostering a culture of empathy and inclusion, businesses can build stronger, more effective global

teams that leverage the collective power of diverse perspectives. These differences, when embraced, become valuable assets that contribute to the overall success of the organisation.

"Where I've personally improved over time is becoming a more empathetic leader," **Joydeep** reveals.

"Being more empathetic towards differences, understanding that people, groups or teams are all different and believing those differences can add to your strengths as an organisation," he adds.

When growing as a leader and developing a global HR team, **Helen** highlights the importance of having open and honest conversations. She explains how it's essential that everyone feels included and their voices heard, regardless of what tools are used.

There are three lessons she keeps in mind as a leader: "Firstly to listen. The second one is to make no assumptions. And the third is to create common ground. That really does create inclusion," she says.

For **Denise**, it's making a concerted effort to think deeply about the cultural differences within the dispersed workforce of dunnhumby, and being mindful of colleagues across the globe.

"None of us have global experience leading a team until you start, so you must get it somewhere," she says. "Every day, I think about how we can be more inclusive to the team and that begins with curiosity and consideration." ■



Criticleye supports senior executives from a variety of businesses, sectors and geographies. With 90 percent of HRDs in our research agreeing that mentoring improves the performance of senior executives, our global leadership Community provides a confidential and trusted space, offering diverse views that HRDs can draw from when making decisions for themselves and their organisations.

Click [here](#) to find out how we support HRDs and other executives.

Featuring commentary from:

Joydeep Bose
Managing Director
& Group CHRO
Olam International



Denise Sefton
CPO
dunnhumby



Helen Webb
CPO
WHSmith



Contact the contributors through:
www.criticleye.com