

AUGUST 2020

Exploring the Evolving Dynamic Between CEOs and CHROs: How Has it Changed?

John Doyle

EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT



By any estimation, the relationship between the CEO and CHRO is one of the most important in any business. Previously, we looked at [the unique relationship between these two roles](#) from a high level. However, the dynamic between these important positions is not a static one. It changes based on a number of internal and external factors. Most recently, the ongoing pandemic has spurred this relationship to evolve in specific ways, effectively strengthening the bond CEOs and CHROs share.

The Pandemic Is a People Issue

Any crisis that a business faces will have varying repercussions requiring the insight of several leaders, working together. What's unique about COVID-19 is that it's distinctly a *people* issue, directly affecting the health and daily life of employees. As such, it instantly elevates the importance of the CHRO role. The person in this position is charged with leading like never before.

This is no easy task. Since the outbreak of the coronavirus, many people have been laid off, furloughed, or let go while others have seen raises frozen or their pay cut. CHROs are at the center of these difficult decisions and conversations. At the same time, they're grappling with the ways to meet the needs of their workforce. According to the [Harvard Business Review](#), organizational resilience, or the ability of a business to adapt, innovate, and succeed, is directly tied to the physical, mental, and emotional resilience of employees. For CHROs, that means one of their biggest challenges is maintaining employee morale and managing stress levels during a difficult time.

Of course, many see a silver lining in the opportunity this provides. Through this pandemic, CHROs can put important human values in the spotlight, helping to build the culture and emerge stronger on the other side. Ultimately, HR is in the best position to look at the company's overall processes from a viewpoint of [systemic thinking](#). The function can improve communication and collaboration throughout the entire business, helping to keep the employee experience on the forefront of everyone's minds. CHROs are especially influential in ensuring the success of the organization as they reimagine the company's processes, address work-life balance, improve employee wellbeing, administer HR systems, and facilitate safe reentry into the office.

The CEO/CHRO Relationship Grows Stronger

Given the prominence of the CHRO role throughout the pandemic, CEOs everywhere are working more closely with those in the position. As a result, the CHRO is called upon as a

trusted advisor to help the CEO reevaluate the executive team's effectiveness, both during the pandemic and moving forward. Have they been able to pivot their strategy into a sustainable model? How strong is their learning agility? Where are they today, and where do they need to be? Although this has already been the function of the CHRO, the pandemic exposed significant skillset gaps in some companies in unprecedented ways. CHROs are tasked with identifying and closing those gaps appropriately in collaboration with the CEO as they navigate a new era together.

Furthermore, CEOs are leaning on CHROs to make sure that their workforces feel supported. It's the CHRO's responsibility to [create a blueprint](#) for what roles, responsibilities, processes, and offices look like as employees return to work. Along the way, CHROs are expected to be transparent with their employees, giving them the truth in ways that are easy to handle. These actions require working closely with the CEO. Even though the CHRO is tasked with leading the charge and being the resource for any people-centric issues, they must operate in tandem with the CEO to ensure a consistent message and facilitate the united action needed to address this unique pandemic.

The closer relationship with CEOs and increasing spotlight on CHROs means they will stand out if they're doing well in responding to today's new landscape, but they will stand out even more if they fail or fall short. There is simply no room for "okay" leadership during these times. Leaders must quickly build a new set of skills so that they can lead from a distance and motivate employees who are working from home. While CHROs seek to embody those qualities, they also play a key role in developing these kinds of leaders while holding them accountable to the company brand and purpose in a new environment.

As CHROs become more prominent and influential, they're leading by example at a significant moment in history. Right now, it's make-or-break time for many in the role as they work in close conjunction with the rest of the executive team. Those who are strong and rise to the occasion will exemplify a true executive leader mentality, and their relationship with the CEO will grow even further.

Read this next:

[Fostering a Productive CEO/CHRO Relationship](#)

[How Are CHROs Responding to COVID-19?](#)

[Why HR Executives Are Flocking to the Private Equity Industry](#)