

# Adapting to Change: The Strategic Role of HR in Organizational Redesign

In today's rapidly evolving landscape, organizational needs are shifting. Emerging technologies like AI, changing market demands, and growing geopolitical pressures are forcing businesses to adapt. Leaders are feeling the impact and asking themselves tough questions: Do we still have the right people in the right roles to meet the demands of tomorrow?

These conversations aren't always easy, but they are essential.

## When It's Time to Reassess Your Organizational Design

In our work with senior leaders and HR professionals, we often see three common triggers that prompt a reassessment of structure and roles:

- 1. Shifting Business Needs** – This could be prompted by lagging performance indicators, such as the profit and loss statement, or by a more future-focused strategy that is responding to external pressures and opportunities.
- 2. Technological Evolution** – The growing presence of automation, AI, and integrated digital systems is prompting organizations to revisit how work gets done and by whom. As technology reshapes workflows and decision-making, it often reveals outdated role definitions or exposes gaps in team structure and capabilities, accelerating the need for reassessment.
- 3. Underutilized Talent** – It is not uncommon for leaders to sense that some team members have outgrown their roles or their current roles no longer reflect their capabilities, which can affect both engagement and performance.
- 4. Lack of Role Clarity** – This can emerge over time as roles evolve without formal updates. It can happen with long-standing team members or even with new hires who walk into an unclear or shifting mandate.

## The Human Side of Restructuring

Most leaders do everything they can to upskill, reskill, and redeploy their teams. These efforts can create real growth opportunities for individuals. But even in the most progressive people-first organizations, there may come a time when restructuring is necessary.

This is not just about those whose roles may be eliminated. How changes are planned, communicated, and implemented will influence how the entire organization moves forward.

Culture, trust, and productivity can all be affected — for better or worse.

That's where HR comes in. Whether your organization uses titles like Human Resources, People and Culture, or Talent Advisors, these professionals play a vital role in guiding change. For simplicity, we'll refer to them collectively as HR throughout this article.

## HR's Strategic Role in Workforce Planning and Organizational Design

### 1. Planning

This is where strategy meets execution. HR can support by:

- Conducting a skills and workforce gap analysis
- Mapping current roles to future needs
- Identifying overlapping roles and mission-critical talent
- Building a clear, step-by-step plan for the change

Good planning lays the foundation for everything that follows.

"One of the most consistent themes we see in our work is that organizations who invest time upfront in planning are the ones who navigate change with the most stability. It's not just about structure — it's about setting people up for success."

— **Janice Tanner Ernst, CPHR**  
Senior HR Consultant, KBRs



### 2. Compliance

There are critical legal obligations to consider when ending employment relationships. These include:

- Employment standards related to notice and severance
- Differences between statutory requirements and common law
- Collective agreement considerations for unionized environments
- Human rights obligations, including duty to accommodate

Pairing thoughtful HR guidance on the human impact of change with sound legal advice protects both your organization and your people.

### 3. Communications

Clear and compassionate communication is crucial. Experienced HR leaders can help develop a communications plan that considers:

- Leadership alignment and internal messaging
- How and when to inform affected individuals
- Communication to the broader team
- Any external communication needed, including clients or partners

The timing, tone, and transparency of your messaging can significantly shape how change is received.

## 4. Managing Impact

Supporting employees through transition is vital, both those exiting and those staying. This includes:

- Offering Outplacement Services/Career Transition to support exiting employees in their next steps
- Providing access to emotional and mental health supports where appropriate
- Equipping managers to respond to concerns from remaining team members
- Reinforcing a sense of purpose and stability

People remember how they were treated during difficult times. That memory shapes engagement and loyalty moving forward.

“Supporting people through transition isn’t just the right thing to do — it’s a strategic investment in your future culture. How you treat people during change will echo long after the restructuring is complete.”

— **Peter Clarkson**  
Career Transition Lead, KBRS



## 5. Sustaining Positive Momentum

Restructuring isn’t the end of the story. HR leaders can help ensure the organization stays on track by:

- Monitoring morale and engagement

- Supporting leaders as they reinforce new structures and expectations
- Aligning talent strategies with the organization’s new direction

Change that is well-managed can lead to renewed energy and clarity.

“We often remind leaders that the real work begins after the announcement. Following through with consistent messaging, support, and accountability is what helps new structures take root.”

— **Joanne Brown, CPHR, CLC**  
Senior Associate, KBRS



## Change Is Hard, But It Can Be Human-Centered

A thoughtful and well-executed plan serves both the organization and its people. When leaders support their teams with care and clarity, even difficult transitions can be moments that strengthen culture, rather than erode it.

If your organization is preparing for change or even sensing that it might be on the horizon, your HR team can be a strategic partner in helping you move forward with purpose and integrity.

# How can KBRS help?

We help organizations navigate restructuring with confidence, supporting both leaders and impacted teams.

Our strategic HR consulting paired with tailored outplacement services ensure respectful, effective transitions that protect your culture and maintain positive momentum.

The Right Solution Starts with a Conversation

## Contact our Experts:



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