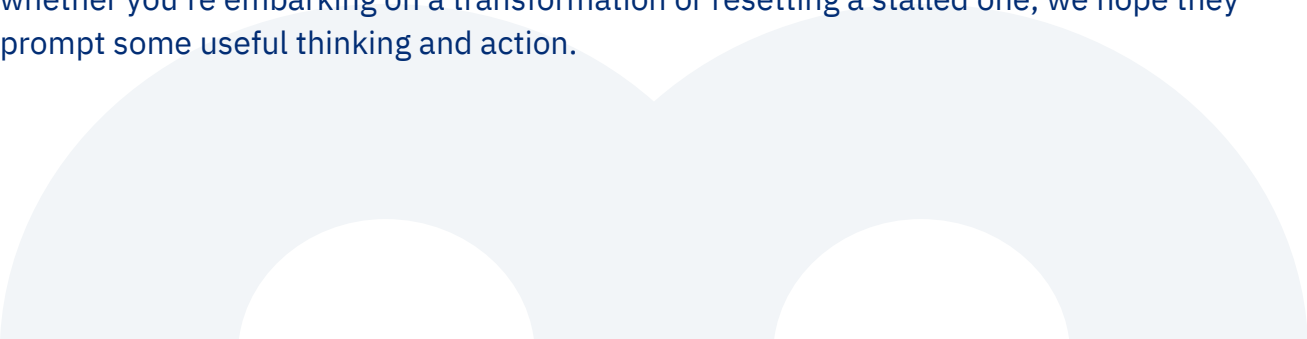


# HR's crucial role in enabling & driving business transformation

How influential is the role of HR in driving your business transformation?

Chris Tomlinson, Muuto Managing Director, met with two exceptional HR leaders: **Estelle Hollingsworth**, Chief People Officer (CPO) of McArthurGlen Group and former CPO of Virgin Atlantic, and **Jack Tabak**, former EVP HR at Shell. Together they explored the key lessons they've learned from steering complex organisational transformations, as well as practical strategies to manage the demands of a transformation while adapting to the fast-evolving business.

We've brought together the **7 key steps** you can take to equip yourself with the tools and insights necessary to optimise the role of HR in your organisation's transformation - whether you're embarking on a transformation or resetting a stalled one, we hope they prompt some useful thinking and action.



## 1. Be a strategic partner

HR must be a true partner in any transformation, with HR leaders claiming their seats at the table and being active participants in decision-making, offering crucial insights on the organisational context and how to navigate the human aspects of change. In short, transformation should be driven by, rather than managed by, HR leaders. That takes a combination of strategic acumen and business know-how to influence organisational decisions effectively. This was more important than ever for Estelle during the COVID-19 crisis, as her previous HR team played a pivotal role in balancing the financial needs with the emotional well-being of the employees.

## 2. Clarify value outcomes and get ready

Clarity is equally important. Successful transformation efforts are rooted in clear, shared goals. Whether the transformation is driven by financial objectives, cultural shifts, or operational efficiency, defining success, and how it will be measured, from the outset is crucial. This makes sure that everyone involved is aligned and working towards the same goals. Without this clarity, a transformation can quickly veer off course and not deliver the right outcomes.

*“You can’t build strong HR leadership at the moment you need it most,”*  
**Jack Tabak, former EVP HR at Shell**

## 3. Simplify complexity

Transformations are complex and messy. And when things are at their messiest, HR leaders are crucial in facilitating and giving clear-sighted direction.

In our experience, defining a strong programme management structure is also essential in managing complexity. Whether it’s through a robust Transformation Management Office (TMO) or clear decision-making mechanisms, this gives leaders the tools to ensure that transformation efforts stay on track, despite the inevitable challenges that arise during change.

For example, during the pandemic, Estelle’s team distilled their mission into three simple pillars: survival, love, and profitability. This focus helped unite the team and kept everyone grounded with a clear, relatable purpose.



## 4. Communicate, communicate, communicate

During a transformation, silence isn't just deafening; it leaves a vacuum likely to be filled with confusion.

HR must wear two hats: both a coach and a policeman. On the one hand it has to make sure leaders are equipped to communicate effectively and on the other that they are sharing the right messages. By communicating the 'why' and 'how' of change, HR leaders support employees to understand both the reasoning behind the transformation and the process that will move it forward. Keeping everyone on the same page.

In turn, leaders need to be comfortable with vulnerability, openly acknowledging when they don't have all the answers.

## 5. Put culture on top of your priority list

Sacrificing culture for the bottom line during a transformation may lead to short-term gain, but it'll store up long term pain. Why? No matter how big the numbers, a company with a bad culture can only succeed so far before it negatively impacts performance. HR leaders must make sure that cultural alignment is never an afterthought, even when financial goals are pressing.

This was demonstrated in Jack's integral work on Shell's integration of BG Group. Although creating \$4 billion in synergies was important, cultural integration was equally critical. This balance wasn't just about dollars; it was about aligning the values and practices of the two organisations to ensure long-term success.

Indeed, based on her broad, previous experience, Estelle advocated that a company's cultural values be built into and considered in every aspect of a transformation, from internal communications to employee wellbeing.

## 6. Use technology and AI strategically

Technology can be a powerful enabler of transformation, when used strategically.

Perhaps HR's most important role during the AI revolution is helping people embrace its benefits in the workplace, which requires a culture of experimentation and a willingness to innovate. HR can champion and develop this mindset, fostering an environment in which new capabilities can be explored and used to their full potential.

So what could this look like in practice? One example is using centralised HR data to make informed decisions. Without it, even the best-planned transformations can struggle.

But technology isn't just about data - there's also the growing potential of AI to streamline processes, accelerate strategic decision-making, and enhance consistency.



## 7. Create positive workplace experiences

Work isn't just about clocking in and out anymore - it's an experience. Every day brings new challenges, teamwork, and a sense of responsibility. Senior leaders should focus on creating an environment where everyone feels valued, included, and part of a real team. A strong sense of community and trust makes a difference, especially in high-risk, hands-on jobs. When leadership understands the work, respects expertise, and aligns with culture, it keeps teams engaged and motivated - no matter what role an individual plays.

Trust will be a cornerstone of organisational success in the coming years. As working practices change, the AI revolution gains pace and information becomes more accessible there will be more flexibility and more uncertainty. HR has a crucial role in creating workplaces and a culture that builds and maintains trust between colleagues and across organisations.



# There's far more to HR's role than just facilitating transformation.

HR leaders will be driving and defining it, balancing the hard realities of business with the human side of transformation. Those who can walk this tightrope successfully will help create stronger, more resilient companies that thrive in today's rapidly shifting business landscape.

To hear the full discussion on how HR leaders can drive large-scale transformation - and the benefits of a holistic approach across people, processes, and technology - watch the full webinar [here](#).

## Speakers



### Chris Tomlinson

Managing Director, Muuto.

Chris specialises in the design and execution of complex global transformation programmes, focusing on organisational restructuring and post-merger integration.



### Estelle Hollingsworth

Chief People Officer of McArthurGlen Group and former CPO of Virgin Atlantic.

Estelle led Virgin Atlantic's people agenda through the unprecedented challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic as VP of Cabin and, subsequently, as CPO.



### Jack Tabak

Former EVP HR at Shell and Non-executive Director.

Jack successfully spearheaded the re-organisation of Shell's global upstream business to enable their \$50 billion acquisition of BG Group.

To discuss this subject in more detail, contact Chris at [chris.tomlinson@muuto.co.uk](mailto:chris.tomlinson@muuto.co.uk)

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