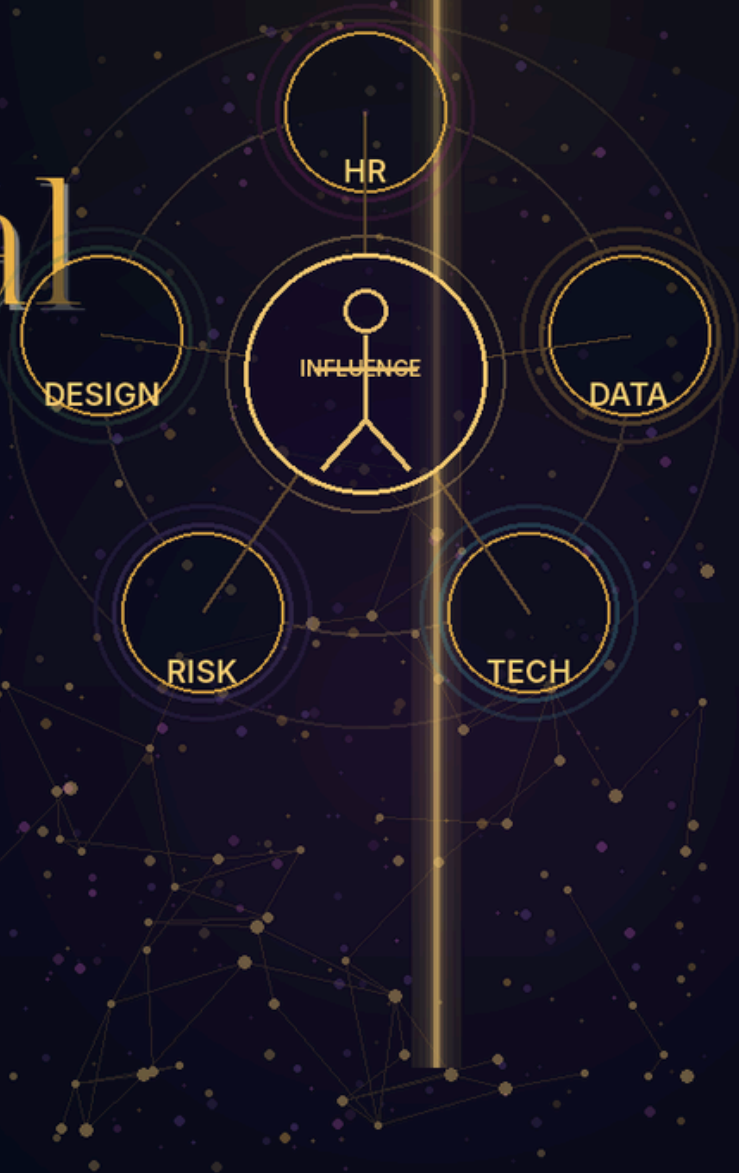


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Beyond Functional Expertise

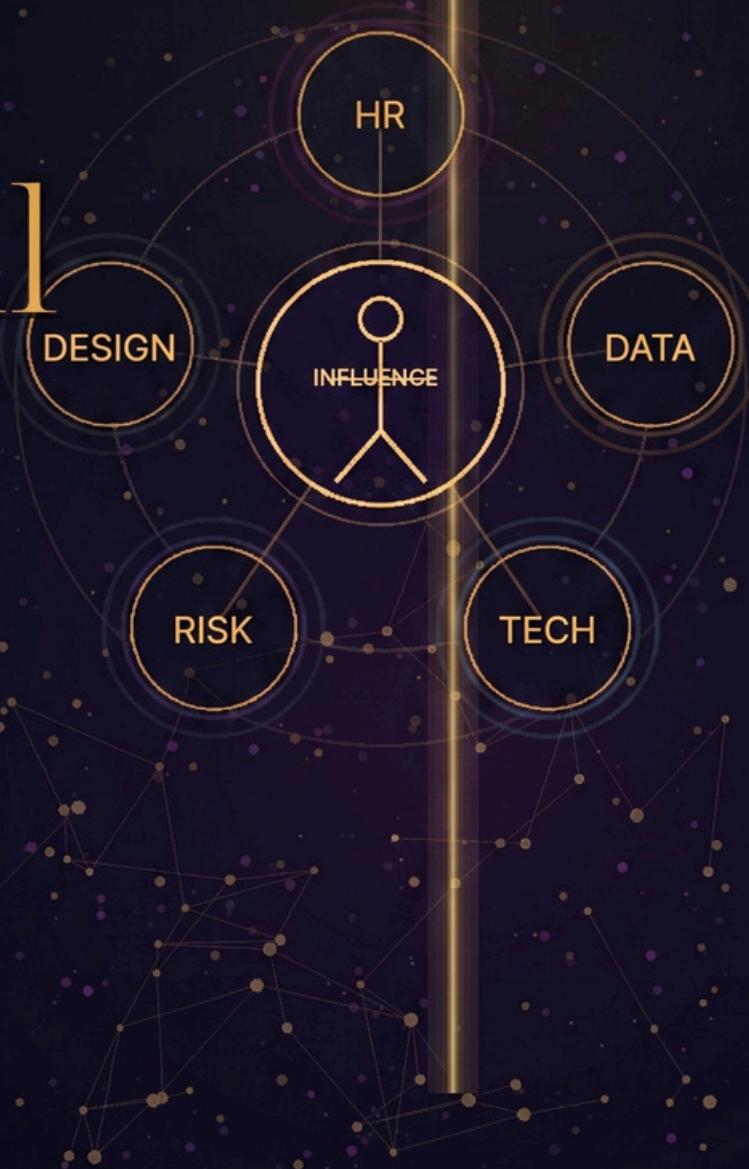
Building Composite Capability
for Future-Ready Influence



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Beyond Functional Expertise

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Beyond Functional Expertise:

Building Composite Capability for Future-Ready Influence



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About Nathan Leadgate

Nathan Leadgate is a diagnostic-led organisational management consulting firm that works with boards, executive teams, and institutions to convert capability into measurable business performance. evidence, diagnosis, and structure. Nathan Leadgate helps organisations move from effort to results. We do not just support organisations. We build systems that consistently produce performance

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Abstract

Professional influence is increasingly shaped by the ability to solve institutional problems that cross functional boundaries. For Human Resource professionals, this requires a movement from narrow functional competence to composite capability: the disciplined combination of HR expertise with adjacent competencies that improve workforce decisions, strengthen execution, reduce institutional loss, and protect value. This article argues that composite capability offers a future-ready development pathway for HR professionals in Nigeria and comparable labour-market contexts. Drawing on labour-market evidence, HR competency standards, public-sector reform priorities, digital literacy frameworks, data protection regulation, and sector realities, the article demonstrates why HR professionals must build competence combinations in analytics, business acumen, technology, governance, organisation design, project execution, and sector intelligence. It concludes with a six-month development challenge that enables HR professionals to select one institutional loss, build one adjacent capability, apply it to a real problem, and document evidence of value.

Keywords: composite capability, HR influence, future-ready skills, people analytics, HR development, Nigeria labour market, institutional value, workforce capability

The New Basis of HR Influence

Influence in professional life grows where competence meets institutional consequence. In Human Resource practice, this means that HR professionals gain stronger influence when their knowledge of people, work, policy, performance, culture, and capability is placed close to the value an organisation must protect.

This article builds on the proposition that positioning is the strategic placement of capability near value that institutions must protect. The same framework asks a defining career intelligence question: “What institutional loss am I becoming competent to reduce?” The question directs professionals to look at where organisations are under pressure, where systems are failing, and where weak capability repeatedly damages execution.

For HR professionals, the question is urgent. Organisations are dealing with skills shortages, digital disruption, workforce instability, productivity pressure, employee data governance, leadership gaps, performance weaknesses, regulatory exposure, and culture risks. ManpowerGroup’s 2026 Global Talent Shortage Survey reports that 72% of employers across 41 countries struggle to find the skilled talent they need, reinforcing the global relevance of capability development and workforce strategy.

Nigeria’s labour-market reality gives the issue stronger local weight. The National Bureau of Statistics reported unemployment at 4.3% in Q2 2024, with informal employment remaining high at 93%. This means that the professional development conversation must address access to quality work, productive work, formal work, higher-value work, and transformative work connected to institutional improvement.

HR professionals therefore need a broader capability architecture. Their future-ready influence will depend on how effectively they combine HR expertise with adjacent competencies that help organisations make better decisions, reduce losses, improve execution, and protect institutional value.

The Institutional Case for Composite Capability

Institutional problems rarely remain inside one function. Attrition affects continuity, cost, morale, customer experience, and institutional memory. Weak supervision affects productivity, safety, engagement, discipline, and service quality. Poor workforce planning affects strategy execution, operational resilience, labour cost, succession risk, and customer delivery. Digital transformation affects role design, skills, adoption, trust, employee data, productivity, and governance.

The HR professional who understands these connections can contribute beyond routine functional delivery. This requires composite capability.

Composite capability refers to the deliberate combination of core HR expertise with adjacent competencies that increase professional usefulness across functions, decisions, risks, systems, and outcomes.

In HR practice, composite capability is expressed through combinations such as:

Composite Capability	What It Enables
HR + People Analytics	Evidence-based workforce decisions, attrition analysis, productivity insight, and management
HR + Business Acumen	Stronger connection between people decisions, cost, revenue, productivity, profitability, and
HR + Digital and AI Literacy	Better HR technology adoption, digital workforce planning, responsible automation, and skills
HR + Risk and Governance	Improved handling of conduct risk, compliance, labour documentation, employee data, audit
HR + Organisation Design	Better role clarity, job architecture, reporting relationships, spans and layers, accountability, and
HR + Project and Change Management	Stronger delivery of HR transformation, performance reforms, restructuring, culture change,

The Institutional Case for Composite Capability

Composite Capability	What It Enables
HR + Sector Intelligence	HR practice that reflects the economics, regulatory realities, customer expectations, and operational

The Chartered Institute of Personnel Management of Nigeria already provides a professional foundation for this broader view of HR capability. Its Body of Knowledge and Competency Framework is built around behavioural and functional competences, with clusters, core competences, and allied competences for HR professionals. This supports the argument that HR professionalism requires both core HR mastery and enabling adjacent competence.

The Empirical Case for Capability Combinations

The evidence base for composite capability is strong.

Deming's labour-market research demonstrates that employment and wage growth have been especially strong in jobs requiring both cognitive skill and social skill. The study shows that social skill and cognitive skill complement each other in the labour market, which validates the argument that capability combinations can increase professional value.

Stephany and Teutloff's research on skill complementarity provides an even closer empirical anchor. Their study shows that the value of a skill depends on complementarity: the number, diversity, and value of other skills with which it can be combined. For HR professionals, this means that HR expertise gains greater value when intelligently combined with analytics, business acumen, digital literacy, governance, project execution, and sector knowledge.

Lightcast's work on hybrid jobs also supports the same direction. It reports that more jobs now combine skill sets that previously appeared in separate occupations, such as marketing with statistical analysis or design with programming. It also notes that about one-quarter of occupations in the United States show strong signs of hybridisation, with these roles often being faster-growing, higher-paying, and more resistant to automation.

The World Economic Forum's *Future of Jobs Report 2025* strengthens the development case. The report identifies the skills gap as a major barrier to business transformation, notes that nearly 40% of skills required on the job are expected to change, and highlights rising demand for AI, big data, cybersecurity, technological literacy, creative thinking, resilience, flexibility, and agility.

These studies support a disciplined conclusion: future-ready influence will favour professionals who can combine technical, cognitive, social, digital, adaptive, and sector-relevant capabilities in ways that solve material institutional problems.

Composite Capability in HR Practice

Composite capability in HR practice should be built around the organisation's Loss Frontier. The Loss Frontier is the point where weakness becomes material damage. In organisational life, this may appear as revenue loss, customer dissatisfaction, compliance breach, talent exodus, safety failure, cyber exposure, service collapse, weak execution, or reputation damage.

For HR professionals, the practical task is to ask: **Which adjacent capability will make my HR expertise more useful where the organisation is exposed?**

Composite HR Capability	Institutional Loss Addressed	Competencies HR Professionals Must Build	Practical HR Application
HR + People Analytics	Attrition, absenteeism, low engagement, poor workforce visibility, weak evidence for decisions.	HR metrics, data cleaning, dashboarding, Excel, Power BI, interpretation of trends, workforce segmentation.	Build attrition dashboards, analyse time-to-fill, track performance distribution, identify absenteeism patterns, and present workforce risk intelligence.
HR + Business and Financial Acumen	Workforce cost leakage, weak manpower planning, low productivity, poor return on training investment.	Budget literacy, cost of turnover, productivity ratios, salary-cost analysis, commercial language, basic finance.	Estimate turnover cost, link headcount to output, analyse overtime, support manpower budgeting, and show the financial implications of HR decisions.
HR + Digital and AI Literacy	Skills obsolescence, poor HR automation, weak employee experience, slow technology adoption.	HRIS literacy, AI use cases, digital workflow design, responsible AI, technology adoption, digital learning tools.	Automate routine HR processes, support digital adoption, redesign onboarding, identify roles affected by automation, and build digital skills pathways.

Composite Capability in HR Practice

Composite HR Capability	Institutional Loss Addressed	Competencies HR Professionals Must Build	Practical HR Application
HR + Organisation Design and Productivity	Role confusion, duplication, weak accountability, reporting inefficiency, poor execution.	Job architecture, role clarity, spans and layers, process thinking, accountability mapping, work design.	Redesign job families, clarify reporting lines, build competency matrices, support restructuring, and align roles to strategic priorities.
HR + Project and Change Management	Failed implementation, resistance, delayed transformation, weak benefits realisation.	Project planning, milestones, stakeholder mapping, change communication, risk registers, adoption measurement.	Lead HR transformation projects, manage performance-system implementation, coordinate culture change, and track benefits from people initiatives.
HR + Sector Intelligence	Generic HR practice, weak business relevance, poor talent alignment, low credibility with line leaders.	Sector economics, regulatory awareness, value-chain literacy, customer expectations, operational realities.	Build HR solutions that reflect the sector's true performance pressures and workforce capability demands.

CIPM's HR Metrics and Analytics programme provides one local development route for the analytics pathway, covering foundations of HR metrics, data literacy, data collection, descriptive analytics, and HR KPIs. Lagos Business School also provides an example of business-facing HR development, with its Human Resource Management programme focused on aligning people strategy with business goals and building cultures that support performance and innovation.

Sector-Based Composite Capability Pathways for Nigerian HR Professionals

The right composite capability depends on the sector's dominant institutional exposure. HR professionals should therefore study their sector, identify its Loss Frontier, and select adjacent capabilities that help reduce the losses most damaging to that sector.

Nigeria's national and sector realities make this approach necessary. The Federal Public Service has adopted Performance Management System reforms under the Federal Civil Service Strategy and Implementation Plan, with guidelines intended for service-wide implementation and compliance. The Nigeria Data Protection Act 2023 creates a legal framework for personal information protection and establishes the Nigeria Data Protection Commission, increasing the relevance of employee data governance for HR professionals. NITDA's National Digital Literacy Framework provides guidelines for digital literacy development in Nigeria, reinforcing digital competence as a professional necessity.

Sector	Dominant Institutional Loss Frontier	Composite Capability HR Professionals Need	Practical HR Contribution
Financial Services, Banking, Insurance and Fintech	Trust loss, compliance breach, fraud risk, poor sales conduct, cyber exposure, talent attrition.	HR + Risk Governance + Analytics + Conduct Management	Develop conduct-based performance systems, strengthen ethics culture, analyse attrition in critical control roles, support succession for risk-sensitive positions, and improve workforce data for compliance decisions.

Sector-Based Composite Capability Pathways for Nigerian HR Professionals

Sector	Dominant Institutional Loss Frontier	Composite Capability HR Professionals Need	Practical HR Contribution
Public Sector	Weak execution, low service productivity, capability gaps, public trust erosion, poor performance discipline.	HR + Performance Management + Policy Execution + Change Management	Support performance management implementation, build competency-based deployment, strengthen role clarity, improve supervisor capability, and link staff performance to service outcomes.
Energy, Oil and Gas, Power and Renewables	Safety incidents, project delays, regulatory exposure, technical skills shortage, contractor risk, operational downtime.	HR + HSE Awareness + Workforce Planning + Industrial Relations + Project Management	Build technical-skills pipelines, strengthen safety culture, improve contractor workforce governance, develop succession plans for scarce technical roles, and align manpower with project delivery.
Healthcare	Workforce migration, burnout, patient safety risk, staffing gaps, service quality failure.	HR + Clinical Workforce Planning + Wellbeing + Retention Strategy + Compliance	Improve retention planning, support shift and staffing models, build wellbeing interventions, strengthen clinical leadership, and connect workforce planning to patient experience.

Sector-Based Composite Capability Pathways for Nigerian HR Professionals

Sector	Dominant Institutional Loss Frontier	Composite Capability HR Professionals Need	Practical HR Contribution
Education and Higher Education	Learning quality decline, faculty capability gaps, weak student experience, digital learning gaps, poor academic leadership.	HR + Learning Design + Faculty Development + EdTech + Quality Assurance	Build teacher and faculty development pathways, strengthen academic performance systems, support digital teaching capability, and improve institutional learning quality.
Manufacturing, FMCG and Industrial Operations	Productivity loss, labour disputes, safety incidents, quality defects, absenteeism, downtime.	HR + Operations Productivity + Industrial Relations + Lean Thinking + Safety Culture	Reduce absenteeism, improve supervisor capability, support shift productivity, strengthen shopfloor skills, and link performance management to output quality.
Technology, Telecoms and Digital Services	Skills obsolescence, talent poaching, cyber risk, rapid scaling problems, agile execution challenges.	HR + Digital Talent Strategy + Agile Organisation Design + Cyber Awareness + Total Rewards	Build digital skills taxonomies, develop technical career paths, improve retention for scarce digital talent, support agile team design, and strengthen cybersecurity culture.

Sector-Based Pathways for Composite Capability Nigerian HR Professionals

Sector	Dominant Institutional Loss Frontier	Composite Capability HR Professionals Need	Practical HR Contribution
NGOs, Development Institutions and Faith-Based Organisations	Donor trust loss, safeguarding failure, volunteer instability, governance weakness, mission drift.	HR + Safeguarding + Governance + Volunteer Management + Values-Based Culture	Build safeguarding systems, improve volunteer management, strengthen ethical conduct, support leadership continuity, and align people practices with mission credibility.
Infrastructure, Construction and Logistics	Project delay, cost overrun, safety incidents, skills shortage, weak contractor coordination.	HR + Project Workforce Planning + HSE + Procurement Awareness + Execution Governance	Build project staffing plans, support safety compliance, improve supervisor capability, manage subcontractor workforce risks, and align people availability with delivery milestones.

Sector evidence supports these pathways. NERC's 2024 Annual Report covers the Nigerian Electricity Supply Industry's operational, technical, commercial, and consumer-affairs performance, showing why HR professionals in power and energy need capability in technical workforce planning, safety culture, productivity, and service reliability. In healthcare, WHO notes that Nigeria is among the 55 countries on the WHO Health Workforce Support and Safeguard List 2023 because of severe health-worker shortage concerns, making workforce migration, retention, and service continuity central HR issues. In education, UNESCO reports a projected global need for 44 million primary and secondary teachers by 2030, with Sub-Saharan Africa requiring an estimated 15 million new teachers, strengthening the case for HR capability in teacher development, retention, and learning quality.

Where HR Professionals Can Learn

A future-ready development pathway requires clear learning sources. HR professionals should combine formal learning, professional certification, digital learning, internal exposure, sector study, and applied projects.

Capability Area	Learning Sources	What HR Professionals Should Learn
Core HR Professional Competence	CIPM Nigeria Body of Knowledge, CIPM certification pathways, CIPM training programmes.	HR standards, employment relations, workforce planning, learning and development, performance management, ethics, and professional practice.
People Analytics and HR Metrics	CIPM HR Metrics and Analytics, AIHR, Microsoft Learn, Coursera, internal HR data projects.	HR metrics, data literacy, dashboards, attrition analysis, absenteeism analysis, workforce planning, Power BI, Excel analytics.
Business and Strategic HR	Lagos Business School, internal finance sessions, annual reports, strategy retreats, business-review meetings.	Business models, cost drivers, productivity, value chains, people strategy, commercial decision-making, performance culture.
Data Visualisation and Power BI	Microsoft Learn Power BI learning paths, Coursera Microsoft Power BI Data Analyst Professional Certificate.	Data modelling, visualisation, dashboard building, DAX basics, data storytelling, management reporting. Microsoft Learn provides structured Power BI paths for modelling, visualising, and analysing data.
Digital and AI Literacy	NITDA National Digital Literacy Framework, 3MTT, Microsoft Learn, Google digital-skills resources, internal digital-transformation projects.	Digital workflows, HR automation, AI use cases, digital adoption, responsible technology use, digital capability planning. The 3MTT programme is designed to build Nigeria's technical talent base and includes applied learning clusters and stakeholder partnerships.

Where HR Professionals Can Learn

Capability Area	Learning Sources	What HR Professionals Should Learn
Risk, Compliance and Data Protection	NDPC resources, Nigeria Data Protection Act 2023, internal audit, compliance teams, legal teams.	Employee data governance, lawful processing, policy documentation, conduct risk, audit readiness, HR records management.
Project and Change Management	PMI resources, internal PMO exposure, transformation projects, Agile learning pathways.	Project planning, stakeholder mapping, benefits realisation, risk registers, implementation cadence, adoption measurement. PMI describes the PMP certification as evidence of project leadership expertise across predictive, hybrid, and agile ways of working.
Sector Literacy	Regulators, annual reports, industry associations, customer complaints, operations dashboards, board papers.	Sector economics, value chains, regulatory priorities, customer expectations, workforce risks, scarce skills, productivity constraints.

HR professionals should also learn from internal organisational evidence. Finance reports reveal workforce cost and productivity pressure. Audit reports expose control gaps and documentation weaknesses. Customer complaints reveal behavioural and service failures. Exit interviews reveal retention risks and leadership weaknesses. Performance data reveals capability gaps and role-performance mismatches. Board papers reveal strategic priorities and institutional anxieties. These internal sources help HR professionals locate the organisation's true Loss Frontier.

The Six-Month Composite Capability Challenge for HR Professionals

The practical challenge is straightforward:

Within six months, every HR professional should deliberately add one adjacent capability to their HR expertise and apply it to one institutional loss that matters.

Month	Action	Expected Output
Month 1: Diagnose the Loss Frontier	Identify one institutional loss affecting your organisation or sector: turnover, absenteeism, weak supervision, compliance exposure, low productivity, poor engagement, skills gaps, slow recruitment, poor onboarding, or weak execution.	A one-page loss statement showing the issue, consequence, affected stakeholders, and value at risk.
Month 2: Select One Adjacent Capability	Choose one complementary capability that will help HR address the issue: analytics, finance, digital HR, project management, risk, organisation design, industrial relations, or sector knowledge.	A clear composite capability goal, such as "HR + People Analytics for retention intelligence."
Month 3: Learn Deliberately	Take a course, join a professional programme, study internal reports, shadow another department, or learn a tool.	Certificate, learning notes, digital tool competence, or documented learning portfolio.
Month 4: Build a Practical Artefact	Create something useful: dashboard, policy review, workforce plan, skills matrix, retention analysis, onboarding redesign, performance scorecard, supervisor toolkit, or manpower cost model.	A practical HR artefact that addresses the selected loss.
Month 5: Apply It in a Real Context	Test the artefact with a department, manager, project team, leadership group, or HR process.	Feedback, early results, revised model, and stakeholder response.
Month 6: Present Evidence of Value	Document what changed, what risk reduced, what cost became visible, what decision improved, or what capability was strengthened.	A two-page evidence brief for management, portfolio, or professional review.

The Six-Month Composite Capability Challenge for HR Professionals

Examples of six-month projects include a recruitment officer building a time-to-fill and quality-of-hire dashboard; an employee relations officer developing a grievance and disciplinary-risk register; an L&D officer linking training interventions to departmental capability gaps; a compensation officer building a pay-competitiveness and retention-risk analysis; an HR business partner developing a manpower-cost and productivity model; and a Head of HR presenting a people-risk and capability-readiness report to executive management.

The discipline is application. Composite capability becomes valuable when it produces evidence.

Conclusion: From HR Competence to Future-Ready Influence

HR professionals occupy a strategic position in institutional life because people, work, capability, culture, performance, conduct, and leadership shape nearly every organisational outcome. Future-ready influence will grow where HR professionals can translate people capability into institutional advantage.

Composite capability provides the development pathway. It asks HR professionals to protect the integrity of their core discipline and then strengthen that discipline with analytics, finance, technology, governance, organisation design, project execution, and sector intelligence. It encourages HR professionals to study institutional loss, select complementary competencies, build evidence, and move closer to decisions that shape value.

The future of HR influence belongs to professionals who can reduce important losses, improve the quality of decisions, and help institutions build the capability required for sustainable performance.

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His work translates complex workforce and institutional issues into teachable, usable and decision-oriented tools for leaders, professionals, boards and organisations. His consulting orientation is evidence-led, diagnostic-driven and judgment-centred, with emphasis on decision quality, execution discipline, risk reduction, institutional credibility and sustainable performance.

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