

Lessons from the 2009 HRPS Conference in Tucson

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Lessons from Tucson

Highlights from annual HRPS conference in Arizona

Future tough to predict but we can be ready

By Suanne Nielsen

I recently participated in a forum of HR executives to explore the impact of the economic crisis on our organizations as well as the implications for HR leaders. To set the context, we leveraged Boston Consulting Group's (BCG) thought leadership in this area. In its Collateral Damage series, introduced at the HRPS conference in Tucson, Ariz., BCG offered a viewpoint on the background to the current troubles, analysis of actions being taken by governments and others and likely economic recovery scenarios. As well, BCG put forth a set of urgent HR topics gleaned from research.

The executive forum considered how HR agendas would need to be shaped to support three economic recovery scenarios:

- "V-shaped" — a brief downturn in 2009 followed by a quick recovery.
- "U-shaped" — the recession lasts until 2010 and has deep impacts.
- "L-shaped" — a long downturn until 2011 with slow recovery in 2012.

Most interesting were the common themes that emerged across all economic recovery scenarios:

Leadership matters: There is no more important time for leaders than during a crisis — they provide a vision for where the organization is heading, steer it and communicate through a period of uncertainty and change. Developing leadership capabilities at this juncture is critical, regardless of the economic outcome.

Know your talent: Whether it's adjusting the workforce to align to changes in demand and supply, or acquiring or divesting of businesses, an improved understanding of the talent required and where it does or doesn't exist today is essential to making the right people decisions.

Understand your business: Linked closely with understanding talent is recognizing the drivers of the business. When HR is faced with making choices about the correct business actions to take, data is crucial. Converting data to information will guide us in aligning people decisions so the right people are doing the right things in the right locations.

None of us can predict how the future will unfold. However, we can take actions to prepare our organizations, and ourselves as HR leaders, for a period of continued uncertainty.

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