

# What's HR's Role in Change Management?

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Is human resources (HR) the organizational function that must lead when dealing with organizational change?

Or is managing change a fundamental leadership competency that a wide array of people from every function should have or develop? If that's the case, should HR professionals themselves try to be change agents?

**What works best in organizations that are dealing with a particularly turbulent business environment?**

These are a few of the questions that I had the pleasure of discussing last week in a lively conversation in Cincinnati with [Jenna Filipkowski](#), who is the director of research at the Human Capital Institute (HCI). She's planning some research targeted at these and related questions, so I encourage you to be on the lookout for that given its relevance for today's HR professional.

**But in the meantime, I think that we have some insight that's useful to consider regarding the role of HR in dealing with organizational change.**

Namely, if we look at the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) Competency Model ([download a full copy if you're curious](#)), what does it include regarding change and the related concept of agility?

The SHRM Competency Model is a detailed, researched-based description of the nine categories of competencies required of today's HR professional. It includes sub-competencies, related behaviors and a whole lot more. Below, I summarize what the SHRM Competency Model includes related to (1) change and (2) agility.

## **Change and the SHRM Competency Model**

The word "change" or "changing" appears 19 times in the full SHRM Competency model. Here's a summary of those mentions.



- 1 Within the competency of “Human Resource Expertise,” one of the sub-competencies is “change management.” In that same competency, one of the proficiency standards for mid-level HR professionals is “Implements change based on proven change-management techniques” as is “Interprets both policies and changes to policy” and “Recommends policy changes to support business needs.” Clearly, change management appears to be part of what HR professionals need to know and practice, at least at the mid-level of one’s HR career.
- 2 Within the competency of “Consultation,” one of the example behaviors of those who exhibit the highest level of proficiency is “Generates specific organizational interventions (e.g., culture change, change management, restructuring, training, etc.) to support organizational objectives.”
- 3 “Change management” also appears as a sub-competency within the “Leadership & Navigation” competency, with an associated behavior of “Serves as a transformational leader for the organization by leading change.” This also appears as a proficiency standard for mid-level HR professionals within this competency, listed as “Supports

critical large-scale organizational changes.” At the senior level within this competency, a proficient HR professional according to SHRM “Serves as a change agent for the organization,” and at the executive level, he or she “Identifies the need for and facilitates strategic organizational change,” “Oversees critical large-scale organizational changes with the support of business leaders,” “Ensures appropriate accountability for the implementation of plans and change initiatives,” “Sets tone for maintaining or changing organizational culture” and “Gains buy-in for organizational change across senior leadership with agility.”

- 4 Finally, within the competency of “Critical Evaluation,” an associated behavior is “Assesses the impact of changes to law on organizational human resource management functions,” and a proficiency standard at the senior level is “Creates and/or dissects organizational issues, changes, or opportunities.”

Taken together, it appears that dealing with or managing or leading change is an important part of what HR leaders should be doing, at least according to the SHRM Competency Model. But what about agility?

### **Agility and the SHRM Competency Model**

Agility, which I typically define as the ability to sense and respond quickly to the forces of change, is an increasingly talked-about topic. For example, McKinsey Quarterly recently devoted its cover and three associated articles to agility ([click here for more](#)).



In the SHRM Competency Model, “agility” appears three times.

First, within the competency of “Leadership & Navigation,” an associated behavior listed is “Demonstrates agility and expertise when leading organizational initiatives or when supporting the initiatives of others.”

Next, as quoted above, an executive-level proficiency standard within “Leadership & Navigation” is “Gains buy-in for organizational change across senior leadership with agility.”

Finally, “Strategic Agility” is listed as a sub-competency within the overall competency of “Business Acumen.”

Beyond that, agility does not seem to appear within the SHRM Competency Model. But that by no means indicates that the SHRM Competency Model doesn’t value the concept of agility—

particularly if you tend to see agility as a fundamental part of being good at all of the other areas related to change more broadly. **In fact, it could be argued that “HR agility” is at the root of all of many if not all of the HR competencies related to change and change management.** What we do know for certain is that the ever-evolving world of organizations requires HR to continue to evolve as well.

It’s also clear that professionals in HR and talent management have an increasingly relevant opportunity to be agile leaders, and I’m looking forward to see what that continues to mean and look like for the HR profession. On that note, I’ll be joining other HR professionals at the **2016 Human Capital Summit in New Orleans, March 29-30**. The theme of that conference is “Agile Talent Strategies for Managing Change and Shifting Priorities,” and I’d love to see you there. [Click here for more about the conference.](#)

**Should HR professionals be change agents? Or does that belong elsewhere in the organization? How should HR professionals deal with their profession as it changes? Leave a comment below!**

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