THE SUNDAY TIMES OF MALTA

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 18, 2026

TRAINING & CAREERS



- HR Lead: FHRD Annual Conference
- Powering strategy through people

FHRD

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WELCOME

Leading the future: HR as the engine of strategy

Earlier this year, fintech company Bolt sparked global debate when its CEO, Ryan Breslow, defended the decision to eliminate the company's HR department. Speaking at Fortune's Workforce Innovation Summit, Breslow stated: "We had an HR team, and that HR team was creating problems that didn't exist. Those problems disappeared when I let them go."

He went on to argue that traditional HR was "the wrong energy, format, and approach," replacing it with a leaner People Operations model focused on efficiency and managerial accountability.

Unsurprisingly, these remarks triggered widespread debate across the HR community. While the immediate impulse might be to brush them aside or waiting for the tide to turn, they offer a valuable opportunity to pause and confront a more uncomfortable question: what if Bolt's CEO actually has a point?

WHAT IS HR ACTUALLY FOR?

The answer to that question has never been more important.

If the role of human resources in your organisation is limited to administration, compliance, policies, and processes, then leadership may reasonably question how much of that work can be automated, digitised, or absorbed elsewhere. However, if HR exists to forecast future workforce needs, build organisational resilience and align talent with business strategy, then its value extends far beyond administration.

This is where the distinction between operational HR and strategic HR becomes critical.

Strategic HR looks well beyond filling vacancies or enforcing policies. Instead, it ensures that organisations have the leadership, talent, culture and capabilities required to deliver their long-term objectives. It prepares businesses not just for today's operational friction, but also for tomorrow's strategic opportunities.

Increasingly, this also means using workforce data and evidence-based insights to anticipate future capability needs, identify emerging risks and support evidence-based decision-making. Some of the world's most successful organisations have already recognised this strategic shift and take important decisions based on informed insights. Microsoft's transformation under Satya Nadella is often cited as one of the most significant corporate turnarounds of recent decades. Whilst the company invested heavily in technology and innovation, a major part of its success was driven by cultural transformation.

Similarly, Boeing's efforts to recover from years of safety, quality, and operational challenges have highlighted the importance of culture, leadership accountability, employee voice, and organisational trust. What initially appeared to be a technical and operational issue evolved into a broader discussion about workplace culture and leadership behaviours.

The common thread is clear: people challenges are no longer isolated HR issues. They are core business issues with strategic consequences. They influence organisational performance, innovation, customer experience and long term competitiveness.

THE MALTESE CONTEXT

This observation is equally relevant in Malta. Whilst much has been said about HR becoming a strategic partner, many HR professionals would acknowledge that the journey is still ongoing.

In some organisations, Human Resources remains excluded from key commercial discussions while at board level decisions are being taken on workforce capability, succession planning and organisational culture. In others, people responsibilities continue to sit predominantly within finance, operations or administration. Some local business leaders are even questioning whether a dedicated HR function is necessary at all.

Yet the realities facing Maltese organisations suggest otherwise. Malta operates in one of the tightest labour markets in Europe, with employment rates significantly above the EU average and unemployment remaining comparatively low. At the same time, employers continue to report talent shortages and skills mismatches as some of their most significant business challenges. For many organisations, growth is no longer constrained by market demand but by their ability to secure and retain the talent needed to support expansion.

Additionally, Malta's workforce has undergone a remarkable transformation over the past decade. Today, approximately four in ten workers are non-Maltese, creating increasingly diverse, multicultural, and internationally mobile workplaces. Successfully integrating and engaging such a workforce requires strong leadership, inclusive cultures and thoughtful employee experiences. These are not administrative tasks; they are strategic necessities.

REDEFINING THE ENGINE

Let's be clear, AI and automation are already transforming traditional HR tasks. On this point, Ryan Breslow is right. The future does not belong to traditional administrative HR. Routine processes and bureaucratic procedures will continue to shrink and technology will handle the heavy lifting.



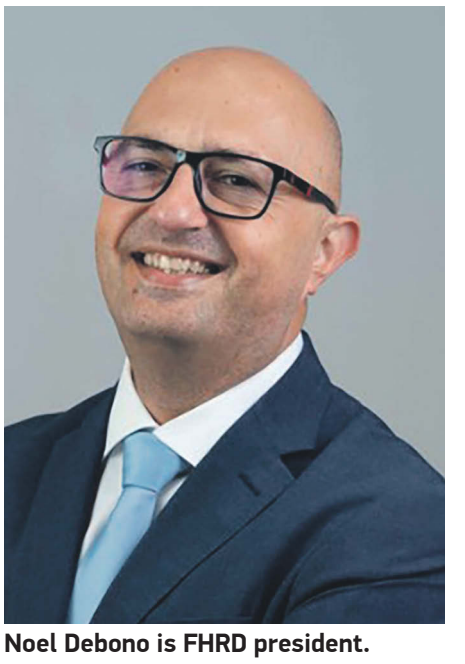
In a rapidly changing world, human resources has a strategic role to play in the shaping and enabling a resilient culture delivered through people. PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

However, assuming that technology renders HR less relevant fundamentally misunderstands the shift taking place. As manual administration is automated, the high-value core of HR comes into sharp focus. Areas like leadership succession, change management, employee experience, and strategic workforce design aren't just administrative duties. They are the foundational capabilities that dictate long-term business success.

The debate sparked by Bolt therefore misses a crucial point. The question is not whether organisations need less HR, it is whether they need more strategic HR.

Because, the organisations that lead the future will not necessarily be those with the largest budgets, the most advanced technology, or the most impressive business plans. They will be the organisations that can attract exceptional talent, cultivate resilient cultures and align human capability with their business ambitions.

And in such a rapidly changing world, human resources has a strategic role to play in the shaping and enabling a resilient culture delivered through people.



Noel Debono is FHRD president.

Organisations may invest in technology, capital and innovation, but their ability to succeed will always depend on the capability, commitment and leadership of their people. That is why, Human Resources can no longer operate as a function that merely supports strategy, it must become the engine that drives it.

PEOPLE

Is mentoring still a valuable investment?


Mentoring may be becoming more important, not less. PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

At the touch of a screen, we can now learn almost anything. A video can demonstrate a process. An AI assistant can offer an immediate answer. Courses and webinars can help us build a new skill before the working day is over.

Learning has never been more accessible. Yet this progress raises an uncomfortable question: if knowledge is available on demand, is mentoring still worth the investment?

My answer is yes. In fact, mentoring may be becoming more important, not less. AI makes learning faster and more accessible. Mentoring helps people interpret it, challenge assumptions and apply it within their organisation, relationships and career.

TALENT NEEDS A MENTOR, BUT ORGANISATIONS NEED PROOF

Every organisation invests in talent, but few ask a critical question: how do we know those investments are paying off? Mentoring is often viewed as a good thing to do, yet strong programmes show that it can deliver measurable business value. A longitudinal study carried out, on mentoring, from Sun Microsystems found that mentored employees were promoted more often than non-participants. Retention reached 69 to 72 per cent, compared with 49 per cent outside the programme. The organisation estimated approximately $6.7 million in avoided turnover costs and returns exceeding 1,000 per cent.

Not every programme will produce identical results. But with clear purpose, thoughtful matching, capable mentors and opportunities to apply learning, mentoring can support retention, readiness and stronger leadership.

Think of an athlete with access to performance data and video analysis. No serious team concludes that information removes the need for mentoring by the coach. A coach helps the player interpret what they see, learn from mistakes and perform under pressure. The workplace is no different. A mentor turns information into judgment, feedback into action and potential into performance.

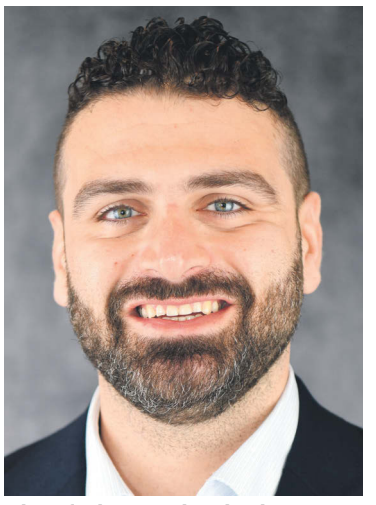
THE GREATEST BARRIER TO GROWTH MAY BE CERTAINTY

One of the biggest challenges in professional development is not what we do not know, but what we become convinced we already know. Imagine an employee who believes their manager does not support their career growth. Once that conclusion is formed, confirmation bias can take over. A delayed reply becomes evidence. A postponed meeting becomes proof. Critical feedback confirms a story that may or may not be accurate.

> *These questions encourage self-awareness and responsibility*

Technology can unintentionally reinforce this pattern. If we present only one side of a situation, an AI tool will respond to the information it receives. It may provide a useful answer without exposing the assumptions hidden inside the question.

A strong mentor creates different value by asking questions such as: Could there be another explanation? Have you communicated your expectations clearly? What part of this situation is within your control? These questions encourage self-awareness and responsibility. Often, growth begins by seeing a familiar situation differently.


Sherif Sleiman leads the HR teams across EMEA & APAC regions at Baxter Healthcare and is vice president, FHRD.

The same applies to leadership development. Telling someone to improve stakeholder management may create awareness. Inviting them to lead an important meeting, helping them prepare and reflecting with them afterwards creates growth. Effective mentoring connects advice with experience, feedback and action.

WHEN GOOD INTENTIONS ARE NOT ENOUGH

Mentoring is not automatically effective simply because it is human. Poorly managed relationships can involve misuse of power, mismatch, limited support, misaligned expectations or mentor absence. A mentor may also impose personal preferences, promote outdated thinking or create dependence while believing they are helping.

There is a lesser-known risk too: over-mentoring. Too much advice can be as limiting as too little. If every decision requires validation, confidence and independence can decline. Development becomes discussion rather than action.

Great mentoring should evolve. As capability grows, the mentor moves from guide to sounding board, creating space for ownership and experience. The question shifts from "Here is what I would do" to "You have considered the options. What do you think is right, and what will you learn from it?" Successful mentoring is measured not by how much advice is given, but by how much judgment, confidence and independence it creates.

SO, WHAT IS THE REAL RETURN?

The return on mentoring is not simply the number of meetings held. Nor is it the satisfaction of having been given good advice. The return appears when an employee stays rather than leaves, becomes ready for an opportunity sooner, makes a stronger decision, shares critical knowledge, develops another person, or avoids repeating an expensive organisational mistake.

AI can strengthen that return. It can broaden access to information, help employees prepare, identify patterns and free mentors from being treated as search engines. Mentors can then focus on the areas where human experience matters most: context, courage, ethics, relationships, self-awareness and judgment.

Technology without human reflection can produce speed without wisdom. Mentoring without openness to new technology can produce experience without relevance. Poor mentoring can constrain growth. Over-mentoring can weaken independence. Unquestioned AI can create a similar dependence in a different form.

The future of development therefore belongs neither to the mentor alone nor to the machine alone. It belongs to people who know how to use both without surrendering responsibility to either. Perhaps that is the real investment. We should not use AI to avoid thinking, and we should not use mentors to think on our behalf. We should use both to become better thinkers ourselves.

The final measure of a mentor, and perhaps of AI too, is not how many answers they provide. It is how capable we become when they are no longer in the room.

References:

Dickinson, K., Jankot, T., & Gracon, H. (2009). Sun Mentoring: 1996–2009. Sun Microsystems Laboratories Technical Report.

Allen, T. D., Eby, L. T., Poteet, M. L., Lentz, E., & Lima, L. (2004). "Career Benefits Associated with Mentoring for Protégés: A Meta-Analysis." Journal of Applied Psychology, 89(1), 127-136.

LEADERSHIP

How can leaders inspire a high-performance culture?



High-performance cultures are built on trust, and trust grows when leaders demonstrate authenticity, communicate transparently and behave consistently, especially when facing difficult decisions. PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM. Inset: Ediana Guillaumier is Senior Manager, People Consulting and Learning at EY Malta and Secretary General, FHRD

High-performance cultures do not happen by chance. They are intentionally shaped by leaders who create trust, provide direction and enable people to succeed. While strategy defines where an organisation wants to go, culture ultimately determines whether it gets there.

For many organisations, performance has traditionally been measured through targets and outcomes. While these remain important, sustainable high performance is increasingly influenced by something less tangible but equally critical: the environment leaders create for their people. Culture is more than a reflection of organisational values; it is a strategic enabler that drives engagement, innovation, collaboration and execution.

At the heart of every high-performance culture lies trust. High-performance cultures are built on trust, and trust grows when leaders demonstrate authenticity, communicate transparently and behave consistently, especially when facing difficult decisions. Employees look to leaders not only for direction, but also for confidence, clarity and reassurance.

Recent findings from EY's Work Reimagined Survey highlight a disconnect between what organisations believe employees value and what employees actually experience. Beyond compensation, employees are increasingly seeking trust, flexibility, meaningful work and opportunities for growth. As a result, leaders must do more than set objectives and monitor performance. They must create environments where people feel valued, supported and empowered to perform at their best.

Inspiring a high-performance culture is therefore not about driving results through authority alone. It starts with three critical leadership priorities: building trust and psychological safety, creating purpose and alignment, and developing talent and adaptability. Together, these elements create the foundation for cultures that deliver strong performance today while remaining resilient and future-ready.

TRUST: THE FOUNDATION OF HIGH PERFORMANCE

Every high-performing culture is built on trust.

Trust influences how people collaborate, communicate and respond to challenges. It determines whether employees feel comfortable sharing ideas, questioning assumptions and speaking openly when something is not working.

In contrast, environments characterised by fear, excessive control or unclear expectations often lead to reduced innovation, lower engagement and slower decision-making.

Trust does not require leaders to have all the answers. In fact, today's workforce increasingly values authenticity over perfection. Employees want leaders who are transparent, approachable and consistent in their actions. They want to understand why decisions are being made and how those decisions affect them.

Research supports the importance of these leadership behaviours. According to the EY 2025 Work Reimagined Survey, 60% of employees reported that workplace culture had improved over the previous twelve months, with factors such as caring leaders, supportive employers and stronger team connections playing a critical role in shaping organisational culture.

Trust is not established through a single initiative or communication campaign. It is built gradually through everyday interactions. It grows when leaders listen. It grows when commitments are honoured. Most importantly, it grows when employees feel respected and valued.

When trust is present, people are more willing to take ownership, collaborate effectively and contribute discretionary effort. This is where exceptional performance begins.

PURPOSE: GIVING MEANING TO PERFORMANCE

People want to understand how their work contributes to something bigger than their individual tasks or responsibilities. They want to see how their efforts create value for customers, colleagues, communities and the organisation as a whole.

Purpose has become increasingly important in a workforce where employees are seeking more than just financial rewards. People are looking for meaningful work, career fulfilment and a sense of contribution.

The most effective leaders understand this. They do not simply communicate organisational objectives; they help people connect emotionally with them. They explain not only what needs to be achieved but why it matters.

In organisations with a strong sense of purpose, employees are often more resilient during periods of change because they understand the rationale behind transformation initiatives. They are more willing to embrace new ways of working because they can see how these changes contribute to long-term success.

This is particularly important given current talent market dynamics. EY's 2024 Work Reimagined Survey found that 38% of employees globally indicated they were likely to leave their employer within the next year, with employees increasingly prioritising career growth, wellbeing, leadership quality and meaningful work experiences.

Leaders cannot take commitment for granted. They must continually reinforce purpose and create a clear line of sight between individual contributions and organisational success.

When people believe in what they are doing, performance becomes more than an obligation. It becomes a source of motivation.

DEVELOPING TALENT: PREPARING PEOPLE FOR THE FUTURE

The pace of change means that skills acquired today may need to be refreshed tomorrow. Organisations therefore need cultures in which learning is not viewed as a separate activity but as an integral part of work itself.

The leaders who will thrive in the years ahead are those who create environments where curiosity is encouraged, learning is continuous and development opportunities are accessible to everyone.

This challenge has become even more relevant with the rapid advancement of artificial intelligence. According to EY's 2024 Work Reimagined Survey, workplace use of generative AI increased dramatically from 22% in 2023 to 75% in 2024. The research also found a strong relationship between AI adoption and employee development, with employees using AI reporting stronger learning and training experiences.

TECHNOLOGY ALONE DOES NOT DRIVE TRANSFORMATION. PEOPLE DO

Organisations often invest heavily in systems and tools while underestimating the importance of developing the capabilities needed to use them effectively. Successful leaders recognise that long-term performance depends on continually equipping people with the skills, confidence and support required to navigate change.

They prioritise coaching over command-and-control management. They create opportunities for experimentation and growth. They understand that investing in people is not a cost but a strategic necessity.

Perhaps most importantly, they understand that today's employees want to work in organisations that invest in their future.

LEADERSHIP ULTIMATELY SHAPES CULTURE

Employees pay far less attention to mission statements than they do to daily leadership behaviours. Every conversation, decision and interaction sends a signal about what is truly valued.

The most successful leaders understand that inspiring a high-performance culture is not about demanding more from people. It is about creating an environment where people can achieve more than they thought possible.

By building trust, creating a sense of purpose and investing in the development of talent, leaders create the conditions that allow both individuals and organisations to thrive.

As organisations continue to navigate uncertainty and transformation, those that succeed will not necessarily be those with the largest budgets or the most advanced technology. They will be those that recognise a simple but powerful truth: high-performance cultures are created by leaders who put people at the centre of their strategy.

TECH

AI and human judgement – Can the two co-exist?

Across organisations, artificial intelligence (AI) is increasingly being used to analyse information, identify patterns, support recruitment, assess workforce needs and inform critical decisions. In HR in particular, technology can process applications at remarkable speed, surface emerging skills gaps and generate insights from volumes of data that would be impossible for an individual to assess manually. The efficiency gains are undeniable, but they raise a fundamental question: as AI becomes more influential in everyday work, what happens to human judgement?

The urgency of this question is reflected in Deloitte's 2026 Global Human Capital Trends research, which surveyed more than 9,000 business and HR leaders across 89 countries. The findings reveal that 60% of executives now regularly use AI to support their decisions. Gartner projects that by 2027, half of business decisions will be augmented or automated by AI agents. Yet despite this rapid adoption, only 5% of organisations consider themselves to be leading the way in AI-enabled decision-making, suggesting a significant gap between deployment and mastery.

The answer lies not in choosing between humans and machines, but in deliberately designing how they work together. Coexistence should not be left to chance.

RETHINKING WORK DESIGN

The real shift is not simply about introducing AI into the workplace, but about rethinking how work gets done so that technology supports people in the right areas, without blurring responsibility or decision-making.

AI can take on the work people are not best placed to do at scale: processing large volumes of information, spotting patterns that might otherwise be missed, and executing repetitive tasks with consistency. If used properly, this gives professionals more time to focus on the work that still depends on human judgement, whether that means having difficult conversations, coaching people, solving complex problems, or making strategic decisions.

But here lies a critical distinction: efficiency should not be confused with judgement. AI operates on information, patterns and models whilst human judgement brings context, interpretation, experience, empathy and an understanding of consequences that cannot always be captured in data.

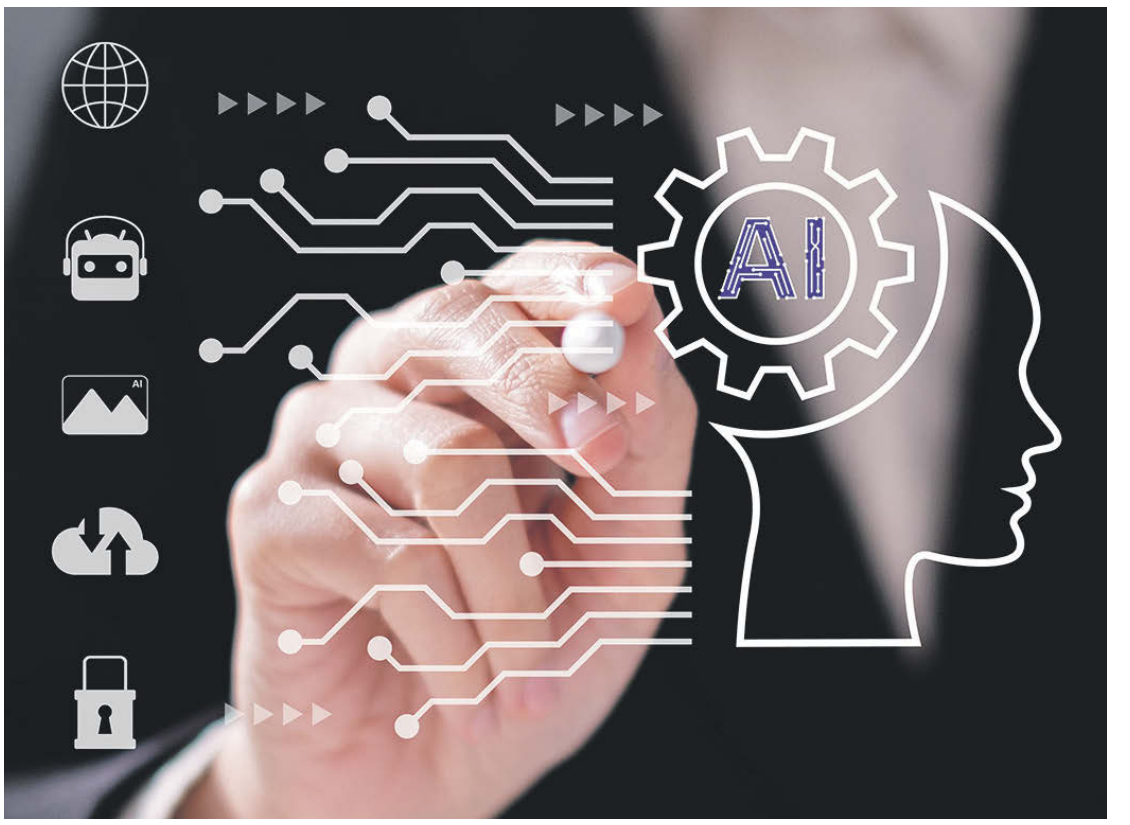
THE LIMITS OF PATTERN RECOGNITION

If we consider recruitment, an AI-enabled system may assess hundreds of applications, compare skills, and identify candidates who appear to match the requirements of a role. That analysis can be highly valuable, but it may not understand why somebody changed careers, whether an unconventional background demonstrates adaptability, or how an individual's potential might translate into a different organisational environment.

> *AI is not free from bias*

The same applies across other HR decisions. AI may identify a high performer as a retention risk or flag changes in workforce behaviour, but it cannot necessarily understand whether someone is disengaged, overwhelmed or simply navigating a temporary period of change. It can highlight the pattern, but it cannot always interpret the reality behind it.

AI is not free from bias, just as human judgement is not free from assumptions, incomplete information or past experience. This challenge is borne out in practice. The 2023 Oracle Decision Dilemma study found that 85% of business leaders regret or question decisions they had made in the past, and 72% say the volume of data and their lack of trust in data has stopped them from making any decision at all. The problem is not too little information, but too much, and insufficient human confidence in how to interpret it.



AI may identify a high performer as a retention risk or flag changes in workforce behaviour, but it cannot necessarily understand whether someone is disengaged, overwhelmed or simply navigating a temporary period of change. PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

COMPLEMENTARY STRENGTHS

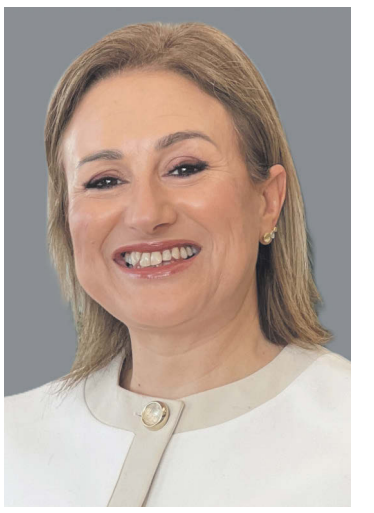
The strongest approach is to use each where it can challenge and strengthen the other. AI excels at pattern recognition, scale and consistency. It can identify correlations humans might miss and apply rules uniformly. Human judgement, by contrast, is contextual, intuitive and values-driven. People can understand motivation, potential and nuance, but they are also prone to cognitive bias, fatigue and snap judgements. AI can challenge human assumptions with evidence, while people can challenge AI outputs with context, experience and ethical reasoning. This balance only works, however, when human oversight is meaningful rather than reduced to routinely approving what the system recommends.

Deloitte's Trustworthy AI research demonstrates the power of this approach: workers who trust the AI agents they work with are 10 times more likely to see those agents as critical to creating value. Trust, therefore, is not a soft outcome, it is a direct driver of business impact.

Organisations need to be explicit about how responsibilities are shared between people and technology. Without this clarity, they risk creating systems where nobody is truly responsible for outcomes.

THE REAL OPPORTUNITY

For organisations in Malta, getting this balance right is increasingly important. AI can improve productivity and help organisations move faster, but its real value will depend on how thoughtfully it is integrated into the way people work and make decisions. The organisations that benefit most will be those that use AI to support better decisions, while keeping human judgement, context and accountability at the centre.



Claudine Attard is Director Strategy, Risk & Transactions Advisory at Deloitte Malta and an FHRD Board Member.

In practical terms, the answer is not to choose between AI and human judgement, but to find the right balance between the two. What will matter most is how well organisations bring the strengths of both together and create a way of working in which technology supports human judgement rather than replaces it. That is the real opportunity ahead.

HR/NEWS

The next generation of HR professionals: The top five skills they will need



As technology takes over routine tasks, the human side of HR becomes more important, not less. PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

Not long ago, HR was seen largely as the department of policies, payroll queries and compliance. Those things still matter, but they no longer define us. Today, people functions sit at the centre of how organisations respond to automation, changing expectations of work and a labour market where skills age quickly. Employers surveyed for the World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs Report 2025 expect almost two-fifths (39%) of workers' existing skills to be transformed or become outdated by 2030.

The next generation of HR professionals will inherit a profession with more influence than it has ever had, and more scrutiny. To earn a seat at the table, and to keep it, they will need a different toolkit. Having worked across HR, learning and development and leadership, I believe five skills will set the best apart.

1. Digital and data fluency

HR can no longer rely on instinct alone. Leaders expect us to explain why people leave, where capability gaps sit and what an investment in learning actually returns. That means being comfortable with HR systems, dashboards and, increasingly, artificial intelligence. The same WEF report ranks AI and big data as the fastest-growing skills of all.

Fluency does not mean becoming a data scientist. It means asking the right questions of the data, spotting the story behind a trend and presenting it in language a board understands. It also means using AI responsibly: knowing where it saves time, such as visualising data or drafting, and where human judgement must stay firmly in charge. The HR professional who can turn numbers into decisions will always be heard.

2. Coaching and empowering others

I believe deeply in employee empowerment, and I see it as one of the most practical skills HR can develop. Empowerment is not a slogan; it is a set of behaviours. It means giving people the context, trust and authority to make decisions, then supporting them when things go wrong.

The next generation of HR professionals should be coaches first and gatekeepers second. Rather than solving every problem for a manager, they help that manager find the answer and build the confidence to act. Asking open questions, listening properly and holding people accountable without micromanaging are skills that multiply. Gallup research shows managers account for 70% of the variance in team engagement, yet Gallup's 2026 State of the Global Workplace report found only 22% of managers engaged. Every manager who learns to coach becomes a stronger leader, and the culture shifts with them.

Lead beyond the tools: Business leadership for the AI era at GBSB Global

Malta has transformed artificial intelligence into a national resource. Since May, citizens and residents who have completed the complimentary "AI for Everyone" literacy course have been able to claim a year of ChatGPT Plus or Microsoft 365 Copilot free of charge. When everyone has access to the same tools, the advantage shifts to those who decide how to use them.

WHY LEADERSHIP, WHY NOW

For founders, CEOs, and HR leaders, AI raises questions that no software can answer on its own: Which processes should be redesigned? Which skills should be developed? How can teams be kept engaged as their roles change?

At GBSB Global Business School, we treat AI as a leadership discipline rather than an IT add-on. Technology is integrated into all of our programs at the Birkirkara campus, from the bachelor's to MBA.

The same applies to working professionals. Our short courses for 2027, taught in Malta and online, range from strategic human resource management to digital HR tech and tools. We design executive programs for companies around their own skill gaps and deliver them in person or online format.

FROM IDEA TO IMPACT

Good decisions are learned by making them. This year, our G-Accelerator Impact Call Malta, run in collaboration with the Malta Digital Innovation Authority (MDIA), selected early-stage ventures in healthcare, education, biodiversity, construction, and digital transformation. The program connected the ventures' founders with GBSB Global's international mentor network.

Whether we are working with a student, manager, or founder, our goal remains the same: to develop individuals who can anticipate change and respond with confidence.

Lead beyond the tools. Discover GBSB Global at www.global-business-school.org





3. A learning mindset, and the ability to build one in others

The WEF estimates that if the world's workforce were 100 people, 59 would need training by 2030. HR professionals therefore carry a double responsibility: to invest continuously in their own professional growth, and to build organisations where learning is part of everyday work rather than an annual training calendar.

That means designing upskilling and reskilling pathways linked to real business needs, making it easy for people to learn on the job, and recognising those who grow. It also means role modelling curiosity. If HR teams are not visibly developing their own capabilities, through qualifications, mentoring or projects outside their comfort zone, it is hard to ask the rest of the organisation to do so. A culture of learning starts with the people who champion it.

4. Commercial and business acumen

The most effective HR professionals understand how their organisation makes money, what keeps the CEO awake at night and how people decisions affect the bottom line.

Future HR leaders should be as comfortable discussing customer experience, operational efficiency or competition as they are discussing engagement scores. They should be able to connect a retention plan to revenue, or a leadership programme to performance. When HR speaks the language of the business, it stops being a support function and becomes a strategic partner.

5. Courage, ethics and human judgement

As technology takes over routine tasks, the human side of HR becomes more important, not less. Difficult conversations, fair decisions and sensitive cases cannot be automated. They require empathy, integrity and the courage to challenge senior leaders when something is not right.

The next generation will face complex questions: how to use employee data ethically, how to support wellbeing without overstepping, and how to ensure fairness when algorithms influence decisions. They will need a strong moral compass and the confidence to use it. Trust is HR's most valuable currency, and it is earned through consistent, principled behaviour.

Investing in tomorrow's HR leaders

None of these skills develop by chance. Organisations, educators and professional bodies such as the FHRD all have a role in giving emerging HR talent the exposure, mentoring and learning opportunities they need. As experienced practitioners, we can open doors and give younger colleagues exposure and a safe space to thrive in.

The future of HR is not about choosing between technology and humanity. It is about combining both. If we empower the next generation to learn, lead and act with courage, they will not simply keep pace with change; they will shape it.



Stephanie Cacopardo Busuttil is Head of People and Culture at Melita Ltd and an FHRD Board Member.



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EVENT

HR·LEAD
Powering Strategy
Through People.

Conference Agenda

FHRD Annual HR
Conference & Expo 2026

23 October 2026
Hilton Conference Centre

Time	Venue	Item
08.15 hrs	**Conference Centre Foyer**	**Registration and Coffee**
09.15 hrs	Grandmaster Suite	Welcome Speech: Leading the Future: HR as the Engine of Strategy **Noel Debono**, FHRD President
09.30 hrs	Grandmaster Suite	Keynote 1: The Power of People: Building and Sustaining High Performance Cultures **Jane Sparrow**, Culture, Change and High Performance Author & Expert | Founder and Managing Director - The Culture Builders
10.00 hrs	Grandmaster Suite	Keynote 2: Who's Flying the Plane? Leading with Data, AI, and Human Judgment **Amit Grinvald**, Keynote Speaker & Leadership Communication Strategist
10.30 hrs	Grandmaster Suite	HR Quality Mark: Presentation of Certificates & Mementos 9th Intake
10.45 hrs	**Spinola Suite**	**Coffee Break & Expo**
11.30 hrs	Grandmaster Suite	**WORKSHOPS** (to choose 1): W/S 1: Rethink, Rebuild, Lead: HR Strategy for a New World of Work **Elli Matsouka**, Strategic Advisor | Executive & Team Coach - Elli & Co
	Vilhena Suite	W/S 2: Strategic HR Leadership: Turning People Insights Into Business Impact **Mariella Galea**, Founder and Principal HR Consultant - HR TalentLEAD
	Pinto Suite	W/S 3: Leading Anywhere: Adaptive Leadership for Hybrid, Remote & Global Teams **Daniel Cassar**, Organisational Psychologist | Leadership Consultant | Founder of Endeavour

Time	Venue	Item
12.15 hrs	Grandmaster Suite	Panel Discussion: The Strategic HR Engine: Powering Business Through People, Culture & Technology **Moderator** → **Vanessa Camenzuli**, Employer Brand & Communications Strategist **Pannellists** → **Karen Spiteri Bailey**, Managing Partner - RSM Malta → **Rachael Blackburn**, Head of Culture - APS Bank plc → **Konrad Cassar Naudi**, International Training | Management Consultant → **Dr Paul Gonzi**, Partner: Head Employment - Fenech & Fenech Advocates → **Dasha Kosse**, Fractional L&D Strategist & Leadership Coach (ICF PCC) | Founder, DaKo Coaching → **Robert Peplow**, Human Resources Manager - Attard Bros Group
13.00 hrs	**Spinola Suite**	**Networking Lunch and Expo**
14.20 hrs	Grandmaster Suite	Conference Energizer by TeamBuilding Malta
14.40 hrs	Grandmaster Suite	Keynote 3: Leading Through Change: Courage, Capability, and Human-Centred Innovation **Dr Rosa M. Colón-Kolacko**, MBA, CDM, SHRM-SCP President and Founder of Global Equity and Learning Partners | NeedsHuman and University Professor
15.15 hrs	Grandmaster Suite	**WORKSHOPS** (to choose 1) W/S 4: Inclusion by Design: Fixing the Systems Behind How Work Gets Done **Natalia Perkowska**, Talent Acquisition & People Operations Expert and Head of Events & Business Travel - SOFTSWISS
	Vilhena Suite	W/S 5: Securing Buy-In from Management and Staff: Elevating HR's Strategic Voice **Martin Spiteri Schillig**, Chief Human Resources Officer - Momentum Group | Co-Founder of PerformanceBeat
	Pinto Suite	W/S 6: From Resistance to Resilience: A People-Powered, Appreciative Approach to Positive Change **Mireille Pellegrini Petit**, Positive Psychology Coach, Trainer, and Consultant – Thrive Positive
16.00 hrs	Grandmaster Suite	**WORKSHOPS** (to choose 1) W/S 7: AI Unboxed for HR: From Regulation to Real-Life Results **Session Lead** → **Pamela Mamo**, Director - PwC's Academy Malta **Guest Experts** → **Gavril Flores**, Chief Officer – Strategy, Policy and Governance - Malta Digital Innovation Authority (MDIA) → **Ramona Galea**, Head of People and Culture - Lufthansa Technik Malta → **Dr Danielle Mercieca**, Senior Technology Lawyer - Chetcuti Cauchi Advocates
	Vilhena Suite	W/S 8: The Unbundled Workforce: Rethinking Work in the Age of AI **Dr Elaine Dutton**, Warranted Psychologist | Strategic HR Advisor | Founder & Managing Director of Fractional HR Malta
	Pinto Suite	W/S 9: Thriving at Work: How What We Say – and Don't Say – Shapes Wellbeing and Results **Darine Aboulezz**, Founder & Lead Soft Skills Trainer - Soft Skills Camp
16.40 hrs		Conference End

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CULTURE/NEWS

Bridging cultural differences in multicultural workplaces

The modern workplace is more diverse than ever before. Employees may share the same organisation, objectives and professional standards while bringing very different perspectives on communication, hierarchy, trust, time management, feedback and decision-making. These differences have the potential to become a significant organisational strength, but only when leaders create an environment where diversity leads to collaboration rather than misunderstanding.

Cultural differences rarely appear in dramatic ways. More often, they emerge through everyday workplace interactions. A colleague's directness may be interpreted as efficiency in one culture and as bluntness in another. Silence may signal agreement, careful reflection or hesitation to challenge authority. Some individuals build trust through relationships, while others build it through consistent delivery and performance. Even seemingly simple behaviours such as punctuality, eye contact, personal space, interruptions during conversation and approaches to feedback can carry different meanings depending on cultural background. What feels natural to one person may feel unfamiliar to another.

The goal, however, is not to eliminate these differences. It is to understand them.

One of the most common misconceptions in today's workplace is the belief that a diverse workforce automatically creates an inclusive culture. Diversity brings people together. Inclusion determines whether those people feel respected, valued and able to contribute fully.

Employees are far more engaged when they believe their opinions matter and their perspectives are genuinely considered. When people feel welcomed, heard and appreciated for who they are, they are more willing to share ideas, challenge assumptions and contribute to better decisions.

This is where cultural intelligence becomes increasingly important. Cultural intelligence is not about knowing everything there is to know about every country or culture. It is about remaining curious, adaptable and open to different ways of thinking and working.



Bridging cultural differences is about developing the awareness, humility and trust needed to work effectively across differences. PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM. Inset: Ramona Galea is Head of People and Culture, Lufthansa Technik Malta Limited and an FHRD Board Member.

The most effective leaders are those who avoid making assumptions and instead seek to understand the context behind behaviour. They recognise that culture may influence how people communicate and collaborate, but that every individual is also shaped by their personality, profession, upbringing, education and life experiences. Rather than asking, "Why do people from that culture behave that way?" culturally intelligent leaders ask, "What might I be missing, and how can I help this person thrive and succeed?"

Multicultural workplaces also require a strong shared framework. Inclusion does not mean having different standards for safety, ethics, quality or respect. Those expectations must remain clear and consistent for everyone.

What can and should vary is how leaders communicate, engage and support their teams. A multicultural workforce may be travelling towards the same destination, but different individuals may need different routes to get there.

In practice, this means making expectations explicit rather than assuming everyone interprets situations in the same way. Leaders should clearly explain how decisions are made, how disagreements should be raised, what constitutes an urgent response and how feedback is best delivered. Teams benefit when these norms are discussed openly rather than left to interpretation. Meetings should also create space for different communication styles. Not everyone processes information or contributes ideas in the same way. Providing agendas in advance, allowing time for reflection and following up key discussions in writing can help ensure that every voice has the opportunity to be heard.

As virtual and hybrid working environments continue to grow, these considerations become even more important. Without the benefit of physical presence, body language and contextual cues are often harder to interpret, increasing the risk of misunderstanding. Managers must also learn how to check for understanding in a way that builds confidence rather than embarrassment. Asking someone to repeat instructions may confirm that they heard the words, but not necessarily that they interpreted them in the same way.

Stronger leaders create dialogue by asking questions such as, "How do you see this being implemented?" or "What would your next step be?" These conversations help uncover misunderstandings early while reinforcing mutual respect.

At an organisational level, inclusion cannot rely solely on goodwill. It must be embedded into leadership practices, development programmes, learning opportunities and employee experiences. Organisations that invest in cultural awareness, leadership development, psychological safety and open communication are often better positioned to attract, engage and retain talent from diverse backgrounds. They create environments where people feel comfortable contributing different perspectives without fear of being judged or marginalised.

Ultimately, bridging cultural differences is not about encouraging everyone to think, act or communicate in the same way. It is about developing the awareness, humility and trust needed to work effectively across differences. The strongest multicultural workplaces do more than accommodate diversity. They embrace it as a source of learning, innovation and better decision-making. When people feel understood, respected and included, cultural differences stop being barriers and become one of an organisation's greatest strengths.

Jobsplus Employer Services

Recruitment rarely comes with a standard set of circumstances. A small business looking for its first employee faces different challenges from an established company recruiting at scale. Sometimes an employer needs candidates. At other times, what they need most is simply someone to point them in the right direction.

That is the thinking behind Jobsplus Employer Services, which this year marks ten years since its establishment.

Over the past decade, the team has worked directly with employers across Malta and Gozo, supporting them with recruitment, vacancy advertising, candidate matching, employment schemes and access to the wider range of services offered by Jobsplus.

But ten years of working with employers has also taught us that the service cannot stand still.

Recruitment has changed. Businesses have changed. Expectations around speed, accessibility and digital services have changed too. There is still room to make processes simpler, information clearer and the journey through our services easier. These are improvements we need to keep pursuing.

At the same time, one thing should not change: the value of having a person to speak to.

Employer Services is ultimately about relationships. It is about understanding what each employer needs, whether they are looking to access training, expand their team or find skills that may not be easy to source. The aim is to provide the right support to help keep their business moving.

As we look ahead, the focus is on continuing to improve that experience by making our services simpler and more accessible, while retaining the practical, human support employers have come to expect from us.



After ten years, the message remains a simple one: when you need support, there is a team at Jobsplus you can rely on.

Get in touch by email at er.jobsplus@gov.mt or call on 2220 1600.

NEWS

A health plan owned by a charity: HSF Health Plan (Malta) at the FHRD Annual HR Conference



HSF Health Plan (Malta) will exhibit at the FHRD Annual HR Conference & Expo on Friday, October 23 at the Hilton Malta Conference Centre, on stand 19.

HSF is the trading company of The Hospital Saturday Fund, a charity founded in London in 1873 to help hospitals reach more people. All of the plan's profits pass to the Fund, which turns them into grants for health causes in Malta, the UK and Ireland. This year those grants total £2.5 million, with Maltese recipients including Inspire, Dreams of Horses, and Service Dogs Malta.

"HR professionals choose the benefits their colleagues rely on," said Adrian Button, Head of Sales & Marketing UK & EU HSF Health Plan. "When they choose HSF, they look after their own people and every euro of profit goes to health causes. Everybody in that circle benefits."

The charitable ownership shapes the service too. Employers are moving to HSF because claims are simple to submit by email and paid quickly. Its Everyday Wellness plan reimburses the regular dental check-ups and eye tests that catch problems early, giving HR teams a wellbeing benefit employees use all year.

Since early 2025, FHRD's Professional Members have had access to a tailored HSF health plan.

> *Bringing meaningful health and wellness solutions*

"We are proud to partner with HSF Health Plan (Malta) to bring meaningful health and wellness solutions to our Professional HR Members," said Karen Muscat Baldacchino, CEO of FHRD.

"At FHRD, we recognise that HR professionals play a vital role in supporting the well-being of others, but their own health and peace of mind are equally important. This collaboration reflects our ongoing commitment to empowering our members not just professionally, but personally. Together with HSF Health Plan, we're ensuring that those who care for others are also cared for."

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EMPLOYER SERVICES

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Since 2016, Jobsplus Employer Services worked directly with employers across Malta and Gozo, supporting them with recruitment, vacancy advertising, candidate matching, employment schemes and access to the wider range of services offered by Jobsplus.

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LEARNING

Why should companies invest in continuous learning?



A Training Needs Analysis provides a structured approach to identifying capability gaps and development priorities. PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

In a world where change is the only constant, organisations are operating in an era where technology evolves rapidly, customer expectations constantly shift, and new skills emerge at an unprecedented pace. As a result, continuous learning is no longer simply an employee benefit. It is a strategic business necessity. Continuous learning has become a strategic business imperative, helping companies remain competitive, innovative, and resilient. Organisations that invest in developing their people are not simply enhancing individual capabilities; they are building future-ready businesses capable of responding to rapid technological, economic, and societal change.

The traditional view of learning as something that happens occasionally in a classroom has become outdated. Learning is not something we do once and forget about. It is an ongoing process that should accompany employees throughout their careers. Workplace learning now takes many forms, including on-the-job experiences, hybrid learning, conferences, mentoring, coaching, reverse mentoring, job shadowing, professional qualifications, and digital learning platforms. These approaches help employees continuously acquire new knowledge, skills and behaviours that improve performance and prepare them for future opportunities.

One of the greatest challenges facing organisations today is the speed of change. In this environment, learning itself must become agile. Businesses need employees who can quickly adapt to new technologies, changing customer demands and evolving ways of working. Learning and Development professionals must therefore focus on agility, developing employees who are willing to embrace new approaches and rethink how work is done. At the same time, learning strategies need to remain closely aligned with business priorities and future workforce needs.

Artificial Intelligence provides perhaps the most compelling example of why continuous learning matters. AI is transforming industries, automating routine tasks and creating entirely new ways of working. Organisations that fail to equip their people with AI-related skills risk falling behind competitors. Investing in AI literacy, digital skills, critical thinking and adaptability ensures employees are prepared for the future rather than reacting to it. Future-ready organisations are those that develop a workforce capable of learning, unlearning and relearning as business demands evolve.

However, successful learning initiatives do not happen by accident. One of the most important elements of an effective learning strategy is conducting a comprehensive Training Needs Analysis (TNA). Too often, organisations deliver training on an ad hoc basis, responding to requests as they arise without assessing whether the intervention is aligned with business objectives.

A Training Needs Analysis provides a structured approach to identifying capability gaps and development priorities. It enables organisations to understand what skills are required today, what skills will be required tomorrow, and which learning interventions will deliver the greatest value. Training can then be planned strategically rather than reactively. Training needs can be identified through organisational goals, employee objectives, performance discussions, personal development plans and job requirement reviews.

An initiative that many organisations are now introducing is dedicated learning time during the working week. For example, "Learning Wednesdays" can provide employees with one protected hour each week to focus exclusively on development. Employees can complete an online course, attend a webinar, listen to a podcast, review industry trends or participate in internal knowledge-sharing sessions.

The true value of Learning Wednesdays extends beyond formal training. They create opportunities for employees to share experiences, best practices and lessons learned. A colleague who attended a conference can present insights from the event. A team member who has mastered a new technology can demonstrate practical applications. Leaders can share knowledge gained from strategic projects. Over time, this creates a culture where learning becomes everyone's responsibility rather than solely the role of HR or the Learning and Development team.

> *Investing in people is not just paying for courses*

Continuous learning also plays a critical role in employee attraction and retention. Employees increasingly want to work for organisations that invest in their growth and career progression. Learning opportunities improve confidence, engagement and job satisfaction while helping individuals pursue their professional aspirations. They also contribute significantly to employee experience and create a culture where people feel valued and supported.

Importantly, investing in people is not simply about paying for courses. It is about preparing employees for the next stage of their careers. Effective organisations actively develop future leaders through mentoring, coaching, stretch assignments and targeted leadership programmes. They understand that their greatest competitive advantage lies not in technology or processes alone, but in the capability and potential of their people. Learning and development creates a pipeline of talent ready to step into future roles and responsibilities.

Yet many organisations still struggle to answer one important question: How do we know learning is working? This is why measuring Learning and Development is just as important as delivering it.

Learning initiatives should be evaluated using recognised frameworks such as the Kirkpatrick Model, which measures training effectiveness across four levels. The first level examines employee reactions and satisfaction through participation rates, completion rates and feedback scores. The second level evaluates learning by assessing knowledge and skill improvement through assessments and performance reviews. The third level measures behavioural change, including improvements in morale, motivation and engagement. Finally, the fourth level evaluates business impact by analysing key outcomes such as productivity, customer satisfaction, employee retention, sales growth and work quality.

This shift from measuring activity to measuring impact is critical. The success of learning should not be determined by the number of people attending a course but by whether the training contributes to business performance and organisational goals. Learning must be measured, analysed and validated to demonstrate its value to business leaders.



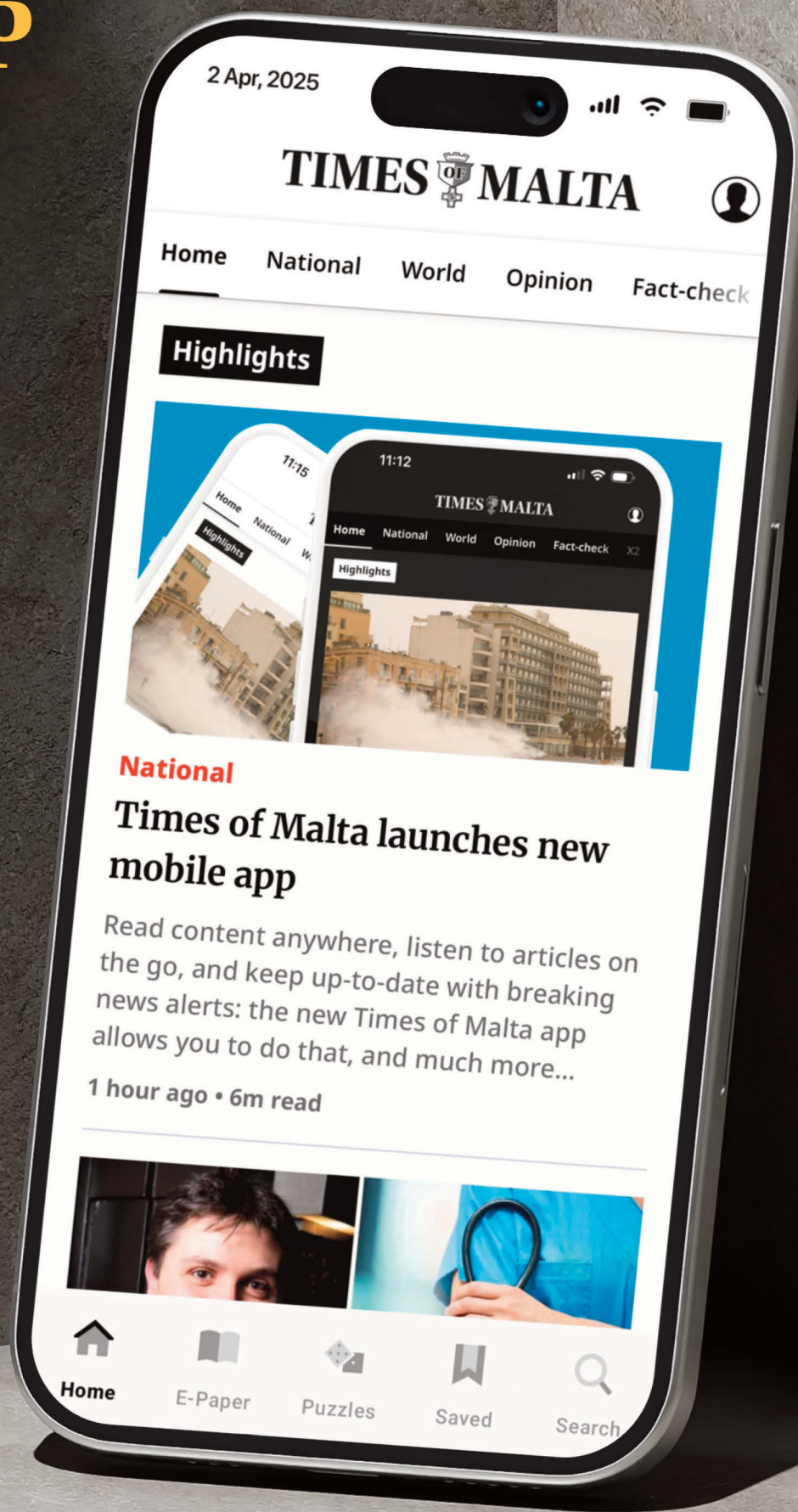
Loredana Mallia is Chief Officer, Human Resources Mapfre Malta and FHRD Board Member.

Ultimately, continuous learning is not a cost, but an investment. Organisations that foster a culture of learning build more engaged employees, stronger leaders, greater innovation, and a workforce capable of adapting to future challenges. Through structured Training Needs Analysis, agile learning approaches, knowledge-sharing initiatives such as Learning Wednesdays and meaningful measurement of outcomes, companies can ensure their learning investments deliver lasting value.

As Sir Richard Branson once said : 'Train people well enough so they can leave, treat them well enough so they don't want to" Perhaps this is the most important lesson of all. Great organisations do not simply develop employees for the jobs they hold today. They invest in preparing them for the opportunities of tomorrow while creating a workplace culture that inspires them to remain, contribute and grow.

TIMES OF MALTA

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INITIATIVES

Shaping the future of HR through accredited professional learning

As the workplace continues to evolve at an unprecedented pace, the expectations placed on HR professionals have never been greater. Today's HR leaders are expected to navigate complex employment legislation, attract and retain talent in increasingly competitive markets, embrace emerging technologies, champion employee wellbeing, and contribute strategically to organisational success.

To meet these challenges, continuous professional development is no longer optional – it is essential.

For more than three decades, the Malta Foundation for Human Resources Development (FHRD) has been at the forefront of advancing the HR profession in Malta, supporting individuals and organisations through high-quality education, professional development, networking, research, and the promotion of HR excellence.

Established in 1990, FHRD is a registered voluntary organisation dedicated to raising standards in people management and creating a stronger, more professional HR community. Through close collaboration with employers, HR practitioners, industry experts, educators and policymakers, the Foundation continues to play a leading role in shaping the future of human resources in Malta.



Karen Muscat Baldacchino is Chief Executive Officer at the Malta Foundation for Human Resource Development (FHRD).

OUR PURPOSE

FHRD's mission is to advance the Human Resources profession by promoting best practices, ethical standards, research-driven policies and lifelong learning, while fostering HR excellence, professional development and positive employer-employee relationships.

This commitment is reflected through a number of strategic priorities, including:

- Promoting excellence and professionalism in Human Resources
- Encouraging the adoption of best HR practices
- Serving as a trusted point of reference for HR practitioners
- Supporting research-based HR policies and innovation
- Facilitating networking and knowledge sharing
- Acting as a catalyst for positive change in people management
- Strengthening employer-employee relationships
- Delivering high-quality professional learning opportunities
- Promoting lifelong learning across organisations
- Upholding the highest ethical standards within the profession

Our vision is clear: to create a workforce that thrives at its full potential through world-class HR practices that deliver productive, fulfilling and collaborative workplaces while contributing to Malta's long-term prosperity.

A LICENSED HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION

FHRD is proud to be licensed as a Higher Education Institution in Malta.

This means that every accredited programme delivered by the Foundation has undergone a rigorous quality assurance process and is formally recognised at Level 5 of the Malta Qualifications Framework (MQF), which is aligned with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF).

Our objective is simple: to provide HR professionals, people managers and business leaders with practical, industry-relevant qualifications that immediately translate into workplace impact.

WHY CHOOSE AN ACCREDITED PROGRAMME?

Choosing an accredited qualification offers significant advantages for both individuals and employers.

Accreditation provides assurance that programmes meet nationally recognised quality standards and are designed around measurable learning outcomes. Participants gain qualifications that are formally recognised by employers and educational institutions alike.

Accredited programmes also open access to government funding opportunities, making professional development more accessible and cost-effective.

> *Assurance that programmes meet nationally recognised quality standards*

Because FHRD programmes are pegged to the Malta Qualifications Framework, they provide employers with a recognised benchmark of professional competence, supporting career progression, promotion opportunities and workforce development.

Furthermore, alignment with the European Qualifications Framework enhances the international recognition and portability of these qualifications, supporting mobility across Europe for both employment and further study.

For education providers, accreditation also ensures compliance with Malta's regulatory framework governing further and higher education.



PROFESSIONAL PROGRAMMES DESIGNED FOR TODAY'S WORKPLACE

FHRD currently offers eight accredited Level 5 Award programmes, each carefully developed with industry practitioners to address real workplace challenges and equip participants with immediately applicable skills.

Award in Human Resources Management & Training (MQF Level 5 – 5 ECTS)

A comprehensive programme covering the foundations of strategic Human Resources Management, including organisational design, talent management, employee relations, learning and development, and HR strategy. Participants develop practical skills through case studies, group work and real business scenarios.

High Impact Recruitment & Selection Techniques (MQF Level 5 – 4 ECTS)

Designed for HR professionals and hiring managers seeking to improve recruitment outcomes, this programme explores interviewing techniques, assessment methodologies, selection tools and evidence-based recruitment practices that lead to better hiring decisions.

Award in Training the Trainer (MQF Level 5 – 6 ECTS)

An intensive programme that equips participants with the knowledge and confidence to design, deliver and evaluate engaging learning experiences. Through practical workshops and peer feedback, participants develop the skills needed to become effective workplace trainers.

Practical Applications of Maltese Employment Law (MQF Level 5 – 2 ECTS)

This programme bridges legal theory and everyday HR practice, providing participants with practical guidance on



FHRD is licensed as a Higher Education Institution in Malta. PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

employment legislation, contracts, employee rights, workplace obligations and compliance issues within the Maltese legal framework.

Award in Public Speaking (MQF Level 5 – 2 ECTS)

Designed for professionals who want to communicate with confidence and influence, this programme develops presentation skills, executive presence, audience engagement techniques and strategies for delivering impactful messages in any professional setting.

Employer Branding & Communications for HR & Marketing Professionals (MQF Level 5 – 4 ECTS)

This innovative programme combines HR and marketing principles to help organisations strengthen their employer brand. Participants learn how to develop compelling Employer Value Propositions (EVPs), conduct employer branding audits, measure success through KPIs and create communication strategies that attract and retain top talent.

Leader as a Coach (MQF Level 5 – 2 ECTS)

Modern leadership requires more than direction—it requires empowerment. This programme introduces coaching principles that enable leaders to unlock individual potential, improve performance through meaningful conversations and build high-performing teams.

Conflict Resolution and Mediation at Work (MQF Level 5 – 2 ECTS)

Conflict is inevitable, but when managed effectively it becomes an opportunity for growth. This programme develops practical mediation, negotiation and communication skills that enable participants to resolve workplace disputes, strengthen collaboration and create psychologically safe working environments.

INVESTING IN PEOPLE IS INVESTING IN ORGANISATIONAL SUCCESS

The workplace will continue to change. New technologies, changing legislation, evolving employee expectations and increasing organisational complexity demand HR professionals who are equipped not only with knowledge, but with the practical capability to lead change.

FHRD's accredited programmes are designed with this future in mind—combining academic rigour with practical application to ensure participants leave with skills they can immediately implement within their organisations.

Whether you are an experienced HR professional, an aspiring people manager, a business leader or someone looking to build a career in Human Resources, FHRD provides learning opportunities that support professional growth and organisational success.

To explore our full range of accredited programmes and upcoming intakes, visit www.fhrd.org/professional-program.

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NEWS

From Malta to the world - Celebrating business excellence

TradeMalta launches the fourth edition of the Malta International Business Awards



From left: Joyce Grech, Head of Commercial Banking at HSBC Bank Malta p.l.c.; Dr Marthese Portelli, CEO of The Malta Chamber; Christopher Cutajar, Permanent Secretary at the Ministry for Foreign and European Affairs; Tania Brown, CEO of TradeMalta; and Daniel Galea, chairperson of TradeMalta.

TradeMalta is inviting Malta-based businesses that are exporting, growing, expanding into new markets, innovating, or diversifying internationally to put their achievements in the spotlight and participate in the fourth edition of the Malta International Business Awards (MIBA) 2027.

Held under the theme 'Exporting. Growing. Expanding. Innovating. Your international journey deserves to be recognised,' MIBA 2027 celebrates the achievements of Malta-based businesses as they navigate their internationalisation journeys, from entering new markets and growing exports to expanding their international footprint, innovating, and diversifying across markets.

In his opening address Daniel Galea, chairperson of TradeMalta, said: "I am pleased to welcome the launch of the fourth edition of the Malta International Business Awards. MIBA reflects TradeMalta's commitment to supporting Malta-based businesses in pursuing international opportunities and recognising their achievements in overseas markets. Through these Awards, we aim to showcase their success, inspire others to follow their example and encourage more businesses to take their next steps internationally. Today's launch brings together organisations and partners who share a common goal of strengthening Malta's presence in global markets."

Announcing the opening of applications, Tania Brown, CEO of TradeMalta, said:

"The Malta International Business Awards recognise the ambition and achievements of the businesses driving Malta's international success. TradeMalta continues to support businesses in taking their products, services and expertise beyond Malta, and these Awards provide an important platform to celebrate those making that journey. Whether entering a first international market or building an established global presence, every step towards international growth strengthens Malta's competitiveness. If your business is building its future beyond Malta, we want to hear your story. Put your achievements forward, showcase your international success and be recognised among the businesses shaping Malta's presence in global markets."

During the same Press Conference, Christopher Cutajar, Permanent Secretary at the Ministry for Foreign and European Affairs, said: "Malta's international economic success depends, in no small measure, on the ability of our businesses to compete, grow and establish themselves in markets beyond our shores. Supporting businesses in their internationalisation efforts is therefore an important part of strengthening Malta's international economic presence.

> ***Recognise ambition, innovation and commitment***

The Malta International Business Awards provide an opportunity to recognise the ambition, innovation and commitment of businesses that are successfully taking their products and services into international markets. By highlighting their achievements and experiences, we also encourage a culture of international ambition and enterprise."

The press conference was also addressed by Marthese Portelli, CEO of The Malta Chamber, and Joyce Grech, Head of Commercial Banking at HSBC Bank Malta, who shared their perspectives on the importance of international growth and the opportunities available to Malta-based businesses.

Dr Marthese Portelli, CEO of The Malta Chamber, said: "When we talk about the future of Maltese business, we are invariably talking about our horizon. As an island state with an open economy, domestic growth will always reach physical boundaries. If our businesses want to scale, internationalisation is not merely an alternative path - it is an economic imperative." Dr Portelli highlighted that operating on an international level incentivise local companies to raise their standards, compete on high value-add rather than volume, and adopt cutting-edge digital and sustainable practices. She congratulated companies that are on an internationalisation path and said "these companies prove every day that geographic size is no barrier to world-class achievement.

Joyce Grech, Head of Commercial Banking, HSBC Bank Malta, added: "At HSBC Malta, we are committed to supporting the growth and internationalisation of Maltese businesses. We have supported TradeMalta since its inception in 2015 and our commitment remains unwavering. For this reason, we are very pleased to be a strategic partner for the Malta International Business Awards for the fourth time. These prestigious Awards provide an excellent platform to celebrate and recognise the achievements of our local exporters. They serve to showcase the diversity and ambition of local businesses that trade internationally and align with our mission to help businesses thrive on the global stage. I had the privilege of serving on the judging panel for the last two editions. On both occasions, was impressed by the quality of local products and services, and by the determination and passion behind our exporters' success beyond our shores. I encourage Maltese companies to submit their nominations. Your achievements inspire other local businesses to explore opportunities beyond Malta."

Four categories celebrating international business

MIBA 2027 features four award categories designed to recognise businesses at different stages of their international journey:

- **Micro and Small Exporter Excellence Award**
- **Medium and Large Exporter Excellence Award**
- **Emerging Exporter Award**
- **Export Innovation and Diversification Award**

One winner will be selected in each category, with the four category winners then competing for the Overall Export Excellence Award, recognising outstanding achievement in international business.

Applications for MIBA 2027 are now open and will remain open until Monday, November 16, 2026.

Malta-based businesses engaged in exporting their products or services internationally are invited to put themselves forward and share their international journey, achievements, and ambitions.

The Malta International Business Awards are organised and administered by TradeMalta, in collaboration with HSBC Bank Malta p.l.c. as Strategic Partner and with the participation of Grant Thornton. The Awards are endorsed by the Ministry for Foreign and European Affairs and The Malta Chamber of Commerce, Enterprise and Industry.

There is no registration fee to participate. For more information and to apply, visit TradeMalta.org/MIBA or contact the MIBA team at miba@trademalta.org