

5 Proven Ways to Accelerate Your HR Career

Your 5-step action plan for developing yourself as an HR professional and preparing to land a more senior role.





Introduction

The UAE is one of the fastest growing economies in the world and has rapidly become an international business hub.

Businesses in this region who want to maximise their opportunities need to have the most capable staff - beginning with their HR team. This has made the UAE something of a 'one to watch' in the global HR community; in fact, the area repeatedly ranked very highly in a [global study of HR markets and practices](#).

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- › **The UAE ranked 1st by an overwhelming margin in the list of countries believed to be the next emerging HR hub.**
 - › **In terms of emerging markets, the UAE is the leading contender for innovative HR practices.**
 - › **The UAE was the fourth most considered country for organisations looking to expand their international footprint - ahead of the USA and Australia, both considered established major HR hubs.**

All of this makes the UAE an exciting place to develop and advance your career in HR. Yet, HR remains a tricky industry both to break into and to progress within once you've got your foot in the door.

The modern HR professional must wear many hats and you'll find that progressing from an entry-level position into managerial and then senior roles will require more than excellent practical HR knowledge and skills alone. You'll also need to demonstrate business knowledge, strategic planning and managerial qualities to be successful in achieving a promotion.

Developing these skills in your current role isn't always possible as you'll often find your time taken up with your day-to-day responsibilities. So, how can you bridge the gap and make the jump to the next stage of your HR career?

We've outlined five actions you can take to help yourself develop the necessary skills and accelerate your HR career to the next level:

- › Make yourself a regular at HR events and conferences.
- › Cultivate a strong professional network.
- › Grow your knowledge with CIPD qualifications and membership.
- › Develop wide-ranging business acumen.
- › Become indispensable through solutions-focused problem spotting.

Making your mark in HR isn't about luck, it's about the actions you take. Our step-by-step plan will help you transform from an ambitious professional into an attractive candidate for promotion.

Our advice is based on feedback and insights we've gained through 30 years of helping people develop their HR careers.

STEP 1

Getting On The Events Circuit

As competition for senior positions grows increasingly fierce, recruiters reviewing multiple applications from talented candidates are forced to look for those who have a little something extra to make them stand out.

How can you make sure that you distinguish yourself from the rest of the crowd? Well, a survey by the recruitment site [Glassdoor](#) found that 88% of recruiters feel that a quality candidate is one that can demonstrate that they're informed.

This means you have to be able to show you understand not only the job role and the organisation, but also have wide-ranging knowledge of the whole HR profession. HR is a fast-changing field and exhibitions and conferences are a great way to keep up with the latest developments. You'll meet a range of people from other HR professionals to vendors and suppliers.

The **UAE** ranked **3rd** in a list of preferred destinations for **HR professionals** to attend **international HR events**.

Take note of Keynotes & be ready to learn new skills

Most large events have a programme of speakers which include keynote speeches from high profile HR professionals and thought leaders. These speakers will often cover hot topics in HR and provide their take on what lies ahead for the future so it's worthwhile to take note - you might even pick up some ideas that you can practically apply to your organisation which will certainly impress your superiors. It's also good to remember that most of these speakers will have started out where you are now. Let this inspire you to keep moving forward!

Attending events is also an excellent chance to access extra professional learning via the workshops and seminars that are on the programme. These can be a more relaxed setting to learn in than official training days and you'll get to interact with a whole new set of attendees at each event. Interacting with your professional peers is an important part of your career development and these events can provide the perfect setting to network.

The UAE: A hotspot for HR gatherings

The UAE is host to many fantastic HR events. Dubai in particular boasts an impressive line up of annual expos and conferences and has become something of a hub for large-scale HR events.

It's no surprise then that the UAE has become a very attractive destination for HR professionals around the globe looking to attend professional events.

There are far too many to list here but attending at least one of these is highly recommended:

- > [HR Summit and Expo, Dubai](#)
- > [FAHR Conference, Dubai](#)
- > [HR Tech Mena Summit, Dubai](#)
- > [CIPD Middle East People Conference & Awards, Dubai](#)
- > [ATD Conference & Exhibition, Dubai](#)
- > [SHRM Tech 2020, Dubai](#)

These are huge events guaranteed to be filled with learning opportunities, new technologies and potential new professional connections. Plus, at some of these events you can even earn CPD points for each hour of learning you complete.

STEP 2

Building A Strong Professional Network

In the HR profession, having a broad professional network is a huge asset to your career. Putting yourself out there and networking is one of the most invaluable tools you have when looking for new job opportunities.

Networking can not only lead to new jobs, but it can also lead to opportunities for professional development and the chance to meet mentors who can share their wealth of their experience with you and guide you as you climb the career ladder.

Even though the UAE has a thriving networking scene for HR professionals, it can be a struggle to build your network from scratch. Conferences are a great place to start, as are professional development training workshops or courses. Dedicated HR networking groups and meetups will also provide you with a wide range of professionals to interact with. Try searching for your local groups on sites like [Meetup](#).

An **estimated 85%** of open positions are **filled through networking** rather than direct applications.

The **UAE** was ranked by HR professionals as the **2nd top destination** for networking opportunities - ahead of both the UK and Europe.

Face-to-face networking can be nerve-wracking so here are a few tips to keep you on the right track:

- › **Don't go overboard on the questions - it shouldn't feel like a job interview.**
- › **Share what makes you interesting as well as asking questions.**
- › **Find ways to be helpful like recommending a relevant book or event.**
- › **Arrive early if you're more comfortable with a small group.**
- › **Have a few icebreaker questions prepared to get things started.**
- › **Follow things up with a short, friendly email to arrange a second meeting.**

Networking in the 21st Century: LinkedIn and Twitter

Thanks to the wonders of technology, you can now grow your HR network without ever having to venture into the outside world.

Using social media is a great way to introduce yourself to networking if you feel you might be lacking in confidence. The key is to actively participate rather than sit back as a spectator.

Twitter

Twitter has become an increasingly popular place for HR professionals from all around the world to connect and share their experience. You'll find lively and interesting discussions under these hashtags:

- › **#HRhour**
- › **#HRTribe**
- › **#LDInsight**
- › **#HRSocialHour**
- › **#NextChat**

LinkedIn

In a similar way to Twitter chats, LinkedIn groups give you the chance to interact and share experiences with other like-minded HR professionals but in a more private setting. These groups allow you to benefit from other members' knowledge and build up confidence by putting forward your own thoughts and opinions.

Groups such as [HR Voices with ICS Learn](#) are dedicated to helping members network and share ideas, and you'll also find groups for more niche specialisations such as recruitment.

Whilst online and offline networking are great on their own, to really cultivate a strong and expansive HR network it's best if you split your time between the two. This way you'll reach a larger mix of people.

Remember, maintaining a professional connection is a two-way street so be on the look out for things you can do to help people in your network instead of just waiting for them to give you a hand.



“The trick with social media is to be a contributor instead of an observer. Engage with the people you follow and contribute to their questions and opinions. Don't just seek out what people can do for you, contribute to the community by introducing opportunities to your contacts.”

- Charles Goff-Deakins, Senior HR Officer

STEP 3

Getting CIPD Qualified

When you're looking to progress to a more senior role, work experience alone is often not enough to take you there - particularly since it can be hard to develop managerial experience in entry-level roles.

91% of global HR professionals feel that formal, ongoing professional development is necessary to continue to work in HR so taking steps to further your learning will show your commitment and passion.

CIPD qualifications can help you bridge the gap between your current role and your next step, helping you advance your HR career at a faster rate than work experience alone.

As the only professional body in the world that can award Chartered status to HR and L&D professionals, the CIPD is the gold standard for professional excellence. CIPD qualifications are the highest recognition of professional quality in HR and L&D - so much so that they're often requested by recruiters and employers.

91% of CIPD graduates would recommend CIPD to others.

CIPD student membership will prove invaluable to you as you can access a huge range of resources and advice to guide you in your studies and career.

In recent years, the CIPD has been expanding its presence in the Middle East and now has a well-established hub in Dubai which delivers locally relevant research, content and networking opportunities.



“It was definitely a vital decision for me to join a course which would not only polish my skills, but also give me a competitive edge in the global market. CIPD will be my competitive advantage.”

- Usman Riaz Qazi, Head of HR & Organization Development, Naveena Group



Which CIPD qualification is right for you?

CIPD qualifications cover both Human Resources and Learning & Development and are available at three levels: Level 3 Foundation, Level 5 Intermediate and Level 7 Advanced. At each level, there are courses of different lengths: the comprehensive Diploma, the slightly shorter Certificate, and the bite-sized Awards.

Level 3 Foundation

Level 3 is ideal for those looking to move into HR or L&D or those with limited experience in the industry. These qualifications provide the essential knowledge and practical skills that are necessary for an entry-level position such as HR Assistant or HR Administrator.

As Level 3 has been designed for beginners, you may already have many of the skills that it covers if you're already working in an entry-level job. You should only choose to study a Foundation qualification if you feel you need to consolidate your knowledge of basic HR practices. If you're looking to progress your career, you'll be better served by a more advanced level.

Level 5 Intermediate

Level 5 is aimed at those who have some experience in HR or L&D and want to develop their existing knowledge and progress their career. It's also suitable for those with no HR experience who have a degree and want to begin learning at a higher level. These courses develop the managerial skills and broader thinking that you'll need to excel in roles like HR Manager or HR Business Partner.

This level is the perfect choice if you're looking to move from your entry-level position into a more senior managerial or advisory role.

Level 7 Advanced

Level 7 qualifications are set at postgraduate level; the Diploma is equivalent to a Master's degree. They are designed for those with significant HR or L&D experience who are responsible for developing and implementing HR strategies and policies. They encourage you to develop the strategic thinking and long-term planning skills that you'll need to work in high-profile senior roles such as HR Director or Head of HR.

This level is the right choice for you if you have significant experience of working in HR or L&D or if you have previously completed an HR or business degree.



Should you choose a Diploma, Certificate or Award?

Diploma

These are the most extensive courses and take longer to complete. They are made up of modules that cover all areas of HR or L&D, from employment law to talent management, giving you comprehensive knowledge.

Certificate

Certificates are slightly shorter in length, but still cover the essential subjects in detail. They consist of core subjects plus some optional subjects taken from the Diploma. These qualifications take less time to complete and are perfect if you're looking to gain essential HR knowledge in less time.

Award

An Award is an individual module taken from a Diploma studied as a standalone course. They give in-depth knowledge of a narrow subject area and are ideal if you'd like to specialise in a specific area of HR or L&D such as Employment Law.

Remember, this is only intended as a guide. To ensure you're choosing the right course for your level of experience, education and future ambitions, you should always speak to an experienced CIPD advisor.

If you've already put the hard work in to develop your career and are currently working in a senior HR role, you'll understand that you're only as good as the team that supports you. Providing your staff with quality professional development is paramount as it will not only improve your team's performance, but increase loyalty and productivity into the bargain.

CIPD qualifications are the perfect solution. They provide up-to-date professional training with a global focus, ensuring your department is ready to take on any challenge.



STEP 4

Develop Your Business Acumen

HR professionals who want a seat at the top table need to prove to the business that they're capable of understanding more than just payroll and admin. The business will be looking for someone who understands the issues it faces, can provide insight-driven advice and expertise, and is capable of aligning people strategy with company objectives.

Having strong business acumen will allow you to really understand how the business works, what makes it successful, and what market trends or economic and societal factors could affect and influence it.



"The more effective HR professionals have that organisational development mindset where they can see different parts of the organisation, how they fit together, how people fit into it and how culture affects how decisions are made."

- Gary Cookson, FCIPD



When developing your business knowledge, you should aim to be able to answer questions such as:

- > **What is our business model? How do we make money?**
- > **Who are the key stakeholders?**
- > **How does each part of the business work together?**
- > **Who are our competitors and how do they compare to us?**
- > **What are the economic and societal factors that affect our business and wider industry?**

This wide-ranging commercial knowledge and understanding will stand you in good stead as you advance your career in HR, allowing you to give valuable insights and make better, more informed decisions.



Keep your finger on the pulse by reading

Reading a broad range of publications is an excellent way of maintaining a good level of commercial awareness and knowledge. Try to read widely across the areas of HR, finance, management and business in general.

You can fit this into your schedule however it suits you, whether that be scanning Arabian Business whilst you have your morning coffee, catching up with HR Observer over lunch or spending your evening delving into a weightier business book. Incorporating different publications will give you new insight and expose you to different ideas, theories and opinions. It's a key part of your own ongoing professional development which will help you become a forward-thinking, insightful and respected HR practitioner.

Don't just passively read; make sure that you're constantly reviewing what you've read and ensuring you understand it. You can try using these questions as a starting point:

- > **What are the key issues being discussed?**
- > **Which trends might influence your business and HR?**
- > **How is HR shaping the trends?**



The more you're able to connect the work you do in HR to the rest of the business, the easier you'll find it to impress in interviews for senior roles.

Make connections with other departments

It's a common misconception that HR people are out of touch with every other department within their organisation. Help banish this stereotype by getting to know the people that make up the other departments in the business and the work they do.

Make time in your schedule to spend with people from other departments, whether you sit with them in the staff canteen, chat to them on staff nights out or join in with charity or voluntary activities. Listening to them will allow you to find out exactly how each department functions and how they contribute to the overall day-to-day running of the business. You should also listen out for any issues or problems that different departments are facing. There might be a simple fix such as a slight change in HR policy which you can suggest, showing that you understand the business and proving you add value.

STEP 5

Learn to spot problems and offer practical solutions

Think of this final step as the culmination of all the work you've been putting in, as you'll only be able to accomplish it through your previous efforts. Just bear in mind that it will take a bit of time and practice to get this right.

A good place to start is with challenges that are affecting other businesses in the area; you'll be able to find this out from your research and the people in your network.

For example, [a recent survey](#) found that 60% of UAE HR professionals felt staff retention and talent management were their biggest challenges of the next two years. Using this example, you can then conduct some research to find out if this is also a challenge to your organisation.

You can also do this more generally to look at the business as a whole using the SWOT and PEST models to give you some structure.

SWOT: Evaluate your company's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

PEST: Identify political, economic, social and technological hurdles it might need to overcome.

Once you have conducted your analysis, you can use your knowledge of the business along with what you have learned from wider reading and your CIPD studies to look for practical solutions to any problems or issues you uncover. This is where all your learning and development will serve you well, as you'll be able to put it into practice and prove that you have what it takes to excel in a more senior position.

It will require practice, and you might not be able to identify a magic solution each time, but it is something that you should frequently repeat to make sure you're putting what you've learned into action and keeping yourself up to date on how the business is developing.





In Summary

Making the leap to a more senior role can be challenging, but there are plenty of actions you can take to bridge the gap:

- › **Attending HR events and conferences will introduce you to new industry technologies and developments and allow you to develop your skills.**
- › **Building a strong professional network will help you hear about job opportunities and meet mentors who can give you the benefit of their experience.**
- › **Studying a CIPD qualification will allow you to develop the managerial skills and qualities that are vital to your career advancement.**
- › **Developing strong business acumen will enable you to better understand your organisation and HR's role within it.**
- › **Using what you learn to identify and find solutions to problems will set you apart from other candidates when applying for senior roles.**

What you learn and achieve through these steps will allow you to develop yourself into the ideal HR leader.



ICS Learn provide highly flexible online CIPD qualifications that allow you to shape learning around your career, family, and schedule.

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