



Maximizing HR Potential:

How to Drive High Performing, Inclusive Organizations and Create Meaningful Work Experiences

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**The better the employee
experience, the better
the workplace.”**

Enio E. Velazco, PhD
Villanova University Adjunct Professor

These are the words of Dr. Enio Velazco, a veteran human resource executive and adjunct professor in [Villanova University's Graduate Programs in Human Resource Development \(HRD\)](#).

Velazco's statement echoes the theme of the 2019 Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) Annual Conference & Exposition: "Creating Better Workplaces."

The SHRM19 theme of 'Creating Better Workplaces' closely aligns with Villanova's HRD vision statement – Developing global thought-leaders in human resources who drive high performing, inclusive organizations and create meaningful work experiences.

In this series, three Villanova HRD faculty members highlight the value points of Villanova's HRD program and address essential elements of a productive and engaged workplace:



Part 1: Driving High Performing Organizations

Enio Velazco, PhD, discusses how to attain and sustain a high performing organization today and in the future.



Part 2: Driving Inclusive Organizations

Jameel Rush, PHR, SHRM-CP, President of the Philadelphia Chapter of SHRM, talks about the importance of inclusion, and why inclusion and diversity are not the same thing.



Part 3: Creating Meaningful Work Experiences

Helynn Nelson, SPHR, SHRM-SCP, People Consultant at Google, explains why meaningful work experiences are essential to an engaged, effective workforce.

PART 1

Driving High Performing Organizations

When HR focuses on the employee experience, employees feel empowered and encouraged to work at their full potential.

Attaining and sustaining high performance status is a goal shared by practically every organization.

These organizations are focused on “long-term success while delivering on short-term goals. The workforce is engaged. They are flexible, customer-focused and able to work effectively in teams,” according to Dr. Velazco. Velazco is a veteran human resources executive and adjunct faculty member in Villanova University’s Graduate Program in Human Resource Development, where he teaches two courses, HR Technology and Strategic and Global HR Leadership.

Becoming a high-performing organization takes hard work. So does maintaining it.

Companies that reach that level and intend to stay will rely heavily on their human resource teams to create conditions in which they can thrive.

“High-performing HR organizations drive business and workforce-related outcomes,” said Velazco, who also is a frequent contributor to Villanova’s [HRD Corner Blog](#).



“They create the conditions to attract, develop, retain and engage key talent. They deliver good services to their workforce and foster the right employee behaviors to build a supportive, collaborative culture.”

Enio E. Velazco, PhD

For an organization’s human resources department, creating the conditions for high performance means focusing on the employee experience, Velazco said. He defines the employee experience as “the sum of everything an employee experiences throughout his or her connection to an organization.” This includes work-related matters and life events that occur — from the birth of a child or death of a loved one to interactions with daycare and wellness programs.

Velazco’s description reflects the theme of the 2019 SHRM conference and exposition, “Creating Better Workplaces.”

What Drives an Organization's Success?

Velazco cited the Boston Consulting Group's study, "[High Performance Organizations: The Secrets of Their Success](#)," and its list of characteristics shared by successful teams. The characteristics are grouped into five categories:

Leadership

- ▶ High-performance teams of individual leaders drive urgency and direction
 - ▶ The pipeline is stocked with future leaders whose skills are matched to future needs
 - ▶ Middle managers embrace and translate strategy
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Design

- ▶ Structure and resource allocation reflect strategic tradeoffs
 - ▶ Few layers separate the CEO and the frontline, and spans of control are wide
 - ▶ Accountabilities, decision rights, and collaboration are constructed with thoughtful consideration
 - ▶ Individual capabilities are matched to role requirements
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People

- ▶ The employer brand is a core asset
 - ▶ Critical roles and key talents are clearly identified and treated with care
 - ▶ HR is a strategic partner and an enabler of the business
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Change Management

- ▶ Change is a disciplined cascade
 - ▶ The organization is evolutionary
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Culture and Engagement

- ▶ Culture accelerates strategic objectives
- ▶ Engagement is measured and cultivated to generate discretionary effort from employees

The human resources team provides the support necessary for teams' success in a number of ways. According to a SHRM article titled [“Developing and Sustaining High-Performance Work Teams,”](#) some of the ways HR departments can help their teams attain high performance include:

Selection of team members and support of team cohesiveness: Diversity makes for a strong team that is both productive and creative. The team's make-up should reflect the diversity of the organization in its mix of genders, ages and ethnicities.

Communication: Information must flow freely, and work matters should be discussed in a frank but respectful manner.

Conflict resolution: Conflict must be handled constructively. It's important to depersonalize the conflict and deal with it as soon as possible. Successful teams view conflict as a reflection of its diversity as well as a chance to learn and consider different perspectives.

Collaboration: HR should work to promote shared goals, interdependence and the importance of what the team can accomplish together.

Team member training: HR should provide training on working as a team (covering the items listed above) to clearly establish the expectations of team members.

Assisting new and departing team members: When a new employee joins or an employee leaves the company, the team's dynamic is impacted. HR can help both processes work smoothly, bringing new members up to speed while recognizing the departing members' service and accomplishments.

Velazco credits HR with driving an organization's success but believes underperformance can be attributed to HR as well.

“Organizations experiencing high voluntary turnover and low engagement levels typically have below-average HR teams,” Velazco said. Correcting these flaws, he said, requires the organization to focus on identifying necessary resources and key roles, balance power throughout the organization, create efficient and effective processes, establish metrics and rewards to drive the right behaviors and implement people practices that develop and sustain the organization's capabilities.

How to Drive a High-Performing Organization of the Future

With more than 25 years of experience as a human resource professional, Velazco has seen plenty of changes in the profession, and he expects to see many more.

Among those changes are globalization, which requires HR to manage facilities and employees around the globe, requiring knowledge of, and compliance with, legal issues in different countries.

“Evolving societal attitudes as well as new labor laws precipitated flexible schedules, contract workers, remote employees, mission-driven organizations, corporate social responsibility and wellness programs, initiatives to lessen unconscious bias, the ‘Me Too’ movement and more,” Velazco said.

HR teams increasingly are thought of as businesspeople responsible for driving high performance and the attainment of the organization’s goals. HR will continue its evolution, Velazco said, with technology driving much of it.

“Artificial intelligence, machine learning, interactive voice response, robotics, augmented reality, virtual reality and business analytics will result in the automation of many tasks,” Velazco said. He believes recruiting, onboarding and many training functions will soon become fully automated.

As a result, “HR professionals will become human capital strategists – trusted advisers with more business knowledge, technology savvy, data analysis competence and change management expertise. They will act more like internal consultants and lead job redesign teams charged with selecting which tasks and jobs to automate next.”

With all the change, though, HR’s focus should remain on the employees, Velazco said. “HR is using employee experience as an operational compass to build a better workplace.”

Velazco said HR must continue to make changes in people processes, rewards, learning and development and organizational structure to bring about the employee behaviors that result in a better workplace, adding that “the better the employee experience, the better the workplace.”

PART 2

Driving Inclusive Organizations

The importance of inclusion, and why inclusion and diversity are not the same thing.



Inclusion, as it applies to business, is more than having a demographically diverse employee roster. It's more than appointing a woman to the C-suite or a person of color to the board of directors. It's more than a seminar in which employees are encouraged to respect co-workers regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation or other differences.

Inclusion is good for business. It's also the right thing to do. Being the right thing to do, though, isn't necessarily inclusion's strongest selling point to businesses.

"If you just lead with 'It's the right thing to do' in a business setting, I think you miss an opportunity to get a deeper level of buy-in," said [Jameel Rush](#), PHR, SHRM-CP, President of the Philadelphia Chapter of SHRM. Rush also is the Assistant Vice President for Diversity and Inclusion at Aramark, and an adjunct professor at Villanova University, where he teaches Diversity in a Global Economy.

"Inclusion makes business sense," Rush said. "There is a ton of research ... that shows that diverse teams outperform homogenous teams by leaps and bounds, and that organizations that have gotten diversity and inclusion right outperform their peers on the Fortune 500."

Stressing the "right thing to do" angle can also lead organizations to diversify in a superficial way that drives neither inclusion nor better outcomes.

"I call it the 'We've got one' phenomenon," said [Dr. Quinetta Roberson](#), Professor of Management at Villanova University. Roberson spoke about diversity and inclusion during an interview for "[HR Tea](#)," the podcast of Villanova University's HRD Corner Blog, for its Graduate Programs in Human Resource Development.

"It's diversity for the sake of diversity," Roberson said, when an organization makes a promotion or appointment so "they can now say to news outlets, 'We have a COO who's a person of color.'"

Creating Better Business Outcomes

Diversity has been shown to have a positive impact on business outcomes. Management consultants McKinsey & Company's report, "[Why Diversity Matters](#)," found that companies in the top 25% for gender, racial and ethnic diversity were more likely to have financial returns greater than the national industry median.

As the population grows more diverse, diversity isn't just an enlightened business practice. It's an essential one.

In a 2018 [SHRM article](#) titled, "Building a Business Case for Diversity and Inclusion," Lesley Slaton Brown, Chief Diversity Officer for HP, called diversity "a business imperative" that should be part of everything the company does.

Valuing differences, Brown said in the article, helps organizations engage and retain talent, as well as enabling HP to better service customers from a diverse range of communities.

Hiring a diverse staff, however, is only part of the solution. According to Rush, it's inclusion that drives those positive results.

"We use those terms, inclusion and diversity, interchangeably at times but they're actually two very separate pieces of the work," Rush said. "Diversity is the mix of individuals. Inclusion is how you make that mix work."

"Adding diversity to a team isn't what drives better outcomes," Rush said. "It's adding diversity and making sure you can leverage the different points of views and different perspectives to work toward a stronger solution. That's what adds to the better business results."

Practicing Diversity and Inclusion in the Workplace

The make-up of an organization should reflect the community in which it operates, Rush said. Communities increasingly include a wide range of ethnicities, nationalities, religions, sexual orientations and gender identities. Some members of the organization may be unfamiliar or uncomfortable with co-workers with different backgrounds, consciously or not.

Few people will take an overt stand against diversity in their workplace, and fewer are completely free of bias toward one group or another. Often, the bias is unconscious.

Having biases doesn't make one a bigot or bad person, Rush said.

Bias, conscious or unconscious, "is a natural part of being human," Rush said. "We all have unconscious biases that shape the way we deal with the world, and those things are deeply ingrained in us through our upbringing, our cultural heritage and everything about the way we've experienced life."

Dealing with bias is best done without scolding and finger-pointing. It's more productive, Rush said, to point out the positive benefits of inclusion as well as the drawbacks of not being inclusive. For example, a team that lacks female managers can make it difficult for the organization to recruit female talent, Rush said. He points out that professionals with different racial and cultural backgrounds must find an organization's atmosphere welcoming, or the organization soon will have trouble filling positions.

Diversity training can be helpful, but only if it addresses the reality of the workplace, Roberson said in the HR Tea podcast. Classes that only offer platitudes about respecting others do little except create what she calls "Kumbaya" moments with little lasting value.

Some organizations have instituted unconscious bias training to more directly address issues that can cause friction in the workplace. According to Slaton Brown in the SHRM article, training can prepare participants to mitigate bias, lead inclusive discussions and cultivate a mindset of growth for themselves and their teams.

Creating an inclusive environment assures that the entire organization feels valued and supported in order to do their best work.

People need to "feel they can bring their whole selves to work," Rush said, "in an atmosphere that values their engagement and desire to be a part of our organization, regardless of who they are or what their background is."

Inclusivity Drives Business Forward

Inclusion is a vital part of Villanova's [Master of Science in Human Resource Development](#) program. The mission of the program is to develop global thought-leaders in human resources who drive high performing, inclusive organizations and create meaningful work experiences.

"I hope that the biggest takeaway for students in the MSHRD program is that they understand the importance of creating inclusive organizations, they understand the importance of supporting employees throughout all parts of their employment journey at their organization, and how those pieces that we control in HR matter to the bottom line of the business, and help make organizations better," said [Bethany Adams](#), Associate Director in the graduate programs in Human Resource Development at Villanova and host of the HRD podcast.



"When people feel supported, they're more motivated to do better work, and that better work drives our organizations forward. It's how we support our employees in creating inclusive organizations, that makes the work they do meaningful for them."

Bethany J. Adams, MA, SHRM-SCP

PART 3

Creating Meaningful Work Experiences

Whether it's the outcomes, the work itself or something more personal, employees' performances improve when their work has meaning to them.

Job satisfaction requires more than a paycheck and perks.

True, workers appreciate the benefits offered by employers, and most would view an increase in salary as cause for a celebration. Salary and benefits often are deciding factors when a worker is looking for a job.

But the employees most supervisors would value the most, the ones who come to work each day energized and enthusiastic, get something out of work that's less tangible, but in many ways just as (or more) important than salary and perks.

Dedicated employees find meaning in their work. Organizations that understand this seek to help employees have meaningful work experiences.

Importance of Meaningful Work

Schools training upcoming human resources leaders also understand the importance of meaningful work. The mission statement of Villanova University's [Graduate Programs in Human Resource Development](#) describes a vision of “developing global thought-leaders in HR who drive high performing, inclusive organizations and create meaningful work experiences.”

Meaningful work experiences are an important component of Creating Better Workplaces, the theme of the 2019 SHRM conference.

Among the attendees was Helynn Nelson, an HR professional with Google who also teaches Strategic Workforce Planning in Villanova's online [Master of Science in Human Resource Development \(MSHRD\)](#) program. Nelson agrees that meaningful work experiences are essential to an engaged, effective workforce.

The meaning a worker finds could be “like a little flame or a glimmer within that excites them and motivates them to get up every morning, come in and contribute. Sometimes it's also the people around them,” Nelson said.

How important is meaningful work to professionals? A [survey](#) released in 2018 by leadership development platform BetterUp Labs found that 90% of the more than 2,000 professionals surveyed said they would give up almost a quarter of their future earnings in exchange for work that is always meaningful to them.

Furthermore, the survey found that employees who find their work meaningful are less likely to seek employment elsewhere. They also work more hours and take fewer days off.

However, according to a 2019 SHRM [article](#) titled, “The Search for Meaning,” most employees believe their work is only half as meaningful as it could be.

How do employers address employees who long for meaning in their work? SHRM provides a list of ways organizations can help workers engage on a deeper level.

Find out what meaningful work means to your employees: Workers may have different answers on what brings meaning to their duties, depending on the work they do. According to the SHRM article, a salesperson, for example, may find meaning in the fact that they are selling a piece of lifesaving medical technology, whereas a public relations professional may find meaning in promoting their organization.

“There has to be a connection to the work they’re doing, the product they’re putting out, the pleasure they’re giving other people in that product or service, or the pleasure and passion that they find in doing it,” Nelson said.

Provide a strong mix of benefits: Benefits can go beyond a paycheck and insurance. Personalized growth plans and challenging work are the sorts of benefits that can inspire enthusiasm in employees. Nelson said at Google these actions constitute “more than a kind of transactional resource. We want [employees] to feel like we’re a true partner in them fully succeeding here at work and feeling like they’re fully supported.”

Facilitate growth opportunities: Employees feel supported when employers take a proactive approach to their education and career development. Tailoring training to the individual shows the employer values specific team members’ skills and goals. Offering educational opportunities also reveals an investment in employees’ abilities as well as their futures.

HR professionals, Nelson said, must “constantly understand where folks are at and have open conversations and create opportunities within their current work - opportunities to be innovative or creative, opportunities to manage and opportunities to lead. You have to bring newness and freshness in your work to be fully engaged. I think to do that is to find meaning.”

Encourage a healthy work/life balance: Engaged workers may be happy to put in more than the standard 40 hours a week but too much time at work isn’t necessarily good for business. In fact, Nelson said a benefit of her being fully present at work is being able to “turn it off and be a great mom and wife when I leave here.”

Employers should encourage workers to take time away from the desk. Employees who are able to spend time with family, travel or recharge are more likely to work at a high level.

Implementing all or even some of these suggestions requires dedication and patience on the part of organizations. However, these are the types of responsibilities for which contemporary human resource professionals train.

Bethany Adams, [Associate Director](#) of Villanova's Human Resource Development graduate programs, believes human resource professionals will lead the way in the search for meaning at work.

"HR professionals have so much influence over how people feel about the work that they're doing, whether they believe the work matters and whether it's meaningful for them," Adams said. "They have an effect on how supported people feel coming into their organization, and whether they feel like the benefits and the compensation that they're offered is going to provide for them, but also that they're going to feel like the work they're doing means something to what they want to do later in life."

Human resource departments handle so much more than onboarding and exit interviews. HR professionals help drive diversity and inclusion, create workplaces with a makeup reflecting the community they serve and drive performance by attracting new talent and helping employees find meaning in their work.

Villanova University's 100% online [Master of Science in Human Resource Development \(MSHRD\)](#) program helps develop HR leaders through evidence-based education and applied experiences in functional and strategic human resource management, within dynamic organizational environments. The program brings students together with faculty who are active practitioners in the field and have helped set the standards by contributing to the Body of Competency and Knowledge content for SHRM and other leading organizations. Instructors bring real-world expertise into the online classroom and bridge the gap between academic theory and practical application.



I feel fulfilled in a way I haven't outside of work in a long time," Larkin said of Villanova's program. "I've definitely developed a sense of pride in myself."

Nikki Larkin, MS in Human Resource Development

Students in the MSHRD program will learn how to:

- ▶ Implement strategic organizational change for increased quality and productivity
- ▶ Recruit high-performing, diverse candidates to drive innovation
- ▶ Construct effective training and development programs
- ▶ Use data and statistics to make informed business decisions
- ▶ Leverage technology to enhance the contributions of the human resource function
- ▶ Develop financial management skills to leverage human capital
- ▶ Structure benefits packages and measure their success

Students enrolled in the program may also tailor their degree to align with their career goals by simultaneously pursuing a [graduate certificate](#) as a specialization within their degree, or as a standalone credential:

- ▶ HR Leadership
- ▶ Organization Development
- ▶ HR Analytics & Research
- ▶ HR Business Partner



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Villanova's HRD courses have been approved for 30 PDCs for the SHRM-CP[®] or SHRM-SCP[®]. For more information about certification or recertification, visit www.shrmcertification.org.



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