

LEADERSHIP RESET IN PRACTICE

The HR Manager Infrastructure Audit

Managers are being asked to carry more than ever: lead through change, develop talent, manage performance, adopt new technology—and still deliver on the work itself. When managers struggle under that weight, the answer often isn't more training or new tools. Sometimes the system around them needs to change.

The HR Manager Infrastructure Audit helps HR and people leaders step back and examine the conditions managers are working within. Use it to identify where information, feedback, recognition, and organizational processes are enabling good leadership—and where they may actually be getting in the way.

The goal isn't to fix everything at once. It's to find the places where changing the system would make management easier and more impactful.

Recommended use case:

When HR or people leaders want to understand whether manager challenges are being caused by capability gaps, unrealistic expectations, or the systems and processes surrounding the role.

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The Audit

Before asking managers to do more, take a close look at what the organization is asking them to carry. Use this audit with your HR or people leadership team. You do not need to solve everything at once. The goal is to identify where the system is helping managers—and where it is actually making their jobs harder.

01. Role Clarity

The question: Do managers know what good management actually looks like here?

Look for:

- Clear expectations for people leadership
- A manageable set of priorities
- Explicit decision rights
- Clarity about what belongs to the manager and what belongs to the organization
- Expectations that recognize management as work, not an addition to an already full job

Ask:

What are we asking every manager to be responsible for that we have never clearly defined?

02. Capacity

The question: Have we given managers enough room to manage?

Consider:

- How much time managers realistically spend on people leadership
- How often new priorities are added without removing existing ones
- Whether managers are expected to remain high-performing individual contributors at the same time
- Where administrative work or fragmented tools are consuming time that could be spent with people

Ask:

What could we remove from the manager role before we add something new?

03. Learning + Practice

The question: Have we taught managers the behaviors we hold them accountable for?

Consider:

Looking beyond courses and completion rates, consider whether managers have opportunities to:

- Practice difficult conversations
- Receive feedback on their own leadership
- Learn from peers
- Experiment with new approaches
- Reflect on what worked and what didn't

Ask:

If a manager struggles with a behavior today, where are they supposed to learn how to do it better tomorrow?

04. Information

The question: Do managers have enough context to lead credibly?

Managers often become the translator between senior leadership and employees. That role becomes much harder when they are handed decisions without enough context—or asked to communicate decisions they did not understand themselves.

Consider:

- How much context managers receive
- Whether they have enough time to process change before communicating it
- Whether they know what is still uncertain
- Whether they know what they can and cannot say
- Whether employees have a clear way to tell managers what they are experiencing

Ask:

Are we asking managers to translate information they don't actually have?

05. Feedback

The question: Who helps managers become better at managing?

Managers give feedback constantly. They also need it.

Consider:

Whether your organization creates regular opportunities for managers to understand:

- What their teams experience from them
- Which leadership behaviors are working
- Where they create friction
- How effectively they support growth, recognition, and candor

Ask:

If a manager wanted honest feedback on their leadership today, where would they get it?

06. Recognition

The question: Are we asking managers to recognize everyone except themselves?

Meisha-Ann makes this point directly: Managers are people, too. They need to feel seen and appreciated if we expect them to keep creating that experience for others.

Consider:

- How managers are recognized for good leadership
- Whether recognition reinforces useful leadership behaviors
- Whether managers can see what their teams value about their leadership
- Whether recognition is happening only during formal review cycles

Ask:

What does a manager hear when they are doing leadership well?

07. Visibility

The question: How much of the work can managers actually see?

Consider:

- Remote and distributed work
- Cross-functional contributions
- Frontline work
- Behind-the-scenes work
- Informal collaboration
- Work that prevents problems rather than producing visible outcomes

Ask:

Who is easiest for our managers to see—and who is easiest to miss?

08. Escalation + Speaking up

The question: Can people raise problems without having to solve them first?

Look at what happens when employees:

- Disagree with a decision
- Surface a risk
- Admit a mistake
- Challenge a process
- Say that something isn't working
- Bring bad news without a proposed solution

Ask:

What does our organization teach people about bringing problems to leadership?

What did you find?

Choose one area where the gap feels most consequential.

THE GAP WE SEE

↓

WHO EXPERIENCES IT MOST

↓

WHAT IT COSTS US

↓

WHAT WE CURRENTLY DO

↓

WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE

Next steps:

Review your responses with your HR or people leader team.

Identify the one gap that is creating the most friction for managers, define who is the most affected, and agree on one organizational change to test before adding any new expectations to the manager role.

Want more insights?

Watch our documentary investigation **The Leadership Reset. Available on demand now.**

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