



Special Report:

Robin Elledge 4-Force
Collision Part II

Katherine Moody: Hi! This is Katherine Moody and welcome back to Part II of our podcast on the 4-force collision and its implications for HR. And you're talking to Robin Elledge who is a senior human resources executive with experience in companies like Hot Topic and IHOP, and she has been spending the last year in her own organizational consulting firm while she is in transition and working with leaders to address their business issues through HR strategies and insights. And this topic is something that she has also have been doing a lot of research on in the last year on all of these changes that are taking place in the workplace. And it really goes far beyond social media, and this is the collision that Robin is talking about with four forces, which are the four forces of the nature of the business environment, workforce demographic, technology, and pop culture.

And so Robin, we had a wonderful Part I. I'm not sure if you want to try to give a brief recap. I'm hoping that everyone who is listening to this either has listened to Part I or will listen to Part I. I'm delighted to have you back again. Thank you so much.

Robin Elledge: Sure, of course.

Katherine Moody: And give us perhaps just a brief recap of this collision that you're talking about.

Robin Elledge: Sure. You had mentioned the four forces and it's somewhat of a misnomer because there is really an infinite number of forces, but these four and while I was talking to people kind of jumped out at me. And they - there's a lot of companies doing interesting things as a result, and you know, in everything from how they attract and retain employees to how they develop their talent both in terms of the methodologies they use as well as the content in terms of what - what skill that we're really trying to teach people. It also has implications in terms of innovation, how the process of innovation takes place within the company.

And alternative work arrangements I think are something that we've been seeing for years, but the momentum is picking up, and you know, the interesting work that has been done around the tipping point, the book "The Tipping Point" I think really by Malcolm Gladwell. He I think articulated. I do think we are at a tipping point where we're going to see, you know, even more of these sorts of arrangements partly because our, you know, younger generation of workers are demanding it, partly because it makes sense economically, partly because I think there's things that actually these differences and these changes actually are better suited to solving some of the conflicts, dilemmas, that we are going to be facing in business over the years, and partly because I just think

that it's a better process for innovation. I think there's interesting things that can take place rather than the traditional way we've gone about it. The bottom line is the work is changing.

Katherine Moody: I think it's interesting.

Robin Elledge: Workforce is changing.

Katherine Moody: I'm sorry about that.

Robin Elledge: That's okay. Keep going.

Katherine Moody: And the business environment is, you know, the way companies, you know, as you mentioned, the way - the interesting example you had of the way Avery Dennison is coming up with new products and the way people are meeting and the way people are collaborating, and perhaps even at some point how businesses are structured, this is absolutely a train that's coming or a parade that's coming and I'm really hoping that HR is going to take advantage of this opportunity. HR executives will leverage what this is able to - what they can do in an organization. And so perhaps you could talk about this, how you see this as an opportunity for HR and maybe some things that you thought you would do immediately when you get into an organization and I know that you're consulting in organizations to help them with this. But if you were, you know, what do you tell HR leaders and HR people to do to take advantage of this opportunity to lead solutions in their company?

Robin Elledge: Sure. Well, you know, the first one is I think obvious to everyone. You got to understand the business and the strategies. And so, these all has to come out of the, you know, what the business needs to do, the strategies for them, because if you engage in any of these sorts of changes without directly tying it to an expected or anticipated business result, you know, in all honesty, it's not going to have the sustainability if it's just a good thing and a fun thing to do. It's got to generate results 'cause otherwise, you're not going to engage all four generations and organizational leaders in having an interest in doing this sort of thing. So yes, that would be first. Evaluate the business plans, find out where a shift in thinking, a shift in processes, along the lines we talked about in Part I might be beneficial.

And then secondly, find, you know, if there isn't an organizational-wide initiative or impetus to, you know, engage in these sorts of things, 'cause you can't do it that way, you can do it sort of top down the whole company all at once. You know, huge change

management issues there as you could imagine. But I think probably for most organizations, a more practical approach would be to find an internal champion, an organization, a group, a division, a department or group of departments where people truly do want to change their processes, really look at work differently, really communicate differently and engage differently. Find your champions 'cause it doesn't have to be an all or nothing thing, and what that does for you is then it gives you the opportunity to find - to make small wins if you will, things that you can publicize and get people excited about and generate the energy and enthusiasm around these ideas so that others want to come on board, others want to participate. And in the process of finding these internal champions, obviously it's important to engage both the key stakeholders of that department or division, even the reluctant ones, even the resistant ones, the finance department, the legal department, the HR department, whoever truly has a stake or who could throw up a road block for success in this area.

And the second thing is to find those informal leaders who may not have a title but they are people who have influence. They are the people who are at the center of the network if you will, the informal network that have the ability to influence how other people think. And so, those people as well as the leaders of that particular division or organization need to be fully on board, fully engaged, participate in what it looks like, what it feels like, how it gets ruled out and so forth, you know, 'cause if you don't have those groups on board, the key stakeholders, the leaders and the informal leaders, you know, it's not going to have - it could have a short run in other words.

And then obviously, third I think is then you develop your objectives and you evaluate those objectives. And in evaluating them, what you're really looking for is both what you intend to happen and what you think might happen that's unintended. What are the possible consequences and anticipate those. For example, a lot of companies who have engaged in social media initiatives have found that there are groups of employees who feel alienated, you know, people who had a power base that is - and their power base is formed on the basis of their title or their sort of formal position or the reports they generate, or whatever it is that might go away completely as a result of these new processes. And so, all of a sudden, they feel like they have lesser importance.

Or another common unintended consequence is just confusion, because now, all of a sudden, you've got new processes that don't mesh and don't match with the existing norms or the existing

procedures. Things don't jive and so it's like, okay, which of these should I do? Should I communicate via the blog or should I communicate via email? I mean, which of these is the appropriate way to go? And at some point, some companies have actually found and of course, this is only after there's a critical mass of people who are using it. They just cut the old systems off. They almost have to. I'm not saying that that's going to work for everyone and certainly not right away but to some extent, you know, to kind of think that way.

Katherine Moody: Interesting. And as you talked about those three points, what everything I have read about the Best Buy example that you discussed in Part I, this is exactly how they did it, and they did look for where there was a place in the business strategy that this kind of change would be effective in terms of just having people work for results, not having them have to be there at certain prescribed number of hours and set hours. And they did find internal champions. They started out very small in small groups because it really was more of something that happened at kind of grassroots and mid-management, and I think it was something that HR was involved in and they've spent quite a bit of time. I think I remember that they spent about two years. Hopefully, I think we'll go faster these days. Before, they really brought it to a point where it was something that was going to be doing corporate-wide, and I know when we read about it, it feels so big and then we go, "Oh, my, gosh, you know. To get my whole organization to do that, I don't even know if I'm up for it." But they started out very small and did these three stuffs that you talked about. So this makes a great deal of sense for everybody who wants to have an impact, but the whole elephant looks too big. These three pieces certainly make a lot of sense.

Robin Elledge: Yeah. And, you know, there's - I mean there's obviously more steps beyond objectives, but you know, at that point, it becomes partly just a large change management effort, and it depends on exactly what changes we're implementing. But I think two things that came to mind while you were talking, Katherine, is one, you have to be willing and able to tweak along the way 'cause you're not going to get it right the first time. And so, I think setting people's expectations that, you know, we're piloting this, we're experimenting this, we're going to - we want feedback, we're going to - we're going to make changes as we go to make sure it works for everyone. I think that's really, really important.

And the second thing is to take a long-term approach. I don't know. I mean, I do think some of these changes will take place more

quickly just because of the tipping point phenomenon, but I do - I mean, for example, Genentech, you know, was involved in a lot of these sorts of things and they said it took a good 12 to 18 months for people to kind of get it and for it to read sort of a mass - a critical mass of use. So, it does take time. And Genentech, I mentioned that specifically 'cause they are a very innovative, very progressive, very leading edge company on just about every measure you can imagine, a phenomenal organization, and it still took them 12 to 18 months. So for a more traditional organization, I actually think, you know, two to three years is not an unrealistic timeframe.

Katherine Moody: Good point, good point. It makes feel it more doable that you don't have to do this all and you don't have to do it in the next three months.

Robin Elledge: Right.

Katherine Moody: So, speaking of those things, what - what do you think companies should be on the lookout for as they're thinking about and beginning to implement these kinds of things? And what would you - what kind of cautions? Maybe you can tell us about some of the landmines that can happen as people are attempting to make these kinds of changes being led by HR?

Robin Elledge: Well, I suppose the first is company culture, which can sabotage any change effort of any kind, this certainly, you know, being a critical one. The - for example, there is an organization who, you know, I don't want to name but I do know that they have a really interesting - on the surface, interesting brainstorming methodology that's sort of online and interactive and, you know, collaborative, and all those other things that, you know, you would think that we're striving for, but it's not in wide use. They really haven't gotten very many tremendous ideas or innovations out of it, unlike the Avery Dennison example where they have had tremendous results.

But in this particular organization, the people that I talked to said, "Nobody uses it because collaboration isn't part of our company culture. It's a very hierarchical company. Decisions are made at the top. We all kind of know and believe that the people at the top don't really care or want to listen to the ideas of people lower in the organization." So, if that is the belief system and that's the culture or the procedure, and culture is what people perceive it to be. I mean, obviously, you know, it's going to - that particular initiative is only going to have limited use so I think company culture is the first one that jumps out at me.

We talked about not expecting results overnight. I think another thing is about communication. We're talking about changing people's long ingrained habits and long ingrained beliefs. So when I say people, I mean, I'm really talking about our generation, you know, the Baby Boomers specifically, but even the Gen Xers to some extent, you know. The Millennials, you know, they are the ones leading the charge in this arena. They are the digital natives and they're certainly comfortable with a lot of the things we're talking about.

But for the rest of us, we have to communicate consistently and constantly and more than you think. You have to overcommunicate, overcommunicate, overcommunicate on all of these sorts of initiatives and what we're doing and why we're doing it, what we hope to get out of it, and you ask for feedback and so forth.

I have mentioned informal leaders earlier and I think that that's really important. It's by the time you get to - especially by the time you get to sort of a larger scale initiative, making sure those informal leaders are engaged. I mean, if you have a task force or a team if you will that is responsible for the implementation, having a few of those informal leaders engaged on that team I think is a critical thing. It shouldn't just be the HR department. It shouldn't just be the OD department or the senior leaders sitting in a room who decide that this is what they want to do. This has got to be very much a grassroots sort of effort.

Ease of use is critical. We got to get feedback. We've got to tweet. We've got to allow room for both people, early adopters and late adopters. So we can't just shut the old systems off, you know, on day one. It's got to be an evolutionary process so that people who are late adopters don't feel the rug has been pulled out from under them. But it's got to be easy to use and potentially even easier to use than the old systems were. I think that's obviously the ideal.

And then of course the only other one that I just want to reemphasize since I've already said it two or three times is make sure that whatever we're doing is tied to the business, the business results. Unfortunately, I think HR still suffers somewhat in that we're not always tied to the business. We're not always knowledgeable or understanding of the business, and that's got to - that's got to be - that's got to change within the profession. And it has changed significantly and it will continue to change, but these are the types of initiatives that really can't get done without that understanding.

Katherine Moody: And it seems to me these are the types of initiatives that really need HR leadership because a lot of the organizational leaders may not be aware of this, may not know how to react to these forces. And it's a real opportunity and a need that we have for HR to step into the bridge and kind of lead the rest of the organization in all of these areas. So it just seems like such a tremendous opportunity for HR to step into the role that it really deserves of being at the table.

Robin Elledge: Oh, yeah, absolutely. I do think that what we're talking about is right in the center, the sweet spot if you will of what human resources is responsible for. And so, taking a leadership role and driving that change and not giving up, sort of I call it planting seeds, you know, because you're not going to, you know, you're not going to see growth overnight. You're changing people's thinking. And so, just planting seeds and getting people to think about things and sending - sending, you know, articles or links that talk about these topics to folks that you want to influence, and bringing in speakers to talk to the seniors to teach some of these changes. And I mean, there's such so many things you can do to sort of make the ground fertile if you will for these sorts of changes. And HR, I would love to see HR, human resources professionals at the forefront of this for sure.

Katherine Moody: Absolutely. I would too because A, I think organizations need more HR involvement and I think that when it comes to leading these initiatives, I certainly hope that it will be HR who is leading that. We need the voice and heart of HR to be in the forefront on these initiatives.

So if people are interested in finding out more and learning more, what are some other places or things that they can do to learn more about this and maybe get a little support as they start thinking about what they want to do in their organizations?

Robin Elledge: Sure. There's - and that's the good news is, you know, none of us have to do this by ourselves. We don't have to do it alone. I think we're all figuring it out together. We're all learning together. I mean, business knows I'm certainly no expert in this area and, you know, frankly, there's a lot of people who are far more knowledgeable than me who are blogging and tweeting and writing interesting books. Speaking of books by the way, one book I would recommend is called "Social Media at Work," and it's written by a group of people from Oracle actually. And it's specific to social media. It's not - I have not yet seen a book that really talks about all of these intersecting forces if you will, but they do have a lot of interesting case studies of companies who have implemented some

social media technologies and I think that would be a good learning opportunity.

I think that - and I kept mentioning Bob Johansen during the conversation. He has written two books - "Leaders Make the Future" and "Get There Early." I think those are both - again, he has a much more - he does not take it from a human resources or OD perspective. He truly is talking about, you know, here is what the next ten years look like, but again, those are the forces and the trends that are going to be impacting our businesses and we need to be - pay attention to that.

And then there's a zillion blogs and people who tweet on this topic and websites if you will too that I think are worth looking at. One is socialmediaatwork-conversation.com and that again is sort of a link to that book I mentioned, *Social Media at Work*. And basically, it's an ongoing blog that has other case studies and other discussions and conversation, and it's a great place to go and ask questions. You know, "Hey, I'm thinking about doing this. Does anyone have any experience at it?" And there are people who will respond.

Another one that also includes a blog is called thefutureofwork.net and that is a group of people who wrote a book and God, I forgot the name of it, but I think it's called *The Agile Workplace* or *Agile Workforce*, *Agile Company*, something like that. I apologize. But - but I'm sure you could find out the name of the book if you go to that website and they would have it there. And there's a zillion other places too but that's just a few to get you started.

Katherine Moody: Terrific, terrific. So, I know you have a quote from someone that you admire. Would you share that with us?

Robin Elledge: Oh, yeah. Well, it's just a - it's sort of - I actually posted this on my computer at one point only because it just sort of kept me grounded. The quote is this. "The dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate to the stormy present. The occasion is piled high with difficulty and we must rise with the occasion. As our case is new, so you must think anew and act anew." And when I look at that, I think, "Oh, that must have written by someone in the last five years," you know, about what changes are happening now. But no, it was actually quoted by Abraham Lincoln when he addressed Congress, and I don't remember the year but specifically he was addressing Congress, and that was Abraham Lincoln. So, it just reminds me that, you know, change is inevitable and it's part of our tapestry if you will within which we do work. And so - so I think it's exciting. I think there's a lot of opportunity for all of us.

Katherine Moody: It's wonderful. I think it's very exciting and I am so delighted that you took the time to share all of your thinking. I know you keep saying you're not an expert but the thing is that you're certainly thinking further ahead and know more about this than I do. And so this is then so interesting and I think it will be something that people will want to talk about. Hopefully, they'll visit some of these sites. And if people want to connect with you, would you be open to that?

Robin Elledge: Oh, of course. In fact, I mean, in all honesty, the main reason that I thought this might be a fun thing and an interesting thing to do, this sort of podcast, is because I'd really love to start a dialogue. I mean it would be fun to have people to talk to about this. I mean, what are you doing? What thoughts do you have and what do you read about that's interesting to you in this area? And I think it would be really fun to engage with other people. So, absolutely, connect with me on LinkedIn. And I do have a Twitter account which is robin_elligence, but I will be honest with you. I am sort of - I'm sort of a, God, what do they call it? A lurker? That's actually the technical. I don't know about technical but that's the word they call for people who read a lot of blogs but don't actually comment on a lot of blogs. Well, my Twitter history is sort of similar. I do tweet from time to time but I love reading what other people are saying and so forth.

Katherine Moody: Terrific. Well, maybe we'll be able to start a collision support force, support group here and get people talking. I think it would be terrific for people to have a place to share and get perspective. So, maybe that's something that we can have happened. But in the meantime, I do encourage all of you listening to connect with Robin on Robin - this is only the tip of iceberg, the tip of the Robin Elledge iceberg. There's lots of other good stuff that she will talk about, exciting and loved it as you can hear. So I want to thank you for listening and if you have any questions, please feel free to connect with Robin. You can connect with me. You can give me a call. My number is 949-981-7255. And thank you again for listening. Take care.