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Age: 24

Human Resources Assistant

Local ANDRH group: Anjou

**CATEGORY: EAPM ESSAY**

**STRUCTURE: RESTORIA**

Business sector: Contract catering

Number of employees in the company: 360

Number of employees on site: multiple sites

**HR generalists in the making:  
What leads in sustainable development for 2020?**

## Prologue:

In response to the topic of this EAPM competition, I had the idea of writing what would be the proceedings of a conference organized on the topic of the future of the HR function in its global environment up to 2020.

This document thus summarizes a **completely fictional conference, invented from start to finish (organization, speakers, etc.)**, held on 19 January 2009, which might be of interest to various HR professionals (junior or experienced) members of the equally fictional DEFI'ID RH association, or any other person thinking of taking up a career as HR generalist.

Here are the programme and the minutes of the main contributions.

## Proceedings of the DEFI'ID RH conference



### ***HR generalists in the making: What leads for sustainable development for 2020?***

#### *Morning: The issues of HR management in 2020*

Presentation by Mr Steser, Secretary of State at the ministry of sustainable development:  
***Global and sustainable: a background for drafting the missions of tomorrow's HRM...***

Presentation by Mr Keuvodi, expert at the European Commission:  
***Prevention and anticipation of economic risks: the territorial lever?***

Presentation by Mr Danlier, sociologist specializing in social relations:  
***Predictable movements of the social body***

Presentation by Ms Portuys, HR consultant, social psychologist specializing in the observation of relations between individuals:  
***An increasingly demanding "client-HR management" system: challenge or stress?***

#### *Afternoon: Round tables: What answers can an HR generalist give to the demands of the environment of 2020?*

Adaptation to the clients: ***Discussion between Ms Kenop, director of the HR master's programme, Higher Business School, and Mr Ritahz, legal expert***

Taking account of the global and local market: ***Discussion between Mr Clavereau, management auditor before becoming HRM, and Ms Toubla, director of a recruitment firm***

A word from the 2008 winner of the DEFI'ID RH young HR practitioners' competition.



## Opening by the current DEFID RH president

*“The work of the HRM is associated with many roles: from the military to the militant or the psychologist, via the artist, the coach, the manager and the lawyer<sup>1</sup>.*

*Each of these roles is present in the collective imagination, and has marked a period to a greater or lesser extent. The occupation of HR generalist is shaped by contextual factors according to current economic or political affairs, by the business sector or by individual expectations.*

*What will be the situation in 2020? Will the business partner model be left aside? Will the role of the personnel administrator return to the limelight given the increasing complexity of markets and rights? Will a new profile of the HR generalist as both technocrat and developer of potential be invented?*

*All visionaries agree that to imagine the future is to reflect history.*

*The personnel manager’s function was born in a context that must not be disregarded if its evolution is to be understood, all the more so in that here we are interested in the path that each of us can take in it.*

*The missions of HR management together with its history lead to today’s impressive variety of diversified competencies.*

*Personnel, and now HR, management can only make itself manifest in today’s society if it has been shared, inherited, lived, whence the ambition of this conference: to continue to shed light on a common future for HR management in its role and its missions.*

*To this end, we are going to hear various accounts of the present time which will be vital for understanding what is going to mark the future of our work.*

*Have a good day!”*

## **The issues of HR management in 2020**

Presentation by Mr Steser, Secretary of State at the ministry of sustainable development:

***Global and sustainable: a background for drafting the missions of tomorrow’s HRM...***

Against what background could the *raison d’être* of a new HR function be written?

Changes in the employment market and talent management, sustainable development, NICT, innovation and globalization are all current concerns to be taken into account by the “HR generalist in the making”, and to a still greater extent in 2020.

At the global level, sustainable development and its issues are going to alter the way we relate to time, to space and thus also to society and to work. This is necessarily going to open up new areas of work for HRMs.

Corporate social responsibility, increasingly mediatized and implanted in the collective consciousness, can continue to have an impact on the organization of work and HR policies.

If we add to this impulse wave the development of NICT and other technologies, the “HR generalist in the making” is going to surf on realities both complex and changing. For

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<sup>1</sup> Seven roles associated with the HRM: source: Thévenet, M. (2004). *Gestion des personnes. La parole aux DRH*. Paris: Editions Liaisons.



example, an HR manager that is both specialized and cross-functional is going to be asked to develop all-out HR marketing, to set up arrangements ensuring gender equality, and at the same time to manage the risks of disputes or think about a new internal organization. So, one of the future concerns of the HR generalists-to-be will be to shorten the distances (geographical, cultural, etc.) and intensify the effectiveness of working time (for themselves and for their peers)! Faced with changes in employment conditions (management of transport, working hours, etc.), the HRM will have to broaden the implementation of new forms of working still in their infancy today, such as telecommuting, and find solutions for those of tomorrow.

The job of the HR generalist is in essence one of networking, and more than ever the professionals' ability to work in teams are going to have to prove themselves.

On subjects such as the citizen enterprise, or the proactive management of jobs and skills, the future HRMs will benefit from mobilizing, duplicating, combining or pooling their practices. No doubt there will be an increase in "HR blogs" or other forms of cyber-communication.

Already used to working in a network with various consultants and experts, and even companies spun off to manage one activity or another, HRMs can no longer work as good technocrats managing their personnel on their own, particularly on issues such as disputes, occupational health, stress prevention or the study of salaries and wages. "*In order to guide the economic, sociological and cultural changes in companies, (...) the HRM has to arbitrate the management of persons and resources with other protagonists, in a line that is both hierarchical and cross-functional*"<sup>2</sup> and, one might add, external to the enterprise. We have come a long way from the time described to me when HR providers restricted themselves to only two principal areas of action: training/consultancy and the beginnings of HRIS.

In 2020 we shall see a bouquet of experts of all types: remuneration, HR performance, talent management, social climate monitoring, "HR R&D" firms, etc.

It is up to the HRM to have sufficient sense of strategy to choose useful allies. The future HR generalist will have to be a good purchaser and make pertinent and documented choices (specification, benchmark monitoring, network, etc.).

The professional environment is becoming more complex, and even more so in HR. It generates currents of ideas, climates, which reveal the issues of tomorrow for the HR professional, two of which merit your attention: CSR and social performance, coordination of employment and training networks to ensure the continuity of the enterprise.

To initiate these sustainable programmes or projects, the economy, now linked with ecology, will be a determining factor in the future of the HR function, and may or may not provide sufficient space to develop projects.

**Presentation by Mr Keuvodi, expert at the European Commission:**

***Prevention and anticipation of economic risks: the territorial lever?***

At a time of damage caused by foolish speculators, when the unemployment figures are going to continue to increase and economic indicators are on a downward trend, can HR management do anything about it? Will it be obliged to simply endure or will it have its part to play?

The answer is not to be found in the organization (its manager, its shareholders, etc.), although they are important variables. It is much more global.

A quick assessment of European policies shows that until now the economic policy of the European Union has been limited to controlling inflation.

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<sup>2</sup> Brignano, S. (2004). *Communication RH, quelles réalités*. Paris: Editions Liaisons. p 118.



The challenge for HRMs, citizens of Europe, will be to contribute alongside the public authorities to socioeconomic engineering: the construction of a genuine Europe-wide social policy of employment. In 2020 the context will be favourable to such construction.

The regulation of a set of “labour supply” resources with a capital of demand is the principal issue of any economic policy.

Is it not the same for the HRMs, who in their enterprises or groups must try to maintain full employment? Job maintenance or creation, working arrangements for senior staff, etc.

But the management of talents, just like trade, does not stop at the frontiers.

It is necessary to act and react in networks in order to assemble the human and financial resources that sustain activity and motivation. The cross-cultural era has arrived to generate human richness, and surely with new prospects that HRMs must be prepared for in 2020.

This is perhaps one of the significant major advances. Have we not passed a turning point in the area of social management? That of considering the virtues of diversity in enterprises, where as recently as thirty years ago white-collar and blue-collar employees were reproduced. The “HR generalists in the making” are passing through an interesting context of transition, and they will have to master its legal and human aspects.

Increasingly HRMs will have responsibility for the jobs that they manage, and for relationships at work; whence the importance of detailed knowledge of the employment market in their sector, at the local level that concerns them but also at a more global level by anticipating opportunities.

What we are highlighting here is the importance of good local territorial regulation of the economy, driven by networks, partnerships, aid for job creation or guidance. An example of a practical project would be the construction of professional development facilities common to an employment area and a network of enterprises.

Over the next few years the State or Europe is going to reinforce its mechanisms of aid for the establishment of a micro-economy by encouraging the dynamics of networks, of competitive cluster employment areas, while facilitating talent management on a European scale.

A number of financial instruments will be available for use by tomorrow’s HRMs.

Because we shall be working within a hard-line financial context, the strategic dimension of the HR function will have to prove itself from 2010-2020. HR generalists will have to develop the capacity to assess their HR strategy, draw up balance sheets of the effectiveness of their function, etc. Called upon to draw up performance indicators and management charts including CSR policy, HR generalists will contribute to a genuine recognition of their role if they manage to give “scientific proof” of the added value they offer. Will they then be able to declare themselves “human capital engineers”?

HRMs are no doubt going to lose their legendary laid-back attitude over the coming years, but it will be to gain in legitimacy if they grasp the opportunity to be identified as partners capable of guiding the organization in its growth or transformation.

Our HRMs in the making seem to have plenty of work to initiate, negotiate and assess which requires them to no longer be toolmakers, since they already have the tools, but rather social networkers: *homo communicus!*

**Presentation by M. Danlier, sociologist specializing in social relations:  
*Predictable movements of the social body***

The current search for flexicurity is a factor that seems to predict new missions for HR management, for example attracting candidates and maintaining their loyalty, and innovating in social relations.



The expectations placed on HR management by social institutions and groups are going to become greater as the management of employability becomes more complex.

The first social bodies with change in full sweep are the personnel representatives. What counter-power will they still be able to exercise? Death of trade-unionism or new impetus imparted by the law? Call for negotiation on new issues: gender equality, diversity management, guidance for mobility (whether internal or external), etc.?

What do the principal protagonists expect from HR management? Listening, compliance with laws and agreements, and a certain social dynamism.<sup>3</sup> To consolidate these expectations, there is very certainly a link to be identified between enterprise culture and quality of social relations.

HRMs are often assessed on the quality of the social relations established, but they have to cast a wide net in order to attain this objective. This will be even more true tomorrow, since the motivations of the social partners will be varied and the legal climate will affect them to a still greater extent! So, why not involve and train the personnel representatives in order to prevent any reflex of conflict and form a constructive and useful working space?

There is a constructivism to be invented, in the sense of discovering the reality of each protagonist, in order to develop a shared understanding. This takes concrete form in a capacity to stir the curiosity of the social partners on subjects with high stakes and help them build on the HR action priorities and those of corporate management.

Opinion polls show that HRMs are in their own world, and do not sufficiently fulfil their role of bottom-up communication, occupied by strategic or more global issues.

Some specialists corroborate these impressions: “HRMs have deserted work organization (...) the hypertrophy of these tools feeds a cumbersome machinery, and HR teams end up by chasing their own tails. HR management is moving away from the concerns of the employees and the managers.” writes J-P Basilien, director of the centre for social dialogue expertise at Entreprise et Personnel.

Consequently, renewing a true social dialogue is the challenge for the HRMs of tomorrow.

Basing negotiations on a common working purpose, capable of taking account of everyone’s point of view and of the current situation (legal, economic).

French law has recently undergone some upheavals (act on market modernization, reform of social democracy), and will continue to undergo a series of reforms in training, occupational health, stress and who knows what else.

The junior who wants to become a generalist must keep a finger on the pulse of social progress and register for legal refresher courses in order to be proactive rather than reactive on positive law.

Culture, a variable not easy to define in itself, can have immediate repercussions on HR management, for example in terms of behaviour at work or skills.

Programmes for the development of foreign language competencies will probably still be a priority in French groups in 2020.

Although cultures mix in the ordinarily neutral world of work, this nevertheless raises some fundamental problems regarding individual freedoms which come into conflict with the common rules: wearing a veil, demands to choose religious holidays, etc.

In recent years enterprises have invested much effort in cross-cultural management. There nevertheless remain a number of fundamental questions for the future HRMs.

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<sup>3</sup> Expectations identified by Peretti (Peretti, J-M. (2006). *Gestion des ressources humaines*. Paris: Vuibert. p17).



And then, “*what is particular about HR management is that in an enterprise everyone claims to have a competency in the area*” (quote from a manager).

Are we all HRMs? The function seems to be increasingly shared, but a substantial consultancy role will remain assigned to the HRM in terms of legal, managerial and organization advice, depending on the protagonists.

Presentation by Mme Portuys, HR consultant, social psychologist specializing in the observation of relations between individuals:

***An increasingly demanding “client-HR management” system: challenge or stress?***

Without being too much of a visionary, one can infer that tomorrow’s HRM will be a manager of individual relations (management of skills, of remuneration systems, etc.).

The emphasis placed in recent years on an attitude of support or providing services for an HR department which guides the strategy of the enterprise is going to continue.

Directors and managers seem to be the leading clients of the HRM, whatever the level of strategy granted to the HRM and the extent to which the function is centralized or not.

The current trend of professional development of managers, including in aspects of human resources management, seems to be confirmed by the directors: “*The changes to come concern first of all very ordinary human resource support for the managerial staff*” (quoted from a managing director of a service company).

The managing director (or chairperson and managing director, as the case may be) wants HR management to be identified to its internal and external clients (investigating networks, providers, etc.). He or she gives the HRM a proactive role in order to prepare the major strategic priorities of the enterprise, including on the basis of social intelligence. He or she also has a strong expectation of reliability and expertise on HR matters with a view to containing the social risk and maintaining the regulatory framework of the enterprise.

Furthermore, with the responsibilities they exercise in the field, particularly in HR, the managers expect a sharing of HR management that can be recognized and guided. They deplore a lack of bottom-up communication or of means made available to fulfil the HR missions successfully.

Whether they are local managers or executive managers, the impressions are the same. They often have the feeling that HRMs impose directives, whereas they would expect support from them that is visibly not provided.

A probable challenge to come between now and 2020: the provision of decentralized HR resources.

As for the increasingly demanding employees, they expect a full range of advice to help them manage their employability, or a range of increasingly technical answers on their rights.

In view of these many requirements included in the “daily specification” defined by their multiple clients, the HRMs of 2020 will have to develop abilities to organize their time and arrange themselves time for thinking. It is therefore necessary for the HRM, a hub of interconnection between all his or her “clients”, to maintain some distance in order to be able to speak for everyone at the same time.

In this respect, if the “HR generalists in the making” have taken a course which gives importance to reflexivity and/or regular practice of analysis of the activity (internally in the contribution to projects or externally), they will have a better overview of this political system of players. Is remaining sufficiently detached concerning one’s practice not the primary ambition of any



professional network? And if tomorrow's HRMs have to learn to "think outside the box" in order to understand the expectations of their "clients" from another angle, they have everything to gain from participating in the networks of other professions.

In what ambient state of mind is the HRM going to harmonize and arbitrate work relations?

We might believe in an era of talent management, in which the HR professional would only have the development of skills to orchestrate. The idyll of harmonious management of human resources to be cultivated, in relation with managerial principles of personnel development. Does this not sound somewhat false at a time when management seems to produce situations of stress and suffering and enterprises, supported by the public authorities, examine organizational systems and psycho-social risks?

In fact, believing in strategic growth of HR management would mean forgetting the climate of uncertainty: this sword of Damocles hanging over everyone's asymmetric career, particularly in periods of foreseeable financial storms.

So, is the HRM of the 21st century a re-structurer? A guide, seeking markers for increasing employability? There again, taking the latter path would no doubt already be optimistic, since it is often in an increasingly complex environment that HRMs conduct their communication campaigns and try to manage the procedures without "rocking the boat" too much and in compliance with the law.

Therefore, all the professionals in HR positions agree that they have only a little room for manoeuvre in managing their work.

The future HR generalists will doubtless be torn like their predecessors between a number of paradoxical demands. The HRM is expected to negotiate with flexibility but firmness, to maintain distance while remaining practical, to be creative within a limited framework, etc.<sup>4</sup> And if an issue that will have come a long way by 2020, stress management, is added, will we be diagnosing the symptoms of "burn-out" in the future HRMs?

In order to avoid this alarmist scenario, the round tables being held this afternoon will allow professionals to position themselves better in the near future of 2020.

## **Positioning and role of the "HR generalist in the making"**

What do the budding HR generalists need? What will differentiate them?

Develop the sense of client adaptation:

***Discussion between Ms Kenop, director of the HR master's programme, higher business school, and Mr Ritahz, legal expert***

### ***Ms Kenop:***

"Listening, understanding, analysis, empathy, coaching: that is the scope of behaviour to be used by the future HR generalist, depending on the situation.

To adapt to the different interlocutors in a client-HR system, the HRMs of the 21st century will be network moderators, sales professionals in the sense of a relationship of service for their various clients and ensuring client loyalty, someone who knows how to adapt the tools to their organizations.

Their primary ambition: the win-win negotiation. That must involve listening and availability, and thorough analysis of each situation in order to optimize the response.

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<sup>4</sup> Quotes from directors taken from: Chalumeau, M. (2007). DRH, ce que les DG attendent de vous. *Personnel*, 485, 40-42, p 42.



It is a prerequisite for them to be able to identify what their role, legitimized by the organization, is in order to act accordingly, and to know the constraints of the different occupations. Relational engineering to adapt their role of consultant to everyone (role of guidance, of ‘champion of relations’, as Ulrich predicted several years ago) (...).”

**Mr Ritahz:**

“I think that, beyond this human and communication component, the ‘HR generalist in the making’ will have to have acquired a sound legal and economic background in order to meet the needs of his or her clientele.

In terms of training, tomorrow’s HRM will have attended courses on labour law for generalists, in order to adapt to the subtle interpretations of the law that is on its way according to the trends that we forecast (increase in disputes, increasing number of sources of law, etc.).”

**Ms Kenop:**

“In that case you make the position of the HRM in the role of head of personnel more inflexible. Don’t you think that the objective of the future HR generalist will be to bring practices into phase with social policies? And that could be summarized as ‘professionalizing the organization of work’, i.e. acting on skills, project coordination and consultancy in order to make HRMs available to everyone and in particular to management. It is that part of support in the field or in-house training provided by the HR department which appears innovative and useful for guiding the changes to come.”

**Mr Ritahz:**

“Yes, but if the social barometer shows, as it does in many enterprises, that there is not enough bottom-up communication and that a climate of restructuring is necessary, the HR generalist will above all have to negotiate collective or individual agreements. And that necessitates an aptitude to find one’s way around in the regulations in order to draw up appropriate conventions and contracts, before going to ‘propose and sell them!’”

**Ms Kenop:**

“That part can always be outsourced. I think that tomorrow’s legitimacy for HR professionals will be in their accessibility, their availability and their professionalism in hearing and dealing with the demands.

If the managers feel that they are not receiving enough guidance in the decentralization of human resource management, the future HR generalists will make the effort to be a model of management in order to promote and transmit the values of the enterprise. They will have to provide a hot-line, capable of managing problems of organization, management and of HR issues. They will have to know how to interpret social symptoms, to be educators, to have capacities of commercial negotiation in order to sell or buy services (both externally and in-house).”

Taking account of the global and local market:

*Discussion between Mr Clavereau, management auditor before becoming HRM, and Ms Toubla, director of a recruitment firm*

**Mr Clavereau:**

“In order to keep a certain structural consistency within the changing financial and social markets, the HRM will have to ensure constantly updated intelligence on technologies, the economy, occupations, etc.



In terms of tools and methodologies, the “HR generalist in the making” will master the use and configuration of a number of information systems (HRIS, payroll, etc.) and will have a portfolio of skills including perfect practice of coordination and of management by project.

In terms of missions, his or her forward-looking capacity will be put into effect by a territory-based approach, involvement in various networks and continuous adjustment of the management of the human factor.”

**Ms Toulba:**

“This raises the question of how to act on the match between enterprise strategy and market? By ‘playing on the enterprise values and culture’? If that is the case, the HR generalists in the making will have to ‘educate the employees’, ensure the application of the choices of the company in terms of sustainable and citizenship development.

More precisely, I think they will play a particularly strategic role in the definition and application of the social sphere. They will be tasked with supporting the eco-environmental activities of the enterprise, as CSR coordinator, a title they take on automatically in a large number of companies, in a similar manner to communication in certain examples.”

**Mr Clavereau:**

Beyond projects linked to CSR, tomorrow’s HRMs must not lose sight of their actions in the strategy of the enterprise. By that I mean that they have to guide the management committees and the managers to think globally in the long term. (...) Conduct ‘mini-jobs and skills planning’ or ‘educational engineering’ at local level with the managers, that is an example of strategic missions for a professional HR generalist.

If the crisis affects the market of the enterprise, it can be imagined that great creativity is expected from the HRM in his or her areas of expertise in order to support the changes. For example, the HRM will have to consider new growth-generating occupations and their assimilation, obtain funding, original ideas, etc. Tomorrow’s HRM will thus be an identifier of new job niches for HR work but also a risk planner.”

**Ms Toulba:**

“Yes, the HRM is expected to act on things that are very detailed and very global at the same time. In structures where the HRM is close enough to the employees, he or she manages several realities at once.

One of the major issues will be to know how to orchestrate and change register, from operational to strategic, while being able to compose the music at the rhythm of the organization: reacting quickly in certain cases and patiently, with the art of “leaving things to ripen”, in others. The job of the HRM, an artist’s job that will stimulate our ‘future HR generalist?’”

**Mr Clavereau:**

“Artist! Yes, well, not exactly! It is precisely because they are expected to be creative that tomorrow HR generalists will be expected to be able to prove the return on investment of these productions. Tomorrow’s professionals will be qualitative and quantitative. They will have control of the accounts and the indicators to be generated from start to finish. And that is precisely what is exciting, to be able to create in this double register.”

**Ms Toulba:**

“This is the type of profile I’m thinking of. The HRMs that we recruit have all developed a variety of skills, and practical financial experience is in high demand. However, what turns out to be more important than this capacity to reason differently is no doubt the skill of analysis, of projection, that an HRM has. Given the issues to come, that will still be true in 2020. Looking



forward to the skills to be developed tomorrow, the 'HR generalist in the making' must above all have 'a different regard', be far-seeing about the organization and the system of relations. For this he or she will develop a science inspired by systems, what we might call meta-communication."



A word from the winner of the DEFID RH young HR practitioners' competition

*First of all, I would like to thank you for the confidence you placed in me on the occasion of the competition and which you are renewing today by inviting me to speak.*

*Sustainable development is a very broad topic, in which the relativity of any HR practitioner remains great. I think that what must motivate HR professionals in the system within which they will work is above all a belief in people and in the potential of their actions, starting with those that we carry out every day.*

*What are the issues of tomorrow in human resources management? What social advances? Talent management, partnerships for employability, the fight against discriminations, participation in European employment policy?*

*So many subjects to be dealt with using approaches and tools yet to be invented.*

*Our common challenge in 2020, as HRM, HR coordinator, HRD or any title that will come into use until then: to generate added value in increasingly unpredictable environments.*

*To take up that challenge, determination, lucidity, boldness and creativity seem to be good prerequisites; in any case, those are the ones that have enabled me to obtain a position as HR generalist.*

*I think there will be three key words to remember in our contribution to the strategy of private-sector enterprises up to 2020: C for Culture, C for human Capital, C for Control.*

*Action on Culture (enterprise or societal) by developing actions in the three spheres of CSR. This might lead us, as future managers of HR management, to implement actions away from our centres of expertise, such as awareness-raising campaigns, cultural changes, and will prompt us to work more closely with communication (internal and external).*

*Management of the Capital of experience and knowledge, using all the means of the learning organization to develop skills and collaborations (internal or external).*

*Lastly, one of the missions will be Control, in order to gain effectiveness and legitimacy. This will involve, among other aspects, verifying the assimilation of the global procedures through the use of the HR tools provided. The capacity to assess and communicate on HR policy, those are new missions to include in the job description of the HR generalist in 2020.*

*On these three major themes, the combination of resources should allow readiness and progress, finding the appropriate rhythm, as "HR generalist of a given entity".*

## **Closing of the conference by a representative of the ministry of labour**

*"I would like to thank all the speakers for the quality of their contributions on the occasion of this conference. (...)*

*I am pleased to note your strength as a professional organization in making proposals, and I will invite you to our working group in the near future on topics discussed today."*

