

Introduction

If you received an instruction manual at birth, please do share it with the rest of us because this is the very thing we haven't been able to create through science and any kind of technology that is currently presented to us on Earth. Our psychological, physiological, financial, spiritual and emotional challenges are never far away. If there are fees for participating in life, you will find many of them across these elements that are associated with human life and human suffering. Yet, all that we are as human beings is truly inspiring. People can demonstrate stunning levels of compassion, creativity, ingenuity, and there are no limits on what can be achieved in life. Yet, people still struggle to realize their full potential in and out of work. Indeed, I can confidently say that many of us barely scrape the surface of our true power and strength in life. Sometimes people get in the way of themselves, and other times, organizations can play a role in limiting the potential of their people. On the other side of this are people and organizations that thrive. They get the best out of each other and make progress, together. The human experience is understood, respected and leveraged to deliver outcomes, as you'll see from several case studies I present within these pages.

The longest relationship human beings experience in this world is the one we have with oxygen. It is the relationship that we cannot do without. It is the relationship that is vital to our survival and a long-term necessity within our life. This is a deeper and more profound relationship than we ever seek to explore. It is taken for granted in most cases, yet our existence entirely depends on it. There is no thinking

required on this point. It is an automatic and rapid understanding of our world for all humans. We don't acknowledge it yet our relationship with oxygen serves as the ultimate reminder of how we are connected to the wider world. The producer of the air we breathe must be protected at all costs for the human species to remain intact. This understanding brings companies, people and communities much closer together in our minds. When we allow companies to flourish that are, in some cases, literally taking away or seriously impacting our ability to breathe, we need to do something about it. The ignorance of this has led to all manner of social and environmental movements, and relates, in no small part, to our individual freedoms as human beings. Our basic human rights may well be understood and enshrined in law offering basic protections against unjust treatment, yet there is never ever any promise of a positive experience for human beings, and there is often very little help when it comes to the experience of our own minds and our own journeys through life and work.

As we'll see throughout this book, in the context of human experience, the organization takes on a whole different role to rise to meet the social, environmental, technological, political and even spiritual challenges that are being experienced by people across the world. It was just a matter of time before the human experience became a key consideration within the strategy of successful businesses and enterprises. The evolution from organization and management-centricity to a deeper commitment to human-centricity in the grand scheme of things has been relatively quick. Just a few decades ago, the economy was well and truly in service to industrialists and those concerned only with profit as an indicator of progress. Fast-forward to the present day, and we have witnessed the emergence of the employee experience field, which continues to enjoy impressive growth and increasing recognition, not just within HR circles, but in business more generally. The research for my previous book, *Employee Experience*, which covered some of the world's leading companies, indicated that businesses that put people first and consider the organization holistically, not only deliver exceptional business outcomes, but also human ones too. The idea that organizations and humans can

flourish at the same time is one that grows in stature every year – it is an idea whose time has come.

Broaching this topic is not easy by any means, and in writing this book, once again my own thinking has been profoundly challenged. Certainly, my thoughts on what the human experience is, and what role an organization and work plays in it, have been questions that warranted some deeper introspection and dialogue with colleagues in different parts of the economy and at different stages in their lives and careers. The examples in this book offer two things: inspiration and impact. Without the former, we cannot expect the latter. Leading business in a human way naturally challenges the status quo, established thought and will provoke reactions. The whole point is to create organizations where people can reach as high as they wish to go – to co-create astonishing things.

It's important to remember that what is right for one context may not be right for another. Every company and person is unique, but I hope your experience with this book will support you in growing and enhancing your human-centred and experience-driven impact. It's rather exciting to discover and work with companies and colleagues that are doing bold things to advance the human experience at work, and my research here aims to contribute some new thinking about how we can do just that. As a result, I suppose this book presents an opportunity to challenge and radically reshape our organizations and the world of HR as a priority. This is not based on hacking, disrupting or refining the current model. It's about a next big step in minimizing the gap between people and companies, making work more human and our experiences more valuable.

Human experiences, not human resources

The exploration I have been on, which took place before and during a global pandemic, has resulted in a radical idea that is centred on where organizations have seen, felt and experienced the best results. Across smaller companies or global enterprises, what is being called for and actively encouraged is an overhaul of organizations, and their

internal support functions, to become more trusted, valued and respected within and outside of their business and industry. These are key measures of success. Trusted organizations are created through trusted leaders and professionals who are consistently amplifying what matters most to a business and the people within it. They help their companies share and live their truth. To that end, rather than silos, functions and departments being set up in competition with each other – fighting for resources and influence with the top team – the organization that is best geared up to deliver on the human experience is the one set up purely with humans in mind. Humans care about their planet, their performance and all the roles they play in life – companies that can be considered as a progressive force for good will, increasingly, be defined by their impact across all of those areas as opposed to a narrow focus on simply delivering a return to shareholders. A profitable business does not always translate into a positive and progressive brand – one that has a celebrated impact in the world.

One hypothesis that is gaining traction is the idea that human experience as an approach and business philosophy essentially replaces human resources as we know it today. Though the profession is so much more than those two words ‘human’ and ‘resources’, to achieve its full potential it has to transform itself up to the next level of collective consciousness rather than seeing people as simply resources. The incremental and very positive steps into organization development, talent management and employee experience are commendable, but it is not enough to truly align with an experience-driven economy. To deliver sustainable and tangible progress, I believe HR will need to reposition its identity, brand and role within business. Thinking of brand HR and impression, perception and trust management, the conclusion to be drawn is that ‘human resources’ may be ready to be retired as a term and as a way of thinking about the role, and impact, that HR professionals have within business. In my opinion, no progressive 21st-century people-centric CEO would tolerate their people being referred to as resources. It’s just not on and it needs to stop. In saying this, it must be noted that I didn’t fall into or end up in HR by chance; I made a conscious decision to move into the field over 15

years ago as I felt that, of all business functions, HR was the best positioned to play a significant business leadership role. There is no doubt that HR has a big influence over the quality of the experience within an organization, but challenges remain in the way the function is set up, positioned and perceived within business. As we'll see from this book, companies are responding in a positive way by accelerating new paradigms for their support services that are more closely associated with the two things that are most important to any brand: humans and their experiences.

The great human movement within organizations

I'm fortunate in my role to work with many progressive companies and individuals that are absolutely committed to their people, witnessing and experiencing the shift to human experience at work. What is of note across many of these organizations is the depth and breadth of their commitment. It is not one thing. It is all things. There are no shortages of places to look for evidence that an employer supports and stands with its people. There is evidence in abundance being freely shared across all facets of media and all measures within an organization. It runs through the business in a way that resonates with many within and beyond the marketplace.

In acknowledging a great employer, we are acknowledging great leadership – at least, what I define as world-class leadership anyway. Whatever reputation has been created, you only need to look at the people at the top of the company to find out exactly why an organization's culture is the way that it is. What is tolerated, permitted and celebrated gives us real clues as to what's really going on inside businesses. Often, an exceptional employer is taken for granted. In the drive for profits, and in pursuit of what is perceived to be progress, people and companies can often lose their way. Those that stay the course and continue to elevate the outcomes of their people as well as the organization should be studied and held up as the inspirational entities they are. Done well, brands in this human mode rightly command respect and attention.

People just know when they're working for a great company because, from whatever angle you look at it, they are being supported. Across the entire human experience, you will see well-defined and well-designed programmes, policies and processes that are there to help people be as good as they possibly can be. Think about an employer from your career where you had a very positive experience. What was so special? What were the aspects that stood out? I ask this a lot of people and in almost all cases the response starts with an emotional response. We *felt* something. This tells us all we need to know about the impact of our experiences in work. Conversely, think about the worst experience you've ever had in work. What was happening there? What went wrong? It could be a lack of care, a lack of compassion or a lack of respect. Any one of these is enough to bring a healthy relationship to a close. So why do some employers allow it to occur at all?

By human experience, I am very much centred on people within the workforce for this book, yet when I talk about the human experience I naturally refer to and include any human that is associated, in any way, to a company and brand. All those experiences matter. They could be the fuel behind major success or they could be destroying any chance at a successful future in business. In practice, the human experience should be an organization's top and most enduring priority. Nothing else should come close.

The journey through this book will be guided by in-depth examples, case studies and insights from my work and research. We will question the very foundations of business and the HR function, and how we can develop our organizations to better serve humanity and the planet. Truly, our moment has arrived. This is our opportunity to build organizations to be proud of, that stand the test of time, and leave a positive legacy in the world. If you're reading this, I consider you an ally in this human-centred movement and I wish you well in advancing the human experience at work wherever you are. It is an honour to share this journey with you. Welcome, and enjoy the experience.