

# Introduction

*A framework for modern HR and people operations*

Human Resources

People Operations

Talent and Culture

People and Places

Human Capital

Talent Operations

Personnel

Do any of those terms describe your team? Perhaps something different altogether? I'm not surprised.

The field has been going through a bit of an identity crisis for several years. Much like the evolution from 'personnel' to 'human resources' was marked by an increase in capability, the current evolution is driven by the increased capabilities and impact of next-generation people teams.

This evolution in nomenclature is not unique to HR. Software engineers used to be programmers. Account representatives used to be sales reps. Even within the field of HR, we've seen the gradual shift from 'recruiting' to 'talent acquisition'.

Let's be honest, the term 'Human Resources' has an image problem. We have ourselves to blame for some of these self-inflicted perception wounds. I'll get into this more later in the book, but in short, our thirst for power and control as a path to the cherished *seat at the table* created resentment and frustration in our teams.

While we have to own our role in some of those legacy perception issues, the reality is that as a function we were rarely given the respect equal to our importance in building a successful organization.

The field of Human Resources today is a spectrum. On one side you have a relic from the days of personnel, defined by words like administrative, reactive, transactional, or less flattering terms. Swing the pendulum in the other direction and you have a very different function defined by words including strategic, transformative, proactive, inclusive, embedded, essential. Your views on the field will largely be informed by where you sit on that spectrum.

This book explores the leading edge of HR. It breaks down some of the ways in which the field has evolved, highlighting shifts in mindset, approaches, technology and more. It blends research, interviews with modern people executives, personal experience and case studies from practitioners around the world who are embracing next-generation people practices to transform their companies.

### Human resources or resources for humans?

I love the question above. I wish I could claim it, but it came from Basecamp co-founder and CEO Jason Fried. We were discussing the role of modern HR on my 21st Century HR podcast when he made this comment (Schmidt, 2019). The simplicity was profound. Too often when we think of legacy HR we conjure visions of impersonal policies and procedures that strip humanity and leave our employees feeling as if they have to have a master's in bureaucracy navigation to thrive. Jason's comment was a great level-setting reminder of whom we serve. His views were echoed by Rainmaking Venture Studio Head of Talent Matt Buckland, in the *Fast Company* story referenced above: 'The Truth is HR did themselves a disservice in the pursuit of a "seat at the table". They became police for the organization and lost the respect/trust of workforces. Any name change that implies some employee advocacy or treats "people" as people should be welcomed.'

Whatever your preferred nomenclature for the function, the reality should be your focus on supporting and enabling your employees to do their best work. 'How' to do that is obviously the art. This book will really be focused on the 'what' and the 'how' of modern HR. You're already reading this, so I trust we can skip the 'why'.

The capability and value to the business of modern people teams go well beyond compliance. Modern people operators bring a much broader skill set to their role, often infused with experiences, perspectives and capabilities from outside the function. People leading these functions possess business acumen on par with their peers across the C-suite. They're embedded in the business and embraced as part of the teams they support. Their teams leverage data that inform their strategy and allow them to address people challenges before they become a crisis. Rather than striving for ownership with centralized command and control structures, their decentralized business partner models focus on empowering and enabling employees to thrive.

### How to read this book – what it is and what it isn't

Throughout the book I'll be presenting a view of modern HR that will shape your perspectives on the field. My views are formed by my own experiences, of course. They're far from comprehensive. When thinking about this book, it was important to me to add a range of voices, perspectives and views beyond my own.

That old cliché about surrounding yourself with people smarter than you is a good metaphor for this book. I've been incredibly fortunate in my career to build a network of relationships with subject-matter experts throughout different HR, talent, recruiting and technology disciplines. Many of them have weighed in throughout this book to lend their expertise and insights. I lean on them to ensure that deep domain expertise is infused into each chapter.

Each chapter includes stories and case studies from practitioners who are practising modern HR. I want to balance my own views with their stories and real-world experience to present a more multidimensional view on each topic.

Practitioner spotlights and case studies are highlighted to help them stand out throughout the book. It was important to me to include a range of voices and real-world experience, practices and stories to bring the ideas in each chapter to life.

This book is not about best practices. I personally don't believe in 'best' practices as they're too subjective. For a practice to be 'best', it requires the perfect mix of ingredients – culture, budget, resources, workforce, locations, facilities and so on. That's a lot of variables. I think the idea that you can

take a specific practice that is aligned with all of those elements, transplant it to another company and yield the same results is naïve.

I prefer ‘proven practices’. They’ve worked well for an organization with all their unique variables. That doesn’t mean replicating it will work for you, but it can inspire you to build something similar that’s localized to your own unique circumstances.

What I hope to do in this book is to expose you to a range of varied practices, approaches, views and more. I won’t be suggesting any of them as ‘best’ or suggest your people practices are inferior if they’re not built the same way. What I do want to do is expose you to a range of novel ways to think about solving non-novel (and some novel) challenges – an assortment of views and ideas. Maybe they’ll inspire you to build something similar? Maybe they’ll inspire you to build something better? Maybe you’ll reject that approach altogether? You’ll have to make your own call.

This book is also not comprehensive. HR is a broad field, made even broader when you look at its applications across companies, industries, sizes, geographies and a range of other variables. We won’t dig deeply into fields like academia, union environments, non-profits and so on. The case studies and executive spotlights lean a bit tech as that’s where I spend a lot of my time and where much of my network resides, but I worked to get perspectives and experience beyond technology as I know that innovation and great people practices can happen anywhere.

You’ll be surprised where you might find inspiration. My goal in writing this book is to introduce you to a range of inspiring practices and practitioners to feed that inspiration and light a spark about what’s possible.

Before we get into the main chapters, it’s important to add some context to what redefining HR means. We’ll do that in Chapter One.

## Reference

- Schmidt, L (2019) Why It’s Time to Include Compensation Range in Job Descriptions, *Fast Company*. Available from: [www.fastcompany.com/90394268/why-its-time-to-include-compensation-ranges-in-job-postings](http://www.fastcompany.com/90394268/why-its-time-to-include-compensation-ranges-in-job-postings) (archived at <https://perma.cc/3GNC-BNFD>)