

Transformational HR

Transformational HR

*How human resources can create value and
impact business strategy*

SECOND EDITION

Perry Timms



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Perry Timms is the founder and chief energy officer of PTHR – a small band of work-focused activists operating as a gold-accredited four-day working week, micro-consultancy and setting out to create *better business for a better world*. At the time of writing, PTHR is a pending certified B Corporation.

Perry's work is influenced by human-centred design and systems thinking plus agile, inclusive and self-managed ways of working that enhance personal fulfilment and organization effectiveness. Perry teaches CIPD qualifications to Level 7, most recently in organization design and development. Perry also lectures on HRM, the future of work, emerging technologies plus conscious social businesses and international marketing.

Perry is adjunct professor at Hult International Business School and Ashridge Management School, a visiting fellow at Cranfield School of Management and Sheffield Hallam University, and is a Fellow of the RSA.

He is an international and 2x TEDx speaker and award-winning writer on the future of work, HR and learning. Perry has headlined some of the largest conferences in HR, people and change across the world. He is a four-time speaker at the Institute of People Management in South Africa, six-time speaker at CIPD Annual Conferences in Manchester and CIPD events in Glasgow, Belfast, London and the regions, plus HR events in Kuwait, Dubai, Miami, New York, Toronto, Shanghai, Istanbul, Reykjavik, Amsterdam, Oslo, Paris, Lille, Milan, Rome, Ljubljana, Portoroz, Bucharest, Athens, Nicosia, Budapest, Vienna, Berlin, Hamburg, Moscow, Mumbai, Auckland, Zagreb, Gdansk and Warsaw.

Perry's 2018 book *Transformational HR* was an Amazon.com Top 30 HR seller shortly after its release, and his second book, *The Energized Workplace*, was published in August 2020.

Perry is BPS Level A and B qualified in a range of psychometric instruments, including OPQ32, Firo-B, MBTI Steps I and II, and is an accredited GCOlogist with the Game Changer Index.

2020 also saw Perry as a new instructor for LinkedIn Learning, teaching on the role of HR and organizational performance, employee relations and engagement, and he has written for Sage, Oracle, SHRM, Ultimate Software,

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Perry is a proud Chartered member of the CIPD and is a three-time member of *HR Magazine's* HR Most Influential Thinkers list, making the top 10 in 2018 and 2019. Before being independent, Perry working on technology-driven change programmes in the Court Service and was head of L&D, OD and talent in the public and not-for-profit sectors. Perry is also on numerous global HR influencer lists for his progressive work in HR, OD and change.

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FOREWORD FROM THE FIRST EDITION

Peter Cheese, Chief Executive, CIPD

As many have said, we live in changeable times, and times of significant uncertainty. Political and social change, economic instabilities and the growing impact of technology and the digital world are affecting us all. The ability to adapt and to be able to take advantage of a changing context in the nature of work, the changing workforce and ways of working have become critical to business philosophy and strategy. At the heart of this is people – how they contribute, how they work together, how they create and innovate, how they are engaged, how we invest in them and how we look after them.

Some might call this business transformation, but it is at the heart of where the human resource (HR) and learning and development professions play a vital and increasingly important role to create a sustainable future of work that is good for business outcomes but also good for people. Good work is a principle the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) has stood for since its inception just over 100 years ago as the Workers Welfare Association and into its current guise – championing better work and work- ing lives. We've responded to the need for good work as a key element of a flourishing society and it is encouraging to see the debate about the princi- ples of good work emerging more widely into business and even into policy.

Digital technology and ever-faster moving enterprises are giving us all many new challenges and opportunities. We are responding to those and promoting more adaptive practices, and growing the focus and body of knowledge for the profession around evidence, research, science of human behaviour and around the idea of outcomes and principles. There is so much opportunity, and need, for great HR in today's world but we also need to step up, to more confidently engage and challenge organizations and business leaders to improve our understanding of people, driving principles of good work and ethical practice and behaviour.

Which is why I'm delighted to present this foreword to Perry's work around a transformational HR proposition, as he calls it. I think it is very

much needed, and Perry and I have collaborated, shared platforms and had many conversations about the potential and the challenges we see HR facing in the next 5–10 years.

Perry rightly starts with a look ahead as the changing context is driving so much of what we have to do in HR, but he then also looks back at what got us to here. It is 20 years since Professor Dave Ulrich's work gave rise to one of the biggest changes to the model and methods HR had seen in years. The business partner concept and the three areas of practice were designed to help the HR profession be seen as better serving the needs of the business, to be more efficient and to be more adaptive to changes needed as the world of work shifted. It became a mantra for large business HR, but in reality was the same shared services model and constructs being used by many other support and enabling functions, from finance to IT.

But it's fair to say that in the last 10 years we've seen even bigger shifts than we anticipated when the business partner model was first published and teams started to implement the new approaches.

Which is why this kind of work and challenge to all of us in the profession is necessary. Changing times necessitate different thinking, and we are seeing that with the growth of many different business and organizational models, more diverse workforces and forms of working, the move away from standard or 'best' practice to innovating and understanding what is best fit for the context we are in. We can learn a lot from the world of agile and creative start-ups, by the moves to more liberated structures and so called democratized workplaces which put people more at the heart of business thinking.

A key principle that guides organizations who put people more at the heart of business is the understanding and support of well-being. With stress, engagement and many other modern work trends not headed in the right direction, well-being must be a central principle for what we do—the duty of care we have to our employees, and how by so doing we help them to be more productive and effective. It's interesting that in the book there is an example of a company in Wisconsin whose HR philosophy, is built entirely from this point. Progressive businesses, doing well and showing their humane side as more than another initiative. A way of working that really is working.

As I would expect, Perry makes some interesting provocations in this book. That we move from three legs to four zones may not seem controversial or radical, but he makes the point that this isn't just a further leg. It's

more a new way to deliver more fluidity, adaptability and responsiveness in an HR function through agile, non-fixed ways of working within HR. We've been talking about agility in HR for a long time now, and Perry's challenge and attempts at showing how this might be delivered through this model and associated mindset shifts, will help us think about how we become much more agile as an ingrained capability.

In the book he also shares his view that HR should transform itself to enable it to be more transformative to the people and the organizations it works with. I agree wholeheartedly and have said we have been the 'cobbler's children' for too long. And Perry's assertion that we must embed and build from the sciences of human and organizational behaviour encourages me greatly, it harks back to a conversation we had in 2014 over a white-board and how we could describe the body of knowledge that we need as a profession in a different way.

There is no doubt Perry has a style of his own—that is evident in every thing he does. In this book he uses that to pose some new phrasing to describe behaviours, attitudes, mindsets and competencies at an individual, collective and strategic level. That Perry references these back to the CIPD's own professional standards and also to the Hackathon we ran in 2013 with Gary Hamel, is good to see. Comfort that the CIPD, its members, and practitioners like Perry who seek alternatives to the conventional ways, can all be part of a dialogue about how we build the profession for the future.

Perry's shown great respect for his peers in this book and been critical only where it's necessary to identify a tension, an opportunity and a chance to be more in tune with the businesses and the people we all work with. There may well be some challenges for some professionals with the content in this book, but that is part of his intent. For example, Perry's suggestions that HR professionals pair-up and work together like extreme programmers in IT, and that HR's role be as a steward of a *just* organization. And yet, these come from his experiences of those alternative and progressive organizations who have captured the essence of our time.

It has been a pleasure to work with Perry and see his thinking coming together in this book, with his trademark enthusiasm and positivity. I think this can act as an inspiration for change to many of us who are not only committed to good work, but keen to have the most impact we can have in pursuit of better work and working lives for all.

Let's transform!

PREFACE

The human resources profession

Since publishing the first edition of *Transformational HR* in 2018, a lot has happened in the world of work, and the world itself.

Indeed, even the term human resources or HR has come into question even more. *People and organization development*, *people and culture*, or simply *people*. Even the UK's CIPD (the chartered, professional body for HR and people development) refers overtly to the *people profession*, especially in its 2020 incarnation.

A single definition for HR *now* is difficult to find – and that may be one of the better things to have happened since the initial publication of this book. We (so by this I mean my fellow people professionals) have become more varied as the needs of the world appear to grow ever more complex: evidence-based HR practice, agile HR, business-savvy HR are just a few of many variants in the HR lexicon.

A quick search engine return on ‘what is HR?’ delivers some of the 2020 and beyond updated narrative on this professional field.

The CIPD has this shorter description before a series of recently published updates, factsheets, reports and researched vantage points:

HR practitioners are increasingly required to understand how to strategically manage human resources in line with an organisation's intended future direction. Here you'll find information and resources on strategic human resource management and how it differs from HR strategy, HR's role in business partnerships, how to develop good-practice principles for the HR profession, and how HR can contribute to business performance (CIPD, no date).

This is a shift from the original text in this book, which came from the 2017 (now no longer available) CIPD website (though arguably, much of this still applies):

HR is about helping an organisation to create value through its people – literally providing human resources. The work of an HR professional will vary depending on the type and size of their organisation, but could include recruiting people, training and developing employees, and helping to decide how staff

should be paid and rewarded. There are even roles which focus on employment law and protecting the rights of employees at work. HR professionals will also often deal with legal issues, help to shape the culture of their organisations, and focus on what keeps their colleagues productive and engaged.

HR gives you the opportunity to work in every sector, from media to engineering and from banks to charities as most businesses need an HR professional to help support their people management. And HR professionals work globally so the world is your oyster!

So if you're interested in business and enjoy understanding how people work and what motivates them to perform well, a career in HR and people development could be the one for you.

In the original version of this book I declared how great this sounded, but then went on to share a less positive picture from articles like this in the *Harvard Business Review* on why people *hated* HR and what HR can do about it (Capelli, 2015).

I talked about a profession in need of a confidence boost – both internally within its ranks and reputationally, externally. It may still be the butt of jokes in Dilbert cartoons, where Catbert the Evil HR Director, is – I'm sure – scripted from personal experiences of overbearing and oppressive HR policies.

I now see we really are beyond this *value add* and *relevance* debate largely through the 2020 experience of the world.

A transformational event – COVID-19

2020 and the global coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) shifted a *lot* of the previously held views that HR was full of well-intending but ineffective bureaucrats and spoilers, fixated on rules and policies and not in tune with what businesses needed to thrive in a challenging world.

2020's pandemic responses saw many people in HR step into heroic positions

With governments directing lockdowns, closing down businesses, schools, some transport and places of gathering, many HR professionals were turned to by their CEO, board and leaders with 'what do we do now?' questions.

The UK Chancellor of the Exchequer introduced many to the term *furlough* with assistance from government funds to those businesses where people could no longer work due to the imposed pandemic-reactionary systems.

What happened throughout 2020 – and continues even to the completion of this revised edition of the book – was that *transformational HR* acted in ways it never had to before: simply to keep people safe and keep businesses going. The list is long but includes:

- **Dispersed working conditions** where possible (mainly for people whose work involved some form of computing device and could be delivered from home or other remote location not dependent on physical proximity to other people or equipment/machinery).
- **Introduction of socially distanced ways of working** where people still *needed* to be present at their place of work (be that a static building/machine or a mobile venue/machine).
- **Policies and actions around health and wellbeing** that took account of:
 - the shielding needed for any vulnerable employees (with perhaps certain health conditions);
 - connection, contact and communication to help people with feelings of isolation, difficult conditions to get to work or work from home;
 - home care of adult or child relatives and home-schooling of their children.
- **Performance and development** delivered in socially distanced or online variations so that people could still be recruited to key roles, onboarded, enabled, guided, developed and that the *wheels of the business* could still turn despite being in a locked-down situation.
- **Leadership support and management adaptability** – with many organizations still built on presenteeism (the act of being present) for supervisory, delegatory and thereby performance assessment, many leaders and managers needed advice and guidance on fair and balanced assessment of performance, work allocation and adjustments needed. Many people reported early signs of fatigue and even more cases of burnout due to punishing meeting schedules online. There were many stark realizations that organizations did not operate on trust, merely supervision and control, and when people were dispersed, the best and the worst was on

display. Many newspapers referred to them as ‘saints and sinners’ (Rodriguez and Talman, 2020).

- **Adaptations to how HR itself operates** – no longer able to physically attend to much of their work, advice, guidance, learning, disciplinaries, and recruitment and selection processes, all had to be adapted to online, virtual versions. Largely, these appear to have been successful while many would accept temporary adaptations.

Overall, HR has transformed two key elements of its 2018 version:

- 1 **Its reputation.** Many CEOs have described how grateful they have been for their HR leaders and teams in helping create safe, transitioned ways of working, navigating complex legal, procedural, ethical and operational issues.
- 2 **Its deployment.** How HR has changed its own ways of working, advice given and the flexibility shown has proven that a more agile version of HR exists and can be applied.

These were two of my main points of need for a transformational and transformed HR function. I would certainly have rather *not* had the death toll, suffering and economic damage as the catalyst for this, but nevertheless, I believe those two elements have come through loud and clear since March 2020.

The CIPD, as the UK’s overarching body for HR professionals, has attracted some criticism from fellow people professionals, but in 2020 it really *stood up and stood firm*. COVID-19 resources, guidance, press releases, webinars, articles and features, as well as unwavering support for its members and the wider HR profession, was obvious, regular and incredibly useful. Their reputation has arguably also been enhanced in their ‘showing’ during the pandemic crisis.

Many people have stated that the pandemic has done more for *business transformation, digital transformation and thereby behavioural transformation* than any wilful strategy or act. Many have mentioned that a likely five-year horizon for more flexible, remote options for roles, more digital connectivity and more agile ways of decision-making and working came into play in five weeks.

So, have we seen nothing but transformation in these recent months?

Yes and no.

As the debate rages on about whether people will now choose to work from home or long for a return to the office, some of this transformation has

been merely temporary, necessary adaptation and therefore has not been transformational at all. Any ‘return to work’ (hardly apt when many people have *continued working* but from home) or at best ‘return to normal’ frames suggest many have simply endured this transformed state and want to erase it as soon as possible. That’s *not* transformational.

Many people, though, have been transformed through this experience – the results of the extent or depth of this have yet to be seen as we are still in tiered lockdowns in many parts of the world. Transformed by the experience of something different and new: choice.

Choice, complexity and uncertainty

People are now often citing convenience, lower carbon from less commuting, more time at home with family, more chances to live a healthier lifestyle, moving away from expensive, packed cities to more calm, suburban and rural environments as part of a newfound, and *transformed*, set of choices.

And others long for the return of the social camaraderie found in teams operating in close proximity. They have struggled with the relentless screen-time of video calls and meetings, events and webcasted (some would say) inferior versions of previously in-person experiences. They cite cultural damage and loss, missing the chance to be with their colleagues and teams.

HR now has a transformed perspective on not only *where* work is done, but how company-based collective spirit is forged and sustained.

If we thought the 2020 pandemic responses were complex (they were more crisis or chaos management), we face more complexity in whatever ‘return’ is deemed best.

Already, *hybrid* has entered our terminology for the workplace: part virtual, part physical. Studies, research, surveys, opinion editorials and a range of books, workshops and strategic models are already coming through. Many people report their transformed choice dynamic is not even clear to them but look to continued virtual working where possible as a choice – even one to two days per week. Others are reporting a longing for the full five days back in the office/factory/warehouse as their preference.

There appears little doubt that the HR profession will have another ‘step-up’ moment in crafting the 2021 and beyond, *post-pandemic version* of work, workflow and workplace.

So, what *has* transformed is that choice and, thereby, the response to that newly crafted complexity.

And therefore I'd assert the need for *transformational HR* is even *greater* than it was in 2018.

Factors I'd considered as an author, such as...

- advances in digital technology;
- robotics and automation;
- artificial intelligence and machine learning;
- flexible and gig working options and models;
- economic inequality and fragility;
- political divisions and extremism;
- societal fracturing and inequity, unfairness and injustice; and
- environmental and ecosystem emergency

...are still all present and, in some cases, amplified and accelerated not just due to COVID-19.

Injustice, inequity and inclusion

What *also* happened in 2020 was the surge of feelings brought about by the tragic death of George Floyd in Minneapolis, USA on 25 May. During an arrest, he was restrained for almost nine minutes by a member of the Minneapolis police and died.

This sparked huge racially motivated tensions and the rise of the #BlackLivesMatter movement. In horror, aghast and outrage across the world, this caused a surge of intense protests about the continued disparity and disadvantages faced by people of colour around the world.

As a result, politicians, businesses and people generally stood up to support increased awareness of this systemic injustice and urged for acts of equality, fairness and inclusion.

HR – long the 'guardian' of policies, processes and approaches that were to enable fairness and equity in the workplace – were *again* turned to by their businesses and leaders: to show support and allyship, to look at their own systems of prejudice and bias, and to create supportive and safe places to work and be.

So not only managing mid-pandemic, but now a social, spiritual and humanitarian element in organizational 'life' was thrust upon already stretched, tired and hard-working people professionals.

Acts of allyship, statements and actions, focus and dialogue ensued – largely catalysed by HR professionals who had, for some years (I’d pointed out in my take on the work of HR professionals), stewarded and delivered aspects of equality and diversity in hiring, developing, deploying and advancing people’s careers on their value, not their ethnicity, faith, gender, sexuality, disability, age, privilege or sociodemographic origin.

While I cannot say this has absolutely transformed work and organizations, the increased focus on fairness, inclusion and understanding and appreciating, valuing and promoting difference has risen.

So, HR professionals have more work to do in these complex areas as the fight for justice and fairness will continue for some time. We do, though, need more transformative strategies, actions and ways of being around diversity and inclusion.

So again, the focus on HR’s significance in work has increased as well as expectations. More discernible and sustainable outcomes are needed as a result of HR’s contribution to the world of work, thereby requiring more *transformational HR* approaches.

I guess in simple terms, 2018’s urges to transform seem less intense than the 2020 versions. And while they are directly caused by tragic events, we need to stop thinking about transformational HR as a nice to have. *The need is clear, present and required.* HR is not a safe role for those who ‘like people’.

Transformational HR is now a fundamentally recast frame of significant human and social influence for good in the world of work. We have a chance like no other to transform work and the lives of people to create a more inclusive, adaptive and fulfilled state of being.

I would even be as bold as to say that if you’re *not* thinking about transforming HR and being transformational with what HR does for the world of work, then think again. We’ve gone beyond indulgences, corporate envy in influence, credibility and relevance. We must move towards impactful, fair and just outcomes. Mediocre HR was tolerated before but is now dangerous.

We *must* transform HR and be more transformational for the good of humanity.

I’ve retained the rest of the preface from 2018 – not because it was necessarily relevant or irrelevant, but because I think it shows the scale of change we’ve experienced since I authored the first edition.

So again, before reading the 2018 position on HR and the world it operated in, *transformational HR* is no longer a wish; it’s a must. Yet at the time

of writing, we've never had a more exhausted, stretched and challenged profession. So we need the energy as well as the guile of these tired professionals in HR to transform at the precise moment that those huge pandemic and injustice challenges are taxing them every hour of every day.

However, this is precisely the time to transform because of those combined elements and the others on the 'future world of work' list, despite the challenges to time, energy and focus. *Not* transforming simply drains further that precious time, energy and focus.

Whatever reserves we can muster as a profession should be directed to transforming *while* adapting to these challenges. We will only give ourselves a fighting chance of the reinvention needed post-pandemic that doesn't just return to what was before, but really does build something better as a result of the transformed world we now face into.

Transformational HR needs to go way beyond the baseline of a bureaucratic, compliance function to become the enabling function for *safe, fulfilling and humanist ways of working* into 2021 and beyond.

2018's inflection point

HR stands at an inflection point in a quite profound way: the ever-dawning realization that organizations are made better or otherwise by *their own people*.

Not just process, brand, innovation, capitalization – their human resources are their *greatest* resources.

Company value consists of shares, stock, market dominance, product sales, innovation. And yet, a fantastic venture can collapse quickly if the very people who got it there become the oppressed, uninspired 'resources' that HR doesn't *seem* to care enough about. Never mind toxic leadership, profit-only approaches to ways of working and a blatant disregard for well-being by managers and colleagues alike. HR is seen as letting these people down, of legislating in favour of a small minority of wrongdoers who bring the mood down and the compliance process regimes up. Where poor leadership is seemingly fostered by HR, it causes harm to the company and the profession.

There is a realization that it's not *at all* right that a company can know and understand more about its customers and suppliers than it does its own people. And that a company reputation isn't just what it makes/serves/sells but how it does its work. Headlines surrounding poor or unfair working

conditions cause as much brand damage as a faulty line of goods or shoddy services.

Bizarrely, those very conditions that tarnish HR's reputation are the very things that may cause its renaissance or even metamorphosis. Organizations who thrive because they are doing right by their own people give HR the greatest chance to do a Phoenix-like rise from the ashes of those oppressors of the human soul. Despite that, we may roll our eyes at *every* corporate annual report, where it states in a clichéd sense 'people really *are* the company's greatest asset', so therefore out-of-this-world HR is what could truly create, sustain and enhance success.

The time for HR is now – and it has to be transformed and transformational

There's never been a better time to be in HR – Peter Cheese, CIPD CEO, has declared on many occasions. His passionate and unashamed promotion of *the time is now* has endeared many people I know to shift their posture and sharpen their attitude from within this oft-beleaguered profession.

And while such a declaration is met with nodding approval, in many cases, a lack of a shift in how things are done in HR is telling. There is perhaps too much *ordinary* work to do that holds transformation work in abeyance.

Transformational HR, though, is – in my view – not just a programme of change or a trendy way to label an HR capability initiative. It is a *fundamental shift* in how we look at the impact the profession can and should have on the world of work it now operates in. It would be wrong to label *everything* transformational – some things are more evolutionary – and yet, if what is required feels like a significant upgrade and shift in the way HR is scoped, designed, delivered and measured, it *is* transformational in that context. Large or small things can have a transformative effect.

With so many businesses feeling the shifts in new markets, economic uncertainties, the surge of digital technological advancement, sciences, research and sociopolitical moves, it genuinely feels like there is the need for something of a renaissance in HR. I've called it an *HR metamorphosis for a transforming world of work*.

Why would I be so confident that this metamorphosis is not only necessary but HR is capable of doing it and therefore practising and becoming a more transformational HR function?

A sense, a vigilant instinct that perhaps never before has the 'people factor' been seen as such a key differentiator in the world of work.

TABLE 0.1 Three key areas of business transformation: people, process, technology

Leadership	We've spent billions and countless hours focusing on the top leaders. We've tried everything we can with that; it didn't really work out. It feels like a never-ending project and a constant battle with egos and fear-fuelled demagogues.
Process re-engineering	Lean and Six Sigma have created supercharged efficiency in manufacturing and engineering. It feels like we can't make it any more lean, else it will vaporize.
Digitization	Another ever-ongoing process and increasingly is no differentiator – it's running to keep pace.

Philosophers, artists, politicians, scientists, innovators are all converging on the point that work – and its future – is all about people and purposeful endeavours.

Table 0.1 looks at factors which lead to this conclusion.

It's *people* that really do make an *adventure* into a business *venture*. People who create a solid business. People who delight the very other people businesses and organizations exist for: to solve the problems their customers have. Even if that problem is they don't have the latest smartphone, handbag or pair of jeans.

Companies for good not just for profit

That we're seeing award-winning organizations held up by government ministers for their inclusivity, innovation or inspirational working conditions means this is front-page news for all of us. How businesses function is subject to the same scrutiny as ministers, public officials and celebrities.

We all need to know – and want to know – how organizations look after (or don't) their own people. We are seeing that job-seeking individuals no longer just look at the salary but ask 'what's it *feel like* to work there?'

The giants of commerce are making workplaces almost irresistible. So much so that there was a rumour that a few employees of a large internet search company were found to have no fixed abode and lived on their office/campus. That is perhaps taking commitment to an employer a little too far.

Workplace design is becoming so critical that instead of working from home, we're made to feel *at home* in our workplaces with coffee bars, sofas, kitchen tables, shower rooms and the ubiquitous tabletop games like foos-

TABLE 0.2 Equation for an experience of work

I	+ E	+ B	- S	- P	- T	= H+/-
(Income)	(Esteem)	(Belonging)	(Subjugation)	(Prospects)	(Trapped)	(Happiness if a + or Hell if a -)

ball and ping-pong. Is this helping work feel nicer and more humane, or is this a ploy to keep us there working ever longer and harder?

Work creating happiness in life or a living hell?

Work is good/work is evil debates will rage on and my take on work as an equation is shown in Table 0.2.

Income – we all get why we work for this. *Esteem* is an ever-larger factor with severe psychological harm caused by an inability to find gainful work. Increasingly, a sense of *belonging* is a key factor for us in wanting to work – to feel we belong to something doing something worthwhile. So, if we have a good feeling about those in the + category, this will impact positively on our happiness in work (and therefore life).

The subtracting elements, though, may impact in a minor or major way to our overall final score.

Subjugation is a strong word, but feeling dominated or controlled is how some of us feel in workplaces with oppressive, aggressive and overly demanding regimes. Negative *prospects* – going nowhere or gaining no more – are the equivalent of a stagnating feel of *Groundhog Day* that could eventually wear us down. *Trapped* is how some of us describe our status. ‘I’d love to breakaway and do...’ is a key indication of being trapped. Sure, another job may be an answer, but is it *the* answer?

It is my assertion that if the + factors are high they can sometimes weather the storm of any subtracting factors. Yet if there’s more negative than positive, we find people in that state Gallup surveys report on, with two-thirds of the US workforce reporting as disengaged, or operating in some minor or major form of hell.

No matter what your final score is from this equation, work is something that *increasingly* defines us, enables us and envelops us. If that’s the case, we

should surely want this to be about income, esteem and belonging without any subtraction?

We might be a call centre manager in Cambridge and we genuinely don't see our work as having value, impact or purpose. Yet, that call centre may handle calls for broken thermostats and boilers that, at times, could be a lifesaving intervention for an ill child or rehabilitating older person. We are *not* our job, and yet our work may define us.

To back this up, one of my favourite quotes is from NFL and Super Bowl-winning head coach of the fan-owned Green Bay Packers from Wisconsin, Vince Lombardi:

The measure of who we are, is what we do, with what we have.

Work could be that *who we are*, doing *what we do* (trade, role, graft) *with what we have* (skill, talent, ambition, pride, purpose). And yet far too often for people, work is a necessary evil and a balancing act to do in order to live, whatever the definition of living is for each one of us.

Work is worth championing

Back to the CIPD and a short pivot they made in 2013 on their mission: *championing better work and working lives*. That says it all for an institute whose members are there to look after the people element of businesses, organizations and workplaces – a conscious move to distance HR from being the masters of prohibiting people processes, to make sure people no longer associate HR as the alchemists of policies and guidance, and avoid further labelling of HR as the risk-averse, hammer-yielding professionals who view the entire world as one of nails (and risks).

It is an emboldened, business-like, humanity-enhancing aspect of work – *championing better work and working lives*.

About this book

This book is talking to every HR and people professional, and that includes every learning pro, every organization development practitioner, every change manager, every communication expert, every coach, every leadership and management developer:

- every startup entrepreneur keen to avoid the mistakes of the (largely) corporate business HR they gladly walked away from;

- every line manager and colleague of HR;
- every CEO/CXO who wants to make that line on the annual report that ‘people are our greatest asset’ *really* mean something;
- and everyone who cares enough about the work we all do, so that others may experience more happiness than hell.

It’s time. To step into a more transformational mindset. To deliver more transformational activities that lift any business to a new level of human consciousness. To put human beings to work in a liberated way as the truly new *technology*. It’s not digital over human that will power us into the future: it’s digital *and* human combined. The sooner we all grasp this opportunity, the sooner we can stop looking to bots to either destroy us or enhance us.

Two words to frame this book

And so before we step into the narrative that sets the context for this book, there are two words I’d like to open with and help explain some of the thinking and research that is contained in this book.

The first word is a very business-like word: **proposition**.

Merriam-Webster defines it as ‘a theorem or problem to be demonstrated or performed’.

1 Noun

- 1 the act of offering or suggesting something to be considered, accepted, adopted, or done.
- 2 a plan or scheme proposed.
- 3 an offer of terms for a transaction, as in business.
- 4 a thing, matter, or person considered as something to be dealt with or encountered: *Keeping diplomatic channels open is a serious proposition.*
- 5 anything stated or affirmed for discussion or illustration.

2 Rhetoric. A statement of the subject of an argument or a discourse, or of the course of action or essential idea to be advocated.

3 Logic. A statement in which something is affirmed or denied, so that it can therefore be significantly characterized as either true or false.

So this is a new theorem to be demonstrated and ultimately performed for HR. The world of work is full of propositions and challenges to existing propositions. And this book will very specifically zoom into a new offering, scheme and transaction that HR needs to offer for the world of work.

The other more obvious word for this book is **transformational**.

This is less well defined and is an adjective attached to a range of other nouns like leadership, change and programmes. Yet the two are crucial to this book. We transform, things are transformational, our world is transformed.

So what is the HR proposition we want, need and should transform? What will transformational mindsets and activities do to the proposition we know of as HR? How do you transform a proposition anyway?

This book will look at:

- 1 the journey to the HR of now and how we have come to the HR proposition we currently have;
- 2 reminders for us of the progress we have made in establishing HR as a professional field and what else we might consider to transform how HR operates;
- 3 a series of narratives and case studies that articulate the causes, approaches and opportunities for HR to be more transformational in the way it operates;
- 4 my views, as author and practitioner in this space for 15 years, of how I feel a transformational HR function could operate.

The entire premise for this book is the need for transformational HR: a fresh proposition for a more challenging world of work – that *HR metamorphosis for a transforming world of work* I mentioned.

Standing still in business has never really been an option, but running to keep pace is also now a fruitless strategy. Being a multidisciplined heptathlete appears to be more of the sporting metaphor for HR (and other corporate) professionals of this modern, ever-changing and, yes, disruptive era we find ourselves in.

So I would urge you to keep those two words in mind – **proposition** and **transformational** – as this book sets out to codify the new proposition for HR in order for it to become what we all need: a transformational force for good in people at work, living fulfilling lives with purposeful enterprises doing good for the world.

A higher state of working consciousness is within our grasp if we, the people, can come together to grasp it *together*. We, the people, are the algorithms of the future. We, the people, create the stories of fiction yet to unfold into reality.

About the rest of this book

In this book we will tell the story of work as a technology, and HR as a profession over the last 50 years, paying particular attention to the last 20 years. Much has happened in those timeframes and this sprint through the future proves there is much to come, which underscores the need for a more transformational approach to HR.

More specifically, we will look at:

- a personal journey of working lives through the recent ages (Chapter 2);
- how the HR profession has arrived to this point in time (Chapter 3);
- a reminder of what we have in the HR profession and where we can build from (Chapter 4);
- defining transformational HR – what do we mean by it, and how can we be transformational? (Chapter 5);
- models that give us shape, clarity and dialogue for past, present and future of work (Chapter 6);
- a model specific to HR – the Ulrich model and how it can be transformed (Chapter 7);
- tales of transformation – narratives from people working and aspiring to transform (Chapter 8);
- stories of the future – examples of organizations that are transforming work (Chapter 9);
- our playbook – for how HR might transform itself to create a better future of work (Chapter 10);
- strategic HR – strategic-level shifts to have a transformative effect (Chapter 11);
- transformational HR – a new model at play (Chapter 12).

We will explore what has been, and what could be, for a profession at the heart of people's working lives – HR.

It's perhaps the perfect time in the story of work to show *human resourcefulness* as the calling card of HR.

Transformational HR could save us all from mediocre and unfulfilling work. So that we, the people, can have work we can be truly proud of, and that makes a difference to all lives on this planet.

Perry Timms

*Founder and Chief Energy Officer – People &
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