Why HR Must Evolve to Address the "Future of Work"
It's time to unite your best and brightest – from all disciplines – under your HR umbrella
By John Boudreau

The forces shaping the future of society are impacting more that just how we live, but how we work too. Long gone are standard forty-hour work weeks made up of five consecutive eight-hour days. Our fast-evolving work ecosystems are now incredibly diverse, made up of people engaging via regular employment, as well as contracting, crowdsourcing, telecommuting and freelancing.

As a means to understand how these changes – and upcoming iterations – are impacting employees, top HR leaders joined forces three years ago in a collective effort called CHREATE (The global Consortium to Reimagine HR, Employment Alternatives, Talent, and the Enterprise). Their effort has revealed a step-change in organization challenges and capabilities. Successfully navigating this new work ecosystem requires "retooling" HR using the best thinking from disciplines such as engineering, finance, neuroscience, marketing, operations and supply chain.

Yes, the team responsible for the recruiting, hiring, development and sustainment of your people needs to be comprised of more than traditional HR players. Leaders need to deploy their best and brightest from **all** disciplines to optimize the future of work.

Five Forces Shaping the Future of Work and Organizations

To help frame where the world of work is going, CHREATE leaders identified five fundamental forces driving change:

- **Social and organizational reconfiguration.** Organizations will be more flexible, shifting towards power-balanced forms and project-based relationships. Talent will engage on aligned purpose, not just economics. Networks and social and external collaborations will make leadership more horizontal, shared, and collective. And organizations will be increasingly transparent to stakeholders.

- **All-inclusive global talent market.** Data proves the workforce in Africa and Asia is growing and becoming talent majorities. People are also working longer, creating multigenerational workforces. Finally, social policies support boundary-less work beyond traditional full-time employment.

- **A truly connected world.** Work is increasingly virtual and occurs anywhere and any time through mobile personal devices with global real-time communications.

- **Exponential technology change.** Robots, autonomous vehicles, commoditized sensors, artificial intelligence, and the Internet of Things reshape the work ecosystem so that flexible, distributed, and transient workforces adapt to rapid business reinvention. Organizations and workers balance long-term bets and flexibility under uncertainty by engaging automation to adapt to frequent changes and rapid skills obsolescence.

- **Human-automation collaboration.** Analytics, algorithms, big data, and artificial intelligence increasingly abolish work previously performed by humans, but also create new work at the [interface of humans and automation](#).

The Required Future Roles to Meet the Challenges of a New Work Ecosystem

Along with identifying the five forces that are driving change, the CHREATE project also [identified four roles](#) necessary to meet these coming challenges.

1. The **Organizational Performance Engineer** evolves from focusing on organization design, total rewards, performance, and training/learning and will now spend time optimizing new work arrangements, virtual teams, global work and social networks, and transparency.

2. The **Culture Architect and Community Activist** moves from employment branding, employee engagement, culture steward and corporate social responsibility to brand building work that unlocks colleagues as ambassadors, connects the employee and organizational "purpose," and shapes policies and social norms that support shared organization and community values.

3. The **Global Talent Scout, Convener, and Coach** evolves from recruitment/sourcing, career path management, and managing full-time and contract workers to perpetual talent scouting and relationship building, establishing boundary-less talent communities, being a trusted talent and advisor and life coach across diverse populations, and acting as a diversity and inclusion advocate and expert.

4. The **Trend Forecaster & Technology Integrator** moves from a focus on data analysis and HR technology to forecasting pivotal work and workforce trends, designing and advocating for optimum workplace technology, and storytelling to enable data- and evidence-based workplace decisions.

An Example: The Evolution of the Trend Forecaster & Technology Integrator
To illustrate how the four roles will come to fruition in the new workplace, let's look at how IBM has successfully evolved the Trend Forecaster and Technology Integrator role. In the past, IBM – like most organizations – did not use analytics to make future workplace decisions. But now, IBM's workforce analytics team truly contributes to the strategic direction of the business. By marrying demographic data, financial data and performance metrics, the team is able to solve specific business problems such as identifying – early on – who's most likely to leave and understanding – in real-time – what's inhibiting people from performing at their best. This knowledge is in valuable in helping the organization build the best team.

The analytics team is made up of a wide range of individuals with strengths spanning HR, business acumen, consulting, storytelling, change management, statistics and visualization. And that is what this endeavor successful – fusing multidisciplinary skills together to solve specific business problems.

And that's not all. IBM plans to focus on the following three things next:
1. Leveraging cognitive technologies to help humans spend more time finding insights rather than analyzing data
2. Bringing together marketing, finance, procurement and other departments with HR to look at a more complete dataset to solve business problems
3. Make more datasets available as wearables and other technologies become more widespread

The Leadership Challenge For the HR Profession and Beyond

Where will the talent to fill these roles come from? It will require tapping leaders from areas beyond traditional HR, including marketing, operations, finance, engineering, communications and more. Top leadership teams must recognize that the most thorny, enticing and challenging questions for such disciplines will involve using their expertise to rethink the future of work and HR. It means "retooling" the fundamental idea of HR, to apply frameworks from these disciplines to the challenge of optimizing the workplace in the face of these trends. Imagine that you have a career path where your engineers take on the idea of organizational culture, social networks, etc. How will you harness that potential?

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