

# HR Transformation – The Next Leap

THOUGHT PAPER

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The last wave of HR transformation identified the three-pillar model (HR BP – CoE – Operations) as the panacea to drive efficiency and manage costs. But as HR worked relentlessly towards helping business and people adapt to an ever evolving working environment and ways, they have had to step out of the siloed three pillar model to address problems with speed and efficacy.

This puts the three-pillar model of HR under a scanner. Is the model relevant anymore? Does it support swift problem solving and execution in tandem with the business need for scale and profit? Is it aligned to giving a great employee experience?

Let's understand with a simple analogy.

### Even Superheroes Need to Adapt!

Often ambushed at multiple fronts, even our favorite superheroes have had to add to their existing superpowers to win battles against new and mysterious forces. Though already doing a tremendous job of saving humanity, Superman was given the 'Superflare' in addition to his Kryptonian powers, and Iron Man has been shown constantly tweaking his body armors for peak level performance.

To tackle multiple disruptive forces, HR superheroes also need to further build on their superpowers for optimal performance and results.

So, let's look at what are the superpowers that HR superheroes need, the structure needed to support these superpowers and competencies required at different levels in a team of superheroes.

## Superpowers Needed

- 1 Strategic Thinking and Business Knowledge
- 2 Focus on Customer Experience
- 3 Tap Into Human Traits
- 4 Push the Boundaries With Agility
- 5 Re-Work Project Management Skills

### Superpower 1. Strategic Thinking and Business Knowledge

Strategic thinking allows HR as a function to extend beyond the realm of 'corporate / support function' into the realm of a business contributor by:

- Understanding the **big picture and translating the same** to an 'easy to understand' model for each stakeholder.

- **Knowing the customers** just as much as the business to get a better understanding of the problem statements that are being solved.
- Being actively involved in the goal-setting process and gaining a keen understanding of organizational goals to align **HR initiatives and actions** for true value addition.
- **Solving for and delivering what works best for the business and employees** rather than just theoretical solutions. **Deep knowledge of ground-level reality** in the organization is a must from an execution standpoint.
- **Apply principles of design thinking** for a human-centric, empathetic, and creative approach to solve complex problems with people-oriented methodologies.
- Making **a tangible contribution to bottom lines** with an acute understanding of business issues, industry challenges, competitive landscape, and future business trends.

### Superpower 2. Focus on Customer Experience

Automation and digital transformation provide HR a rare opportunity to create and enable **enhanced candidate, employee, and managers experience**, much as organizations focus on customer experience to boost productivity and improve satisfaction. This can be achieved through:

- **Paying attention to verbal and non-verbal customer cues** for pro-active problem-solving.
- **Leveraging automation and artificial intelligence** to put systems, tools, and processes to perform traditional HR roles and people processes. Thus, not only freeing up their own bandwidth but also freeing managers to focus on people leadership skills required to create a thriving workplace.
- **Embracing technology & automation** and using it to get more efficient in their work rather than fearing that it would replace it.
- Providing **tailor-made solutions for frictionless end-to-end employee experience**, enabling organizations to attract and retain the best talent.
- Developing the courage to **challenge business decisions** if needed and offer alternative insights.

### Superpower 3. Tap Into Human Traits

The waves of change further mandate HR professionals to tap into their distinctly human traits to foster an environment of trust, care, and collaboration at the workplace. The ability to connect at a human level becomes more critical to engage an ever-increasing virtual workforce. This implies that HR professionals **evolve into the role of mentors and coaches by:**

- Building communication channels that encourage **active listening and transparency**.
- Creating an **environment of psychological safety** free from judgment and assumption.
- **Addressing and alleviating the fear of redundancy and replacement** through learning and development opportunities that up-skill employees in line with emerging technologies.

#### Superpower 4. Push the Boundaries With Agility

In an age of hypergrowth, successful businesses are defined by their ability to scale up and their speed of response to changing market demands. As strategic contributors, HR professionals need to push the boundaries with a flexibility that enables them to:

- **Re-imagine problem solving and re-inventing cultures** based on **the first principles-based approach and a willingness to fail, learn and re-learn** from methodologies that are tested.
- **Re-look and re-design people strategy** continually to cater to a diverse workforce.
- **Collaborate with other departments** on critical conversations that impact overall business performance.
- **Adopt a fluid approach** towards processes and mindsets aiding swift problem-solving.

#### Superpower 5. Re-Work Project Management Skills

The siloed three-pillar HR structure has always limited collaboration between teams and departments. The current pandemic has necessitated HR professionals to push the envelope by huddling with different teams for a quick turnaround on business needs. This threw up fresh challenges and an eminent need to enhance project management skills to:

- Work effectively with people from different teams in a **project execution mode** to ensure effective and speedy resolution of issues.
- Master digital literacy to fully **exploit the potential of data collection and analysis** for informed decisions making and predictive insights required for improved business performance.
- Add value with a **quantitative approach** that looks beyond emotions and feelings to reach pragmatic tangible solutions.

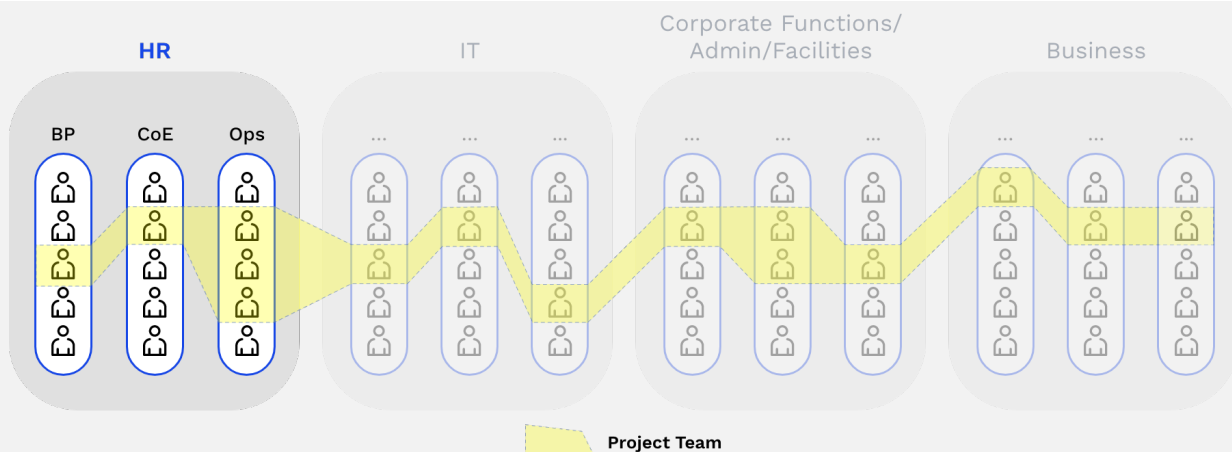
#### Superstructure to Support Superpowers

In an environment that has many unknowns, and a set-up consisting of a diverse workforce, many of which are working virtually, critical factors that HR needs to account for are solutions, execution, and speed. HR can achieve the next level of peak performance by wrapping the Agile structure over its three-pillared model.

A hybrid HR model will bring in the speed of response with a structure that:

- Consists of **representatives or internal consultants from across disciplines** for early identification of problems, swift issue resolution, without getting dragged by bureaucracy and time lag between inter-disciplinary communications.
- Provides a differentiated and unique employee experience based on **decentralized close collaboration between the three pillars of HR structure** (HR Business Partner, Centre of Excellence, and HR operations).
- Instead of separate functions, all units **give inputs and work in tandem for effective strategies** while dealing with different people's issues.

Image 1 – Hybrid HR Model



## Superpowers (Competencies) Mapped

Given the wide variety of contexts in which HR professionals perform their role, HR competencies change depending on levels across HR roles. By mapping them, we have tried to determine what competency is required in which HR role and at what level within it (see tables below). With this approach, HR professionals can define the competencies which individuals in their teams possess and determine competencies that need to be further developed for success.

As we see it, 'Learning Agility', 'Business Acumen', 'Data-driven', 'Empathy', and 'Employee Experience Orientation' are capabilities that are 'must-have' across HR roles and levels. An MH at senior levels, we perceive competencies like 'Strategic Thinking', 'Design thinking', 'Project Management', Change Management', and 'Coaching' as 'Good to have' and 'Nice to have', even at junior and middle levels. This supports our view that there is a need for junior and mid-level HR professionals to increase their capabilities incrementally to become knowledge partners and not just discharge their duties.

Table 1 – HR Business Partner

	Data-Driven	Employee Experience Orientation	Empathy	Business Acumen	Strategic Thinking	Design Thinking and Problem Solving	Learning Agility	Project Management	Change Management	Coaching
Junior	✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓✓	✓	✓✓	✓✓✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
Middle	✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓✓	✓✓	✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓✓
Senior	✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓✓

✓✓✓✓ Must have    ✓✓ Good to have    ✓ Nice to have

Table 2 – Centre of Excellence

	Data-Driven	Employee Experience Orientation	Empathy	Business Acumen	Strategic Thinking	Design Thinking and Problem Solving	Learning Agility	Project Management	Change Management	Coaching
Junior	✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓✓	✓	✓	✓✓✓✓	✓	✓	✓
Middle	✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓
Senior	✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓✓	✓✓	✓✓✓✓	✓✓

✓✓✓✓ Must have    ✓✓ Good to have    ✓ Nice to have

Table 3 – HR Operations

	Data-Driven	Employee Experience Orientation	Empathy	Business Acumen	Strategic Thinking	Design Thinking and Problem Solving	Learning Agility	Project Management	Change Management	Coaching
Junior	✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓✓	✓	✓	✓✓✓✓	✓	✓	✓
Middle	✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓✓✓	✓✓	✓	✓
Senior	✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓✓	✓	✓✓

✓✓✓✓ Must have    ✓✓ Good to have    ✓ Nice to have

### **More than a matter of functional relevance**

As superheroes augmented their powers their aim was not merely to stay relevant. Their efforts were aimed at maintaining the very relevance of life on earth by leveraging the best resources available to them.

In the context of HR, they need to be mindful of the fact that employee experience and strategic business contributions are the new battleground for a competitive advantage. As in the case of our beloved superheroes, for HR to adapt and gather new armor is not just a matter of staying relevant as a function, but a far more crucial role of keeping their organizations relevant.

### **“Never let a good crisis go to waste”**

- Sir Winston Churchill

## About the Authors



**Mainak** brings over 24 years of experience spanning business and HR roles across geographies. This has given him a unique understanding of the link between HR and business strategy. He also holds a patent for HR capability development.

Mainak's experience includes human capital strategy, culture, talent development (performance, leadership development, career pathing, competency, learning, engagement, diversity) and talent acquisition (including on-boarding and background check). He has also implemented HRIS platform and HR metrics to improve performance.

Recently he has been helping start-ups set up efficient and effective HR teams and processes. In addition, Mainak is a recognized Executive Coach and Leadership Development expert.

Mainak's previous work experience includes stints/projects with Accenture (Consulting and HR), Hewitt Associates, AbsolutData, Heidrick & Struggles, Evalueserve, Sterlite Technologies and Upstox.

Mainak holds a MBA from the Indian Institute of Management, Calcutta, and is a certified executive coach.

## About PeopleAsset

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