

## Reframing HR for the modern world

**Author: Kevin Miller . November 2021**

As my HR career has developed, I've become less interested 'what' HR does in organizations, and much more interested in 'why' HR does it. Who are we here to serve and what is our purpose? My preoccupation is not to keep the 'HR business as usual' wheels turning by doing the same old HR work I've always done. The outdated HR remit to police rules and processes still exists inside too many organizations. The question of why HR exists as a function within organizations remains an important one.

Whilst HR's intention comes from a good place, fuelled by our desire to keep our organizations safe and achieve high performance, a disproportionate focus on rules and compliance can stifle energy and erode trust. It sounds ironic, but HR has too many times lost sight of the people element in our work. In my view, there are lots of reasons for this. Firstly, it can be a tough job being in HR. We are routinely called upon to deal with the most sensitive, complex, and emotionally charged issues in an organization. HR can be the last people to benefit from internal support and encouragement. This can lead to HR closing ranks and focussing inwardly on HR's needs rather than the wider business. Self-preservation kicks in. Justifying HR's existence becomes the priority. Secondly, within the context of restricted budgets and HR needing to lead significant change to deliver 'more for less, this is understandable. It so often comes down to the numbers.

Lots of organizations have some HR provisions in place yet the day-to-day working reality for people at work can be miserable and demotivating. This can include those who are working in HR! In too many cases our work cultures are shortening lives through excessive stress and burnout, fear and blame dominate the landscape. Unhealthy and toxic workplaces that do not care for people are actually shortening lives. People can feel trapped within organizations sometimes out of economic necessity and a fear that the alternatives might be even worse. How on earth was this allowed to happen? How can a lack of caring for people as human beings in our workplaces become normal? It's that serious.

Against the backdrop of such critical challenges, HR can no longer afford to accept it is 'HR business as usual. There has never been a more important time to look upwards and outwards in our work. If HR does what it has always done, it will get the results it has always got. It is time for a different approach. We need to step back from the day-to-day HR administration and compliance tasks and challenge ourselves to realize the potential impact we could have on the lives of people in our organizations. HR needs to discover it's true why.

I believe there needs to be a radical reframing of HR's 'why' to discover a much more important cause behind our work. What if HR's purpose was creating truly humanized workplaces where people are enabled to do their best work? Workplaces that send people home every day feeling happy, safe, and fulfilled. Striving for this could be the goal, and what an important goal it is. How people feel at work really matters. It shapes the whole climate in which we work. Over a period of time, our behaviors shape culture - both positive and negative. HR needs to be brave and lead the movement to improve the individual lives of people working in our organizations. We need to think the unthinkable. It should never really be about HR at all, it's all about the people HR exists to serve. This should be the real measure of our success. Our organizations would become happier, more productive, and more profitable. Better numbers than keep everyone happy.

An aspiration yes, but what other choice do we really have? Too many of our current workplaces have allowed toxicity and poor working conditions and practices to take hold, which damage lives and harm organizational performance. Do we just accept that these challenges are beyond us in HR or that it is not our remit to tackle this head-on? Do we accept things are just 'the way they are'? I'd firmly argue 'no' and furthermore, this situation can all start to change tomorrow with a change of HR mindset. It's time for HR to step up and be counted. Time to begin a process of turning this vision into reality. The experience of day-to-day working lives is what counts, rather than the rhetoric that 'people are our most important asset' which means nothing if behaviors are not consistently in place to back this up and impact how people feel about their organizations. The catalyst for change could start with HR, living and breathing a true people-centered approach, but we cannot do this alone and need to inspire others to join a positive movement for change. It is crucial HR have influence and credibility with senior leaders regarding the need for change and the plan to get there. We cannot afford to wait on the periphery of organizations in the hope that somebody else might do this for us.

What better and more important work can HR be doing for our organizations than this? What more valuable contribution to society could we make? We'd literally transform lives. Let's start to think about the ripple effect on communities given the number of our lives that we spend at work. The immediate benefits for improved mental health and wellbeing are obvious, as are the improvements in business productivity and profitability. That's worth getting excited about. HR could have a profound impact on individual lives, on organizations, and on wider society. Places of work that provide a sense of pride, belonging, and fulfillment because we really do put people first and mean it with our hearts, and through our behaviors. We put people first and mean it irrespective of whether they are employees, suppliers, or customers. It's all about people and relationships, delivered in an authentic and consistent way, championed tirelessly and relentlessly by HR. The time to reframe HR for the modern world is now. HR may have lost its way but it's time for a course correction. All HR people working in this amazing profession should accept nothing less.

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*The post "Reframing HR for the modern world" was first published by Kevin Miller MCIPD here* <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/reframing-hr-modern-world-kevin-miller-mcipd/>

## Kevin Miller MCIPD

Owner of an HR company here in the glorious southwest of England. Our purpose is to humanise workplaces. We deliver HR services, but in a deliberately human way. It is the human, not the resources bit which really matters to us. Humanising workplaces deliver amazing benefits for organizations and improves individual lives. It enhances people's experience at work and shields organisations from risk. When the environment and conditions are right, it enables people to achieve optimal performance.

We believe in a better and different way of doing HR. It's a high-impact, win-win scenario. What is good for people is also good for business. Many organisations grapple with the complexities and nuances of culture. We have guided many organisations to humanise their workplaces and modernise their approach to HR. We provide fresh thinking, new insights, and practical tools that work and inspiring people-centred approaches which make a difference.

Strategies, plans, and processes don't create meaningful change in organisations, it's the people who do. We, therefore, need to keep people intentionally and authentically at the heart of our business culture. We need to walk the talk when it comes to our values in every single interaction.

This is how we change things for the better and build financially healthy, sustainable organisations. It's how we'll ultimately build better communities and a better world. We spend most of our lives working, so let's make it meaningful, enjoyable and fulfilling. That's something worth getting fired up to do every day!

We need a humanity upgrade in our organisations. The pandemic has taught us many things. We need to go back to authentic human-centred HR, put people ahead of process, and move on from outdated language, ways of thinking and limiting bureaucracy that holds us back. We would love to share our ideas with your organisation. We will change the world of work for the better one conversation at a time. Let's start that conversation right now!

I am also co-founder of the Humanising Workplaces global community of like-minded people with Rob Coulston as well as a qualified coach and also a featured contributor with the brilliant team at Biz Catalyst 360.

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