



Leveraging AI and data in HR for better outcomes

Host: **Kyle Forrest**, Human Capital US Chief Marketing Officer, Deloitte Consulting LLP

Guest: **Richard Rosenow**, VP People Analytics Strategy, One Model

Kyle Forrest:

Hello, Capital H listeners, and welcome to another episode from the Gartner ReimagineHR Conference in Orlando, Florida. The event has been packed full of energy. I'm really excited to have joining us on this episode, Richard Rosenow, the VP of people analytics strategy from One Model.

Richard, super excited to have you here. Would love to start with an introduction of you to our listeners, a little bit about your career background and what your role is currently at One Model.

Richard Rosenow:

Sure thing, Kyle. Thank you for having me on. So, my name's Richard. I'm the VP of people analytics strategy at One Model. What does that mean? I have an exciting job. I get to work horizontally across the company.

So, I get to chat with our marketing team as well as our product team and data science. And I get to stick my nose in just about everything going on over at One Model, which gives me a front row seat to see some of the most exciting things that are going on in the people analytics and data orchestration space.

So way back when I was actually in HRBP, got my start in HR, found my way to people analytics, and just fell in love with this space. I worked across a couple different teams—got to see gigantic teams of 150-plus all the way to tech-enabled teams trying to roll out platforms. Some smaller teams and bigger teams. It was a really unique career path that I got to see a lot of this space very quickly.

And I can't get enough of people analytics. As much as my day job has informed my

career, really my side gig throughout all that was just researching and studying the space. Some people like baseball and basketball. I like people analytics, if they made baseball cards for people analytics people, I'd buy them.

I can't get enough of it. And so, just really being able to see the space evolve over the past decade in a bit now, to go from kind of where we were maybe 10, 15 years ago. Tried everything on the side of our desk to a very tech-enabled platform-based approach today has just been tremendous.

Kyle Forrest:

Yeah. Well, Richard, thank you for that. And I love the baseball card analogy. If I had to think about someone who has, I have seen out of the market just talking about and sharing everything about people analytics,

you've been doing it. So, thank you for all you're doing for the community as well.

Richard, let's also just share a little bit with the listeners about One Model as a company. So, you shared some of the career journey that led you to One Model. What is One Model focused on from a mission perspective and what is One Model bringing to its customers?

Richard Rosenow:

Oh absolutely. So, maybe to talk about One Model is to talk about people analytics. So, people analytics is about making better decisions for your workforce. That's really the core of it. I think there's a lot of definitions out there. There are truly hundreds of definitions of what this people analytics space is.

But it's about how do I help make better workforce decisions that lead to better outcomes for both the company and the people that work there?

One Model acts as a sort of people analytics platform. We're the operating layer for all things people analytics. We actually help do the extraction side. We do architecture modeling; the data management services. We help HR teams to get off the ground when it comes to, "I don't have access to my data. My data sits in a lot of places." We're there to help the entire way through.

From there, we've got our front-end visualization tools, data science tools, GenAI [Generative AI] tools. All of that application layer stuff builds on top of that strong data foundation. And we're there to help them get data into the hands of decision-makers. So more, better, faster people decisions. That's who we are.

Kyle Forrest:

Yeah. Which is bringing to life the promise that I think people have been talking about from a people analytics perspective, probably for the last decade, right? And so, you've been in the journey living it with the teams that you've been building and on to now here working at One Model.

And so, Richard, you made a comment that people have been looking at initiatives within the HR function for a long time

around people, process, technology, and now data. People are saying it's people, process, technology and data.

Because for a long time, data wasn't maybe addressed significantly or intentionally. And so, you would see, alright new technology capabilities rolled out, process change. But if it was bad data in, bad data out, was the initiative ever fully realized?

So, last couple years, data has been coming on as maybe the number one focus area for organizations as they say, how am I going to actually achieve value relative to something like AI, automation, et cetera. Can you, in your seat over the last couple years, share a little bit about what you've been seeing broadly with the trends around data quality, data governance, and how are organizations really going to take care of something that is truly the foundation to all of the technology efforts that are being tackled out in the market?

Richard Rosenow:

Yeah, Kyle, it's a great question. It's one that a lot of times when we hear data as HR people, we got into HR because we want to make the world better for people. We want to make the workplace better and make the workforce be involved in that space.

And that can be a word that sometimes feels like something different. I think first off, I'd just like to say a lot of times data is people in disguise. Behind every data point we have, especially within HR, there is somebody there with friends, family, livelihoods. Everything they've got going on about them is represented in that.

And so, that abstraction sometimes is quick to kind of go to data and then, oh, that's something else. That's something different than HR. I'd make the argument. It is so core to HR to look at the data and listen to the data to be able to engage with our workforce and those core things we are within HR.

So, what we've really seen is that we talk a lot about the people data supply chain. And we think about that as strategy, ops, tech, data and analytics. They flow really from top to bottom. And HR went through this journey where the proto-HR, the very beginning was this sort of white glove: We set our strategy;

we're going to differentiate our business through our workforce, and we're going to do what we can.

Then we realized, hey, it helps if you write things down. That's where operations really came about. Where, hey, we're going to standardize and scale and automate our processes. That's HR operations was born.

Then we found out, hey, we can push these into tech. So, suddenly we can start to hit a new level of scale by kind of doing these things, being able to help people reach further, accomplish more. And HR really started to get moving.

And we jumped to analytics. And a lot of times you'll see teams that say, "Hey, we installed our tech, go do data science." And this unfortunate thing is, until we knew we wanted to do analytics, we didn't have to backtrack into that data space. Because really the tech was there. The tech did its job. It automated the process. That's a lot of the HR systems today. They're tremendous for what they set out to do. Which is to automate and scale and enable the process.

But we find out kind of living in this modern age, data's really valuable. And so, managing that flow from tech to analytics, it's neither a tech domain or an analytics domain. We're starting to see that separate and create space there for that data mindedness and data governance as a strategic piece.

A lot of times, again, you think data governance, it sounds very technical, very kind of privacy, lawyery. Data governance is saying, does your data say what it's supposed to say? Is it accomplishing the results you're trying to accomplish? That's where data governance really comes into play a role there and enables downstream analytics.

So, I'll say people analytics team for the past 10 years have been pounding the table saying, "We need data. Please help us." And they're finding some allies here and there. The big change that's happened in the past two years is we suddenly have a peer in the people analytics space of AI. And AI has tremendous consumption of data. So, this supply chain of strategy, ops, tech, data analytics is now data AI too.

And we've got an associate now to go after this together. And so, fixing that upstream supply chain and flowing all the way through, I see a lot of HR teams that struggle and say, "I wish I could do AI. I'm feeling bad that we're not doing AI." They're almost lashing themselves for not being able to accomplish it.

If you don't have the data, it's got to be really hard. And so, moving upstream in those upstream pieces, it actually enables that downstream AI space. So, as much as you could go in every day at work and try to just do AI projects—sometimes fixing your operations, fixing your tech, fixing your data is the fastest way to enable your AI strategy.

Kyle Forrest:

Yeah, well, and Richard, it's probably very easy for us to sit here towards the end of 2024, two years into this AI automation journey, at least at scale and in kind of front and center with workers and consumers, and say, "Gosh, looking backwards, if only we had done better with our data."

But if you go back 15ish years to when the first cloud HCM platforms were being launched, no one was probably thinking at the time, and what I really like and what you said is, humans, there's a human behind every data point. And humans bring a lot of data points forward.

Right? Data points about their job record, their career, their learning, personal, you name it. And the more humans that came into any given organization, the more data points there were. Now, many organizations in the last 15 years have also gone on this journey swinging maybe back and forth between best-of-breed or consolidate-within-one-solution.

So, many organizations have now got all these human data points living in multiple different systems. So, then here you are in 2024 as a company trying to say, "I need to take care of my data and maximize this investment in this thing called AI; while I've got data sitting in seven different systems." And maybe those are only the HR systems.

What about the finance system? What about the procurement system? And all of a sudden it probably feels like this

insurmountable task and topic, hence entering some companies who are helping bring all the data together into one place, extract, et cetera, and bring that value to life.

But I'd be interested, Richard with what you just shared relative to that kind of people-and-data supply chain, where are you seeing people like try to start their journeys now in 2024? Or three or four places that you think are good places to start? Is it the data governance, common data definitions or a data cleanup effort? What are some things that you're seeing organizations tackle?

Richard Rosenow:

Yeah, Kyle, it's a good question and I want to come back to it, but one of the things you said, I just want to make sure we don't lose track about that. As the function has evolved, as HR has kind of built ourselves out, we've always been historically very vertically oriented. We have recruiting, comp [compensation], L&D [learning and development], you name it.

Employees have always experienced HR horizontally. Employees experience the system of work. We don't just do I'm a recruiting as an employee, now I'm a training as an employee. Now I'm a this. No. It's like I go to work, and I experience a lot of things. I think to get to that level where we're servicing employees where they need to be serviced, we've got to think about this as a cohesive system.

And this is really coming to your talk around the boundaryless HR is to break down those silos of those verticals. We've got to create these unified data models. We've got to find a way to bring these data together to be able to look at things from this horizontal perspective and say, what does the employee experience look like across, because your L&D deeply impacts your recruiting, deeply impacts your comp. These different pieces. We can't solve those things in silos. So, I think breaking those down and coming at the data perspective from that unified approach is critical to modern HR.

Don't want to lose track though—coming back to your question about where do you start? Because this is a big question and something I have been chewing on is how much should HR know about data? There's a

really interesting question here where I think a lot of times we get blamed for not knowing about data—if you knew more about data you could go further, you could go faster.

But it's like, we know a lot about HR. And give us credit for a minute about learning and knowing about the human experience at work. Because that is a massive, complex, social science of a space that has not even been scratched as much as we need it to accomplish our core HR pieces. And now we're being asked on top of that to go learn data.

So, I think that the place to start a lot of times is, I mean, really, where to start is find some data, start to understand it, start to think about it and start to work through it. For whatever decision you're working on bring some data to bear. You've got to take those baby steps. But again, that sort of like puts it on the HR team to be the one to make the change.

We are driving business goals, but we don't have access to data to drive the business. So I do think that there's a business imperative to manage and understand your workforce at scale with data, and HR should be doing that. And don't try to take this alone. Because we're last to the table and it's not necessarily HR's fault. And as much as possible, I try to emphasize that when I'm talking to people because we take on a lot in HR. And we'll take on maybe a little more than we should.

But also, there's a lot of partners out there too. I think what I started as people analytics space almost 15 years ago now, you really had to do everything from scratch. You had to know SQL, you had to know how to code, you had to dig in. If you wanted to do good research, you had to go find PhDs to bring them in. And you still need PhDs—don't get me wrong on that.

But this idea of having no SQL even, I think that's a fascinating one. We spent the past decade telling HR they had to go learn how to write SQL to get to their data. ChatGPT's really good at SQL. It's really good at SQL. I knew SQL at one point in time. And there's a half-life to that. I probably don't know SQL anymore. I probably can't claim that.

But I know that if I needed SQL, I can go to ChatGPT, it will help me write that. So, the funny thing is, a lot of these technologies and tools are actually coming closer to HR that are going to enable us to do the things we've always wanted to do without necessarily having to take on the extra burden of learning these different pieces.

Kyle Forrest:

Well, and part of what I really like in your message, Richard, I just actually heard in one of the Gartner sessions, a leader say, "Better to take action and fail than not take action." So, if you are an HR professional trying to understand where to start with data, take that first step.

To your point, bring some data to a decision. Make sure you clearly understand it. How have you defined it? What are you trying to measure? But just take that first action and even if it fails, even if it doesn't go well, it's part of the learning journey.

Now, Richard, I want to go into where you were headed a moment ago talking about the skills needed to understand data, to bring some of those insights and analytics forward and where things are now.

So, we were talking about this [AI] agent/ agentic topic that's out of the market right now. And one of the use cases I've seen out of the market from a number of organizations is how can you use an agent to help you? Whether that's with data quality, data cleanup, data insights.

So, you're putting the information needed closer to the worker or closer to the leader to make better decisions faster. To the point of what you shared One Model is really focused on. Can you share a little bit about what are you seeing in the space relative to agents or agentic AI and the potential impact that might have on the people analytics space?

Richard Rosenow:

Yeah. It's a great question. It's funny that word "agent," I think even over the summer was still pretty new. But even at Workday Rising, SuccessConnect, all these different conferences and places, the large HRS teams have adopted it. We've seen it really come into vogue as its own term.

So, if you're an HR and you're just hearing "agent" for the first time, spend a little bit of time, do some research, dig in just to like to get yourself familiar with that because we're going to be hearing a lot about it. When I think about agent, just to put a definition out there, we think about LLMs [large language models] as we got a chat bot. You kind of think back and forth. If that thing could take an action, that's really what an agent is. And it's an ability to take an action that will not necessarily be pre-prescribed.

So, when we think about RPA, robotic process automation was really in vogue really the past 10 years. That was: I'm doing something a thousand times, how do I automate it? And we kind of wiped out a lot of stuff in HR that we were just spending a lot of time on. And RPA is tremendous for that.

But there's this long tail of stuff that's maybe a one-time thing or a one-off thing. And that was really stuck in the domain of humans, even if it was kind of drudgery or kind of small things or tasks that we didn't want to have to do. We had to do them because it was a one-off thing. We couldn't plan ahead for that.

That's really where these agents are thriving in HR to be able to make those kind of long-tail one-off decisions and one-off execution that previously you would've had to like write a lot of if/then statements, it come in and start making action there.

So, when it comes to data, one of the things that we see is these LLMs and tools are really, really good at code writing. Because at the end of the day, code is language and it's language that has a lot of rules about it that tell you what to do, how to do it and it accomplishes a result. It's actually a little bit easier for some of these LLMs to write code than it is to speak like a human. And they're pretty good at that too.

So, what we found is by building out an agentic workflow, we can start to stitch together a couple agents to work together in a small organization. So, these agents, I'll give an example with One Model, we started to build out some demos around AI, we have a project manager agent, a data engineer agent, a code checking agent, and

an analyst. And they work together as a small tribe. You can say something like, "Hey, I need new comp data from Workday. Can you get it for me?" And the project manager says, "Sure. I'm after it." And the project manager agent starts to build a plan, and it sends some tasks over to that data engineer.

And it's funny, in some of these demos that data engineer, maybe it gets something wrong, it sends it to the project manager and the project manager says, "No, that's not right. Do it again." And sends it back. It's very back and forth in that nature. But this flow in this system and when you stitch together a couple agents, just like when you stitch together a couple people into an organization, that organization is bigger than the sum of its parts. And you can accomplish so much more.

We're able to start delivering at scale with data engineering at a speed that we were not expecting.

So, I'll give an example. I think we have some of the world's best data architects and data engineers. We have people that have been doing this for multiple decades. They're best in their field. Multiple companies. They've been building architecting data models. Our two very best data engineers were set up with a project to re-architect this particular data model. And they estimated it was going to take them two weeks. So, 80 hours, two people, 160 hours of time of some of the world's best data engineers. So, they estimated that, and they said, "Okay, that's our plan. We have our estimate. Let's see what this agent workflow can do." It took 45 minutes.

So, to go from 160 hours of data engineer time, which is not light, to 45 minutes, you start to see that and the ability for it to create connections. And to build this data warehousing and this architecture side.

To me, the dream here is not that HR learns a lot about this space. It's that if we accomplish our goals, HR won't have to. If we can start to automate and scale and take on more of this managed service that we're doing today and automate that, then HR can stay in the insight game, can stay in consulting and stay in action where we really need help downstream.

And so, as much as I want HR to lean in on the data side, we're coming fast and we're here to help. And especially when it comes to building out these data architectures, that's a prime spot for where agents are starting to see traction.

Kyle Forrest:

Well, what I love about that example is you think about what can you do with the time from those data engineers now to do net-new things, that maybe are that much more impactful to an organization?

I heard a CHRO really put a nice frame around AI where it was, if you as an organization believe that AI is only for efficiency, you're going to cut costs. If you believe AI is about growth and doing new things and growing the pie, you're going to find net-new uses of people's time that could unlock new revenue streams, new products, just things that maybe wouldn't have existed if you hadn't freed up the capacity of those humans, right?

And so that example of taking two incredibly experienced data engineers; sure it might be a project that could be somewhere in the priority list for them, but if it can be done that much faster, what can you now do? The potential is limitless.

Richard Rosenow:

Oh absolutely. And let's elevate humans. I think even some of the framing of the conversation around AI is where can AI best play in the workplace? Where do we best use AI? How does AI maximize its—we talk a lot about AI in that terms. I would love to see us apply that same terms to the humans.

So, where can we best apply humans to drive our business forward? Where are we going to get a competitive edge from humans? And it's a little weird. It's a little different to talk about it that way. But to bring that to bear, you can start to say, "Hey, maybe I shouldn't have this human doing a hundred tasks every week identically. Maybe I should get that human working on something creative that drives meaning for themselves and for the business."

And how do we uplevel that human asset, that human resource, to get them to work on the things that really matter to drive the business forward.

Kyle Forrest:

Yeah. What I love about that, in our 2024 Human Capital Trends report, there were two things that Deloitte dug into earlier this year. One was, if you focus on human outcomes and business outcomes at the same time, how much more unlock can you have versus only focusing on the business outcome.

So, your point around organizations saying, "Hey, what am I going to do with AI, AI, AI?" Well, that's money has been allocated against an initiative. The initiative is deploying AI. Really focusing on the business outcome.

Well, if you're not having the equal conversation around the human side of that, you're missing half the equation. The second piece of the research that we dug into was this concept of human sustainability. Which is, there's been a wealth of research last decade plus around the increasing demands on our workers that has resulted in mental well-being challenges, burnout, overwhelmed employee, lack of clarity around career, any number of topics you can kind of take it. And so, if you take that human sustainability concept and say, we've now unlocked potential in another new and different way, how can I think about where humans should be focused on in the organization differently? That might also start to shift some of the narrative of saying, it doesn't always have to be adding more onto the human's plate, but where are we giving them focus times, space to be creative, space to be curious. Some of those human skills. I know the World Economic Forum had said nine of the top 10 skills in focus are human skills. So, it's a fascinating kind of inflection point that we're at relative to this topic at large.

Richard Rosenow:

Yeah. And just to double down on that, from that Human Capital Trends report, the business outcome and human outcome, seeing those together and being able to drive better business results, because you're looking at both. I just want to underline that for folk that are listening, because for the HR teams, go steal that. Bring that in.

And I'll double down on that. Just from being across people analytics, seeing a

lot of different teams, seeing some really, truly phenomenal researchers and people analytics. I have never seen a people analytics team have a finding that says, "If I treat my employees badly, my business is better." I have never seen that. And if it was true, you would think somebody would've tried it. But the truth is, every single time I see research on management research, and Peter Cappelli was talking about this, when we invest in people, when we invest in human outcomes, the business thrives.

And we've seen that across academia. We've seen that in people analytics teams. We need to start getting that into other forums and other places. And that's really HR's job is to be that advocate and the voice for that message, which is, if we treat our workforce well, the business thrives. And I loved seeing that in the Human Capital Trends report.

Kyle Forrest:

Yeah. No, we appreciate it. So, you mentioned at least one of the insights that you've taken away from the first kind of day and a half that you've been at the Gartner ReimagineHR Conference. Are there a couple other things that have stood out to you that you think we should share with the listeners?

Because while I know there's 5,500 people here in person, a thousand kind of tuning in online of some form or fashion, there are tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands of HR professionals in the US. Around the world, you're into the millions. But any highlights that you'd like to share with folks that they should dig into further for not being able to attend or listen into the conference?

Richard Rosenow:

Yeah. It's been an incredible conference. So, I'll say, first off, just the Gartner analysts do such a good job of staying independent and staying a little bit distanced from some of the frothiness of the market.

They can see a little bit further. They know they can kind of look across a little bit more. And that comes through with almost every conversation that they're having about the trends they're seeing, the caution. The kind of just like measuredness of that.

And where it really came through, I think is ... and I've been to a lot of conferences this past year with One Model. I go out there on the speaking circuit. I've talked to a lot of HR tech people. What I really liked about this conference is that it was a focus on the HR outcomes and the people outcomes. And AI enables that.

But "and AI enables that" was like the second thing they said. It wasn't AI is going to change everything. And everyone's blaring that from the foghorns, which a lot of the HR tech firms are really leaning into pretty heavily right now.

And so, Gartner being that sort of independent analyst voice was able to come in and say, "Hey, at the end of the day, we still have to do our day jobs. AI's going to help us do it better, faster, accelerated. But some of these core themes about connection and collaboration and the ways we build and collect intelligence across the company.

I really was taken aback, and I've just been sitting with that a little bit and just reflecting on how this shift in tone is changing now that we kind of hit this moment of peak hype, and maybe we're coming back down a little bit from AI. Not because AI is not delivering, it's actually starting to deliver more. But I think we're recognizing we still have to do really good HR just with AI helping us.

Kyle Forrest:

Yeah. I mean in the Gartner keynote that opened where Russell and Jesse were talking about collaboration gap as a challenge, that's a human challenge. Skills gap as a challenge, that's a human challenge. And technology gap as a challenge. It wasn't

framed as a technology challenge. It was framed as a human challenge. Too much technology, not enough helping the humans really understand how to adopt it, leverage it, change the task, change the work, change the job. So, it really all comes back to the human. So, to your point, it's not just AI will solve all. It's how are you going to address the human which AI will enable or empower?

It was a great start to I felt the theme that they were setting for the three days, which is all around just making work better. Which coincidentally is our human capital tagline, making work better for humans and humans better at work. So, it was a great open.

Richard Rosenow:

Absolutely. I agree. And I'll add on just the seniority of the attendance, the conversations that are had here. As much as I've tried to get to as many sessions as I can, you end up getting caught in the hallway talking to somebody, and the advice I'd give is never leave a hallway conversation for a session. Doesn't matter what the session is, when you're having that really spectacular conversation with somebody you just met or got to know or learned about the problems they're working on, stick that out because that's really where these conferences thrive, is getting the right people together to have the right conversations at the right level. And this has just been a standout conference.

Kyle Forrest:

Yeah. Well, I would agree. It's the power of the community. Learning from each other to ultimately make that much more of an impact for the organizations, the workers, society at large.

So, Capital H listeners, I want to say thank you to Richard for joining, this tremendous set of insights about his career, One Model, the topic of data and where agentic AI is playing into just augmenting and amplifying humans.

As Richard mentioned, he has been out on the conference circuit. While I know we're coming to the close of the fall conference season, I expect you will see him in the spring at some various places. He's also got various insights that he shares via LinkedIn and other channels. So, make sure to check that out because it's a wealth of insights tied to the topic of people analytics data and in an actionable fashion.

So, Richard, really thank you for coming on to Capital H today and sharing some of your time with us here at Gartner ReimagineHR.


Richard Rosenow:


It's been a pleasure. Thank you so much, Kyle.



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