

EBOOK

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MEET THE PEOPLE NERDS

How Data-Driven Leaders Are Redefining the Future of Work



Making Better People Decisions *Everyday*



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Redefining the Future of Work



In a modern business landscape characterised by rapid change, economic uncertainty, and intense competition for talent, one constant remains the key to sustained success: **your people**.

The challenge for executive leaders today is moving beyond outdated assumptions and guesswork to truly understand what drives human performance. For too long, people strategy has been guided by intuition or generalised best practices. The leaders who will define the future, however, are the ones who insist on evidence. They are the ones who are transforming the function of HR from administrative support into a core **strategic intelligence capability**.

This eBook, "Meet the People Nerds: How Data-Driven Leaders Are Redefining the Future of Work", is a powerful showcase of the leaders driving this transformation. It is a testament to those who have successfully merged the essential empathy of human-centric leadership with the analytical rigour of data science to drive positive organisational performance.

These change-makers are using **workforce intelligence** to solve the most complex business problems, leveraging data to:

- ✓ **Elevate Strategy:** Identifying hidden trends in performance, engagement, and retention that inform long-term business goals.
- ✓ **Mitigate Risk:** Proactively forecasting critical skill gaps, optimising workforce planning, and managing high-value talent flight risk.
- ✓ **Drive Tangible Impact:** Building a more equitable, productive, and resilient culture based on empirical facts, not just feelings.

Throughout the Asia-Pacific region and worldwide, the shift toward treating people data as a primary strategic asset is becoming non-negotiable. The leaders featured in these pages are pioneers in this movement. They share their most insightful discoveries, their practical strategies for gaining buy-in from the C-suite, and their bold vision for what workforce data will unlock next.

Their stories reflect an understanding that data is not merely for reporting—it is the fuel for **courageous, evidence-based leadership**.

I am proud that we have the opportunity to spotlight these innovators. My sincere hope is that their experiences will inspire you to elevate the role of data in your organisation, empowering you to lead with greater clarity and redefine the future of work for your teams.

Lee Boon Huat,
SVP, Growth and Strategy, APAC
at Visier



From Anecdote to Algorithm: The Quest for the Computational HR Mindset

For Dr Jaclyn Lee (Jac), CHRO at Certis, the mission was clear: pull the function out of the realm of administrative guesswork and into the domain of precision science. Her focus has not just been on implementing analytics tools, but on embedding a fundamental computational mindset within the HR team itself. For Jac, the most rewarding projects are those where people's data directly solves an acute, operational problem.



Connecting Wellness to Worker Output

A favourite data-driven effort for Jac was an in-depth correlation study linking workforce health metrics directly to productivity.

"We started to look at all the health, workforce, workplace safety data, absenteeism, MC rates, injury rates, vis-a-verse, worker productivity," Jac recalls. The team studied about 5,000 people and came up with very interesting insights.

For instance, the data revealed that aviation screening officers were sustaining an unexpected number of hand injuries due to the constant, repetitive lifting of trays. "As a result, that affected productivity," she notes. The intervention was clear and precise: "we tried to tackle it by teaching them how to have the right posture." She confirmed that, subsequently, "the injury rate came down."

A second, even more complex problem the data solved was the chronic shortage of front-line staff working long, inflexible hours. To tackle this, Jac's team studied shift patterns and shift hours, eventually developing a massive dynamic rostering project called "Cadence."

The solution allowed for unheard-of flexibility in the security sector. "The Cadence actually allows employees to go in and look at dynamic rostering and say, 'Hey, can I swap shifts? If my son's birthday is coming next Thursday, can I swap with another colleague?'" she explains. "That allowed that flexibility to the employee." Furthermore, "as we also allow part-timers to choose the shifts they want, we solve a lot of shortfall problems in our airport."

Fostering the Computational Mindset

The biggest shift in HR strategy under Jac's leadership was the cultural adoption of data. When she first joined, "people were not serious about data analytics." Her response was to train them out of anecdotal thinking.

"I started to foster in them a computational mindset," Jac says. This means, "when you are doing things, don't just do for the sake of doing, but use data to give you insights. With data, it gives you insights and helps your HR strategy to be more

Dr Jaclyn Lee, CHRO at Certis



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precise and relevant to the business." She points out that projects like Cadence "actually improved productivity and impact ROI of the business."

This cultural shift required capability building. Starting with one data analytics person, "He has since trained another 15 people within the group HR team to be conversant with analytics, so it's replicated now." Now, the HR team is sophisticated enough that "they're able to build a linear regression model." By applying a prediction model to the police force, they found "employees who are in the company for about two years are highly likely to attrit." This predictive insight allowed for proactive targeted intervention such as looking at career development. The result? "Our resignation rate is very low for our frontline police officers."

Data Trust and Prioritising Action

When faced with concerns about data quality, a common issue when inheriting legacy systems, Jac and the People Analytics team adopted a strategic, phased approach to data management. They recognised that disparate systems and the lack of a centralised repository (like a data warehouse) were the root cause of the "dirty data" perception.

Rather than attempting to immediately cleanse the entirety of Certis's 27,000 employee records, which was tactically challenging without a robust data lake, the team took a focused, high-impact approach:

Targeted Scope: They deliberately limited their initial data consolidation and cleaning efforts to a group level (e.g., the Land Security Group). This strategic constraint allowed them to quickly deliver clean, reliable data for key organisational segments.

Deep-Dive Cleansing: The People Analytics lead invested significant effort in back-end data work, meticulously scoping and executing a deep-clean process to establish a verified and pristine dataset for the chosen groups.

This approach ensured that while a full organisational data overhaul was pending, the People Analytics function could immediately begin delivering trusted insights to business leaders, building confidence in the data's integrity one group at a time.

Beyond the technical hurdles, Jac identifies the biggest blind spot in HR as a lack of analytical skills. "A lot of HR folks don't know how to read data, don't know how to make sense of data, so more training is needed." This underscores the need for constant coaching in one key area: data storytelling. "How do you make sure that you put it in something not so complex and mathematical that you can't even see it? It relates back to the business."

To ensure business leaders act on these insights, Jac's strategy focuses entirely on partnering to solve their urgent operational problems: "you've got to ask them, walk the grounds, understand what that problem is and what's the thing that keeps them awake at night?"

Her advice to any C-suite leader starting their workforce intelligence journey is to apply this pain-point-first mentality: start with the problem that "impacts ROI, productivity, and also your revenue. At the end of the day, in the private sector, it's really all about revenue and profitability."

Looking to the future, Jac hopes that the evolution of technology will simplify analytics even further through Generative AI. She looks forward to a time when "people analytics leaders don't even need to do coding or think about building complicated dashboards." She concludes that the future is where, "I know what's the basic problem, I'm able to tell AI and it can generate insights for me."





Leading with Insights, Not Gut Feel

Ray Tan emphasises that leaders must move beyond anecdotal evidence and operate with objective, data-driven certainty. For him, the ultimate power of workforce intelligence lies not just in counting people, but in understanding the levers that influence their decisions.



Identifying the True Drivers of Turnover

The most resonant insight for Ray is the complex reality behind voluntary turnover, as it disproves commonly held HR assumptions.

Ray explains the starting point: "My favourite people insights are the drivers of voluntary turnover, and it's a visual that Visier has." This data enables the team to understand the actual reasons why employees are leaving or staying.

HR practitioners often rely on intuition, but data introduces objective truth: "Very often, HR practitioners have a gut feel of why employees are leaving. Sometimes they're right, sometimes they could be for completely different reasons. So surfacing these insights in a data-driven way dispels all preconceived notions."

He contrasts a simple number with the actionable intelligence provided by advanced analytics: "Attrition rate is a number, right? Headcount is a number. But, having a way to let AI and machine learning tell us what is driving attrition in a certain population group brings us closer to making a decision, or an intervention, than just having a number."

Ray also points out the immediate limitation: "The current limitation is that this insight tends to look inwards at internal HR data. It could be expanded to include external factors, such as data sources from IT, which could make it even more useful."

Moving HR from Gut Feel to Enterprise-Wide Intelligence

The shift to using sophisticated workforce intelligence has been profound, replacing subjective decision-making with consistency and enterprise-wide metrics.

"Traditionally, before people analytics and workforce intelligence, a lot of how businesses and managers approach people issues are either based on feeling, or a one-time analysis that someone has put together," Ray observes.

The new approach streamlines decision-making across the entire organisation: "Workforce intelligence allows an enterprise-wide application of the same metrics with minimal user effort, while ensuring secure and appropriate permissions, empowering managers to make informed people decisions."

Ray Tan, Director, Total Rewards
Data & Insights – Global at AbbVie



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When addressing data quality pushback, the inevitable claim that data is dirty or incomplete, Ray maintains a pragmatic stance: "If everything has to be perfect, then we will never start."

His solution prioritises progress over unattainable perfection: "You can always start from a solid base to work from. Dirty data can be cleaned. Most often, you can get good insights from what you already have, and it's definitely far better than never starting."

Driving Action: Speaking the Language of Business

A major blind spot Ray identifies is knowing what to focus on once the data is available. He states, "In the past, HR analytics was about having the data. Now, it sits in different places, and it is about how I can put it into a clearer manner for it to be digestible to the intended audience."

His strategy for driving action is to always translate people metrics into the core language of the business: performance and growth. "What business leaders are most interested in is business performance, and people insights that can relate to their interests are going to get their attention. If not, you're going to lose their attention."

He gives an example of how to frame metrics in commercial terms: "Attrition rate only has meaning as it relates to how it affects their business growth, how it relates to competition in the market. Similarly, time to

hire is only meaningful if you're not attracting talent at an adequate pace to meet your business goals. So always phrase it in what it means to the business."

Building a Data-Driven Foundation and Future Focus

For a C-suite leader establishing a workforce intelligence capability, Ray advises a conservative start. "Start small, start with what you have. Almost all companies will have a HCM system that keeps employee records. Just start from that one source. That can help you understand basic metrics such as headcount, geography, total salary and so forth. Over time, you can add on other insights, but that's probably the easiest way to get started."

Looking ahead, Ray identifies the ultimate future focus as manager effectiveness. He notes that current metrics are often inadequate for measuring leadership quality at scale: "There are a lot of HR metrics that measure many macro aspects, like headcount, attrition, hiring, but even with engagement surveys and 360 feedback, the data is often siloed."

Effective company culture starts at the top, but it needs to be permeated down the levels through managers. Thus, cultivating manager effectiveness should be viewed as a strategic imperative for continuous evolution.





Leading with Consistency and Speed: A HRBP's Approach to Workforce Intelligence

Data isn't just a reporting tool—it's the foundation for confident, fast decision-making. As a HR Business Partner (HRBP), Angela Ryan, Director, HR Partnering Lead at IQVIA, focuses on translating raw data into a consistent, actionable language that empowers leaders across the organisation. For her, the real value of workforce intelligence is the speed and clarity it brings to people's strategy.



Establishing a Consistent Data Language

When asked to name her favourite data-driven insight, Angela bypassed a single metric and instead highlighted the ability to use dashboards to establish a consistent language across the enterprise. This approach prioritises utility and organisational alignment over the specificity of any one number.

"Where I'm seeing a lot of value is the dashboard creation and that very consistent language," Angela explains. This singular view is essential, "regardless of which internal client you're working with," or the level of the organisation. That "ability to have a very consistent language and communication on key metrics across the board is where I see a lot of value."

This focus on consistency drastically changes how HR views people strategy, primarily by enabling speed. The challenge of providing strategic counsel used to be bottlenecked by manual data retrieval. "Information that used to take such a long time to gather, collate and analyse, is now readily available for you." This acceleration allows the HR team to "move quickly to provide the intelligence including supporting and planning with that data." This provides real-time support for decisions and planning, which "provides confidence all around" to both the team and business leaders.

Data in Action: The Span of Control Challenge

Angela points to a complex situation that highlights the power of real-time data: optimising the span of control in a past organisation. Span of control, a key structural metric, often becomes a target area when organisations pursue greater efficiency.

Before robust visualisation tools were leveraged, getting a clear, actionable picture of the span of control was "very tricky." The breakthrough came from the capability to move beyond simple organisational averages. "Being able to go micro as well as macro, very quickly and in real-time, that was probably a very important and valuable capability for me." This ability to transition seamlessly between a high-level overview and specific details is what drives actionable solutions in complex structural decisions.

Angela Ryan, Director,
HR Partnering Lead at IQVIA



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Addressing Scepticism: Context and Transparency

When faced with scepticism about data being "dirty or incomplete," Angela's primary strategy is transparency and context.

"Being honest is the first, primary requirement," which means acknowledging "when there is going to be some anomaly." As an HRBP, she advises that you should "have an understanding of why those anomalies might exist, and you can speak to it. Critically, it's not about the data not telling the truth, it's about defining the truth first, and then seeing what the data says." Her experience shows "the data is accurate; it's just the story behind it that you need to understand." Success relies on the HR practitioner being informed about the organisation's evolution when entering a discussion.

Blind Spots in Interpretation

Angela identifies several key blind spots common amongst stakeholders when interpreting workforce data:

- **Perception versus Actual:** Leaders often rely on internal perceptions that contradict the factual data.
- **Percentage versus Count:** Misinterpreting a high percentage that is based on a small population size. A high percentage "can look very significant when the actual count isn't."
- **Historic vs. Restated Organisation:** Failing to understand the impact of significant restructuring, leading to comparing data that are not comparable. This reinforces the importance of understanding the business's evolution.





Driving Action: Solutioning and Strategy

For getting business leaders to act on insights, Angela shifts the focus from the data itself to the proposed solution. Her most successful strategy involves crafting a comprehensive and effective narrative.

"It's less about the data and more about you as a practitioner, coming to the table with a proposed solution, and where you fit in." The goal is to come to the leader with a complete thought, ensuring the problem is not just "passed over the fence" to them.

She details the full approach, which provides confidence and a clear path forward: "Here's what we can see, here's what we know this means, and here's what we think we should be doing as a result." This is the kind of "solution that the business leader needs, but they need it supported by data." The data, therefore, acts as a powerful enabler for the practitioner's expertise.

Building Capability: Anchoring to Strategy

For any C-suite leader starting their workforce intelligence capability, Angela advises them to anchor their efforts in the business strategy.

The starting point is to ask: "What is our current organisational strategy? What are we aiming for? Where are our key areas? And what are the metrics aligned to that?"

In a global company, consistency is vital; leaders must ensure their focus "is aligned" with key metrics used by headquarters or other regions to avoid conflicting views.

The Ultimate Question: Future Position Profiles

Looking ahead five years, the big question Angela hopes workforce intelligence will answer is around job transitions.

She wants to know, "What kind of job profiles will be more pertinent, and therefore, what kind of talent is required?" This is a question that relates directly to positions and skills, specifically, "what kind of skills and talent are we going to need in five years to fill the positions that are going to be more prevalent?"

Given the "evolution of AI and other technologies, including robotics," this predictive capability is crucial for companies to plan their talent pipelines effectively for the future workforce.

Finally, Angela's advice to fellow HRBPs: "Make sure they're using data to support any solutions and the design of initiatives. Using data consistently and transparently is the fastest path to being seen as a truly strategic partner."





Data as Currency: Earning Confidence in People Analytics

Greg Newman sees the most profound change workforce intelligence brings not just in identifying trends, but in elevating the strategic stature of HR by giving them numbers that leaders can trust as implicitly as their financial reports.



The Invisible Workforce Connection

When asked for his favourite data-driven insight, Greg points to a metric that speaks volumes about organisational dynamics: relationships.

"The average white-collar worker has 140 workplace relationships over a year," Greg notes, a statistic that "still sticks with me." This insight resonates because it highlights a critical blind spot: "We measure a lot in organisations, but we're still not good at measuring workplace connections, collaboration, relationships and trust." This is critical "even though we know that's really how work gets done."

This reality shapes Greg's view on HR's evolution. He observes that in executive meetings, finance numbers "are trusted, they are not questioned, they are deemed to be accurate, up-to-date, and correct." Conversely, "whenever HR starts to show data, there's a lot of mistrust."

The solution is competence and confidence. "I think being able to support HR business partners in gaining confidence and giving them reliable numbers is probably the most important change we can support." This empowers HR to move beyond abstract discussions and speak the objective language of the business.

The Power of Productivity

The most complex and rewarding application of workforce data Greg and his team have tackled is "measuring productivity across the whole of the enterprise." This remains "an aspirational goal" for many organisations.

While mining businesses have measurable output, achieving a consistent measure of productivity across the whole organisation is the game-changer. By linking HR activities to this central business measure, "we're hopefully going to get to the point where we can say a more highly trained workforce is more productive." This linkage "will get the business's instant attention, because we're talking their language, which is productivity."

Greg Newman, Principal People
Analytics Partner at Rio Tinto



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Data Quality: Confidence, Not Perfection

Addressing the common pushback that HR data is "dirty or incomplete," Greg advocates for radical transparency, suggesting teams focus on the strong data set and avoid pushing things "where you lack the confidence."

A highly effective technique is "starting to put a confidence indicator on data and dashboards." Using simple traffic lights, HR can signal the trustworthiness of a metric. Headcount data might be "green, we are really confident," but "maybe our Indigenous workforce population data is only amber."

This preemptive transparency prevents a single, minor data point disagreement from "undermining the impact of everything that you're trying to say." By putting the confidence signal in, HR is saying, "You're right, there is a chance that the population count of that worksite may not be up to date, but that's because we have these data issues, or we have these timing issues, or consistencies." This allows them to "get over that, put it in a little box, and still talk about the overall message." Moreover, highlighting data weaknesses drives engagement in governance: "By highlighting where we lack confidence and where we know we have issues, it's a great opportunity to say, well, we have been asking you to appoint a data quality leader."

Focus and Storytelling

The biggest blind spot Greg sees is "forgetting about the storytelling." This is the idea that "If I give you a dashboard, you should go away."

HR must go beyond merely presenting numbers. Greg says, "We really should be saying: your part of the organisation compared to another part of the organisation is above the number or below the number." The conversation must be about commitment: "If you've got your hiring numbers wrong in terms of gender mix, are we talking about working towards solving that within a year or a month? How committed are you to that target?"

To ensure leaders act on insights, Greg's team adheres to a key principle: don't push irrelevant data, what they internally "Cool Story, Bro." Success comes from presenting "answers to those questions" that the leaders already care about. This often means drastically reducing the number of dashboards: "dropping from 800 dashboards to six dashboards." He adds a crucial lesson from his startup time: "It's much easier to do work where there is a budget." By tagging initiatives into existing budget lines, there is a much greater chance of success.

The Ultimate Question: White-Collar Productivity

For C-suite leaders starting their workforce intelligence journey, Greg advises against tackling "enterprise-wide problems that take years to fix" right away. Instead, focus on short-term projects with a relatively quick turnaround.

Areas like "process improvements in talent acquisition or onboarding" are great starting points. This allows leaders to build evidence: "doing relatively short payback projects for small subsets of the organisation, and then using that as evidence to then build up scale and complexity off the back of relatively small but highly visible successes."

The ultimate question Greg hopes workforce intelligence will answer in the next five years is white-collar workforce productivity. He believes that for most organisations, "it's impossible to know what our white-collar workers are doing, and whether those efforts are productive or not." He sees AI-powered products enabling "task-level analysis of every job in their organisation, at scale, in an ongoing nature." Future breakthroughs will likely start by "identifying what the unproductive tasks they are stuck doing, and removing them to enable productivity to build off the top of that."





The Attrition Compass: Steering HR from Reactive to Proactive Planning

For Nikitha Mehta, workforce intelligence is the essential compass, moving HR from reactive hiring to proactive, data-driven planning. Her focus is on deeply interrogating core metrics to reveal the strategic narratives that traditional reporting often obscures.



The Story in the Demographics

Nikitha finds her favourite and most resonant insights in attrition data. Unlike surface-level metrics that only report how many people left, she is primarily focused on who is leaving.

"Attrition data specifically always intrigues me quite a bit, because it really talks about what kind of people are leaving," Nikitha explains. She looks at the demographics and tenure of outgoing employees because "that gives us a bigger story in terms of, is it an onboarding issue, is it an issue of retention?"

This deep analysis shifts the entire people strategy from a reactive, crisis-management footing to a strategic one. Before implementing sophisticated analytics, HR teams often operated in a simple, continuous loop: "I've used analytics, specifically when it comes to workforce planning. At one point, what I noticed was that people were continuously just looking at headcounts and just being very reactive. Somebody leaves, you hire; rinse-and-repeat."

Now, intelligence tools reveal underlying trends that inform workforce planning. "The overall workforce planning is something that transforms data into wisdom," Nikitha notes. For example, data charts can easily show us "this is the full headcount, and out of which this is the active, this is the passive, so it breaks down the data." This proactive view allows HR to plan strategically, rather than scrambling reactively to fill headcounts.

The Challenge of Cultural Biases

While data solves many problems, Nikitha points to engagement-related data—specifically ESAT (Employee Satisfaction) scores—as the most complex and tricky area to apply, primarily due to cultural biases.

Working in a global role, she observes fascinating contradictions across geographies. "Traditionally, people in India and the Philippines tend to have a higher ESAT ratio versus somebody in Singapore," she notes. She questions the interpretation: "Does it mean our India policies are great because of the higher ESAT score?"

Nikitha Mehta, Director,
HR Business Partner – Global at FIS



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She finds that "sometimes it's fascinating" that in a place like Brazil, "where we have the least amount of best people practices, our ESAT scores can be so high." Conversely, in the UK, "where we've got lots of benefits, including childcare and more, our ESAT scores are low." The complexity is that "when it comes to those country biases, I don't think there's a tool that kind of addresses" the local context.

This difficulty in capturing objective truth also surfaces in performance management. The key challenge lies in accurately tagging performance exits. When a low performer resigns before their PIP is complete, the system registers it as a voluntary termination, masking the management's active efforts.

Leaders often push back, saying: "All of you are not performance managing people out, you're not doing performance management." Their reality is: "We are doing all the right things to push people, and then they resign. But your data is not capturing it." Nikitha suggests that "we need to think about a better way of tagging it in a system, and we have to figure out how we can tag out voluntary terminations and put them under a non-performance bucket."

Beyond cultural complexities, Nikitha notes a second key blind spot: the generational gap. ESAT scores and employee priorities "could be really different for the newer workforce that we are bringing in versus those who are more experienced." This difference "is not really called out significantly because of the population and doesn't give us a full connection."

The Power of the Manager Scorecard

Workforce intelligence is only as valuable as the action it drives. Nikitha's most successful strategy for compelling business leaders to act is built on accountability through transparency: leadership tracking.

"I have a manager board, and a leaderboard where we talk about everything from engagement scores, attrition scores, hiring scores, performance scores." She summarises: "I really like to score our leaders based on that, so I think leadership is probably my favourite part about analytics and how we use it." By making leader performance transparent across people metrics, the function becomes a critical priority.

For C-suite leaders just starting to build their capability, Nikitha advises focusing on two core areas. First, start with high-performance data: "what's happening within the high performance matrix and how do we engage them?" Second, integrate compensation analytics, which is often "underutilised."

Looking five years into the future, Nikitha hopes workforce intelligence will be able to answer the biggest, currently unmeasurable question: Employee ROI (Return on Investment). She envisions a scenario where HR can assign a measurable ROI score to individual employees. She posits the ultimate question: "How is Employee A's ROI different from Employee B's ROI?" She believes putting a score "to the ROI of employees will help us drive a lot of people's strategies accordingly."





The APAC Puzzle: Why Regional Data Requires Market-Specific Nuance

In the vast and diverse landscape of the Asia-Pacific (APAC) region, aggregate numbers can paint a dangerously misleading picture. For Marcel Wirantono, HR Reporting and Analytics Lead at IPG Mediabrands APAC, his primary focus is on dissecting regional trends into their market-specific realities. His philosophy is that meaningful workforce intelligence is rooted not in broad generalisations, but in the granular details that empower local action.



The Story in the Turnover Cause

Marcel's favourite data-driven insight revolves around turnover, specifically the ability to break down the cause of turnover by market and employee tenure.

"If it's about turnover, it's really about the cause of turnover," Marcel states. He emphasises the need to "deep dive further, whether it's employees who join in the first year or new to the workforce versus employees who are senior and tenured, and dividing it by markets as well."

"In reality, the story does differ from market to market," he explains. As an example "If in APAC as a region, turnover is down by 20%, but in Market A, it's up 10%, and in Market B, we are actually doing better by 20%" he says, "That makes a big difference in the story." Operating at a regional level means providing leadership with granular numbers: "we still break down the report by market, and consulted the market based on those numbers as well." He adds: "The fact that you can always benchmark, break down different stories and actually report on insights by different parameters is really the big difference in my day-to-day job."

Granularity Drives Decision-Making

The introduction of dedicated workforce intelligence platforms has fundamentally changed how HR Business Partners (HRBPs) and finance teams view people strategy, primarily by enabling two crucial shifts: an increase in data quality awareness and the provision of necessary granularity.

Marcel explains that while the business and finance teams know the general business trajectory, "sometimes what they forget is that the details in different markets provide different nuances on what they need to focus on." Workforce intelligence addresses this by providing "the speed and readiness to make those decisions without putting an umbrella term for the whole region."

Marcel Wirantono, Former HR Reporting and Analytics Lead at IPG Mediabrands APAC



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Essentially, the granular data highlights the unique problems in each market, guiding leaders toward specific, impactful actions instead of relying on broad regional generalisations.

"I would say granularity is the big impact for them," Marcel confirms. Now with people analytics, "they know which department is performing well and not performing well, rather than looking at it just on a country level."

Internally, the biggest impact for HR was a focus on data quality. The teams moved from a simple "voluntary resignation" to "a more detailed data capture" asking: "is it voluntary because of salary or manager or other factors?" The regional team is trying to "build that cadence so that we have the same level of insights across all markets."

Solving the Early-Career Turnover Trap

The most complex problem Marcel's team successfully tackled involved addressing exceptionally high turnover rates among fresh graduates in a specific market.

"When comparing the fresh graduates' salary compared to the senior manager's salary, the ratio was a lot higher versus other markets," he revealed. This indicated a lack of a robust financial career path for early-career professionals. The resulting strategy focused on ensuring "those fresh graduates have a stronger career path in terms of compensation."

"I really believe a lot of the impact that we're trying to do, is to ensure that there is a career path for individuals who have selected us as their first company," Marcel states. In markets with high turnover, "those tend to be the low-hanging fruit." The goal is simple: retaining them "would ensure you have continuity in terms of serving your client, which works better for your revenue rather than waiting for a month or two to find replacements."

Data Trust and Prioritising Action

When business leaders claim the data is dirty, Marcel points to the systematic approach provided by their workforce intelligence platform, Visier. "With Visier, it does enable us to present the data cleanly and consistently," he notes. Previously, different markets used "different formulas or different time sets for periods," leading to mistrust. "With Visier, that question did not arise as often anymore, because they are aware that we have a systematic way of presenting this."

The biggest blind spot Marcel sees when applying this workforce data is not technical, but strategic: "coming up with the action items." Leaders may see five to 10 action items that you can take at any given time, but they need to know where to prioritise and where to find the biggest impact."

Marcel's strategy for driving action is simple: prioritise the most impactful projects that won't paralyse the organisation. He advises: "Please make it to be the one that is most impactful, but at the same time, not killing yourself for implementing it." He stresses that leaders understand the data's impact and know "how much effort and cost it will take." For difficult issues like pay equity, if "40% of the people are not being paid equally, then it will cost them a lot to put everybody to parity," which means "that they may need a staggered approach, as an example."

Building a Data-Driven Foundation

For any C-suite leader starting to build a workforce intelligence capability, Marcel's advice is to assess data availability first. If data is still managed via "Excel, pen and paper, or captured via email," the first investment should be in "a HCM system that is digital."

Once that foundation is set, focus on consistency. "If those are already handled, you can get regular reporting." He emphasises that "consistent and regular, frequent reporting is where you get to start to make business decisions." Building that consistency is crucial because "reading reports is what leaders are kind of expected to do these days."

Looking to the future, Marcel believes the biggest question workforce intelligence will help answer is around AI adoption. "I don't believe everybody will get replaced by AI," he says, "but the ability to use AI better will put you in a better position in the longer term." He views AI as a shortcut: "You can reduce the amount of work and use that time to learn about processes and even enable more functions within your business function, whether you're HR, finance, or Strategy."



Decoding Organisational Agility: From Structure to Strategy

Moving the People Analytics function from simply reporting the past to predicting the future is the core focus of Suria Tsang, Senior Manager, People Analytics (Functional Lead) at PropertyGuru. For her, data's greatest value is its ability to transform abstract organisational issues into actionable, human-centric strategies.



Balancing Efficiency with Empathy

Suria's favourite data-driven insight is rooted in the structure of the organisation itself: examining the relationship between the management span of control and employee engagement.

"Teams with optimal span, around seven to eight, neither too wide nor too narrow, consistently correlate to higher engagement, lower attrition, and stronger performance outcomes," Suria found. This insight resonated deeply because "it transformed something we've often seen as structural into more deeply human."

She explains the impact: "It shows that the leadership capacity and the team design directly influence the employee experience." In an environment where the focus is often on increasing the span for perceived efficiency, this data provides the necessary counter-balance. "Analytics can help leaders balance efficiency with empathy. It's not just about reducing the layers or increasing the span, but also enabling the managers to lead effectively."

This approach defines how workforce intelligence has changed HR strategy at PropertyGuru. The function is moving "from reactive to predictive thinking." Previously, time was spent "explaining what had happened, such as reporting attrition rates or headcount changes after a specific situation arose." Today, discussions are "more centred on the future of work and workforce planning." The focus is on the question: "What is likely to happen next? This includes anticipating upcoming talent risk, and potential skill gap if we are going for a new business strategy." This shift has "reframed HR as a strategic advisor and HR business partners are now more confident in using data to challenge the assumptions from the business and propose forward-looking strategies."

Depersonalising Difficult Decisions

Suria points to navigating a major organisational redesign or transformation as the trickiest situation where workforce data was successfully applied. The challenge was to "optimise the cost while also protecting the capability and morale."

"Different leaders have different opinions on where efficiency should come from," she notes. "Through workforce data, analysing the spans and layers,

Suria Tsang, Senior Manager,
People Analytics (Functional Lead)
at PropertyGuru



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functional duplication, cost-to-value ratios and more, the team was able to bring clarity. By overlaying these insights into critical role mapping, we could distinguish between areas we want to streamline versus the areas we want to have required strategic investment."

What made it successful was that the data helped "depersonalise the difficult decisions. Instead of debating opinions, the team was able to show actual factual workforce structures, enabling leaders to make more deliberate, evidence-based calls on the balance of both financial and people outcomes."

The Goal is Trust, Not Perfection

The inevitable pushback around data quality is something Suria views as "a sign of growing data maturity instead of a challenge, because it means that the leaders are actually engaging critically with the information." Her strategy is to "acknowledge the imperfection up front and shift the focus to directional accuracy rather than perfection."

Her key message to leaders: "The question isn't whether the data is 100% clean; it's whether it helps us to make better decisions today." To build confidence, she ensures transparency about "how it is sourced, cleaned and validated." The goal is "to build trust with them through consistency and transparency, but not by promising perfect data."

The real blind spot Suria observes is "assuming the data speaks for itself, leading many to interpret the numbers literally without the context." She cautions against "mixing correlation with causation." For instance, "if the attrition spikes, the immediate conclusion might be something went wrong with the engagement, when in fact, it could be planned exits, restructuring, or even a healthy renewal of talents." She emphasises that "the interpretation requires both analytical and contextual judgment." The goal of analytics is not "to find only the answers, but to ask the questions and explore the story behind the numbers."

Linking People Costs to Business Value

To ensure business leaders act on insights, Suria focuses on linking the analytics directly to "business outcomes they care about such as efficiency, cost management, and return on people investment."

She points out that "attrition alone doesn't always trigger any concern." What truly engages leaders is understanding "whether the workforce is structured efficiently, and whether people costs are aligned with the business values."

She suggests using metrics like "the proportion of a corporate or supporting function versus revenue-generating roles or the overall people cost distribution by business line. This ratio will tell a clearer story of our organisational health."

Suria also adds that "when analytics shifts the discussion to how our money is spent, and are we getting the value of every dollar of the people cost, it becomes a business conversation, not an HR conversation. That's where I see the biggest impact, when the data becomes a common language between finance, HR, and the business."

Solving for Agility

For C-suite leaders starting their workforce intelligence journey, Suria advises them to "start with a clear business question they want to solve, not a dashboard. The real power lies in solving specific business challenges such as where do we have a duplication of functions or workforce, or what is driving our productivity gap?"

Secondly, she stresses the importance of investing early in the data literacy of your leadership team, adding that "even the most advanced analytics is meaningless if the leaders don't interpret or trust it. Building the curiosity and the confidence around the data interpretation is just as important as building the system itself."

Looking to the future, Suria's ultimate hope is that analytics will help us "better understand the true drivers of organisational agility." She wants to know "why some teams adapt faster to change, learn quicker, and deliver consistently despite the disruption versus the others." "Agility is still hard to quantify." She concludes that "if we can identify the condition, the leadership traits, or the team structures that make the organisation truly adaptive, that will reshape how we design work and develop leaders today. Agility is the ultimate competitive advantage," and she believes "Workforce Intelligence will help us to decode that."

About Visier

Visier is the global leader in Workforce Intelligence, empowering organizations to make every people decision with confidence. Through Visier Workforce AI, our award-winning AI technology delivers actionable insights that help HR leaders plan, decide, and act at the moments that matter most. As the market leader in people analytics, workforce planning, organizational design, and manager effectiveness, we enable companies worldwide to drive smarter workforce decisions, optimize talent strategies, and achieve measurable business impact. Our mission is to help businesses lead with insight at scale while continuously transforming in a rapidly changing workforce landscape.

Founded in 2010 by the pioneers of business intelligence, we have over 85,000 customers in 75 countries—including enterprises like Domino's Pizza, Experian, Amgen, eBay, and Ford Motor Company.

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