Upskilling the HR Profession

Building Data Literacy at Scale

INSIGHT
222

Contents

Executive Summary

People analytics is growing. Indicators such as technology spend, mergers and acquisitions activity, number of practitioners, size of function and the reporting hierarchy of people analytics leaders show that, as a profession and function within organisations, people analytics is growing and becoming more influential. And this growth is set to continue for many years.

Coupled with this growth, in today's fast-changing business landscape and with rapidly evolving technological advances, the importance of being proficient in data literacy – in general, and in human resources in particular – has become more critical than ever. Across the business world, data literacy is set to be the most in-demand skill by 2030, with 85% of C-suite executives believing that being data-literate will be as vital in the future as the ability to use a computer is today.[1]

All of this points to one thing. The human resources (HR) profession must improve its data literacy over the coming years.

At Insight222, we find that many global organisations are approaching this topic with vigour. In companies, the conversation with the chief HR officer (CHRO) pivots around the dual desire to improve the value from people analytics, and the need to upskill the HR function itself in data literacy.

The research outlined in this report focuses on the latter. The insights revealed in this report are taken primarily from a survey of 73, mainly global, organisations during April 2023. These organisations collectively employ more than 96,000 HR professionals and 5.6 million employees.

Our study revealed four key insights:

1. **Role-modelling by the CHRO and HRLT is essential.** When the CHRO and their direct reports role-model the use of people data and analytics, HR practitioners use people data and analytics insights in their day-to-day jobs at a much higher level than if neither the CHRO nor the HR leadership team (HRLT) do not personally role-model the use of people data and analytics.

2. **Responsibility for upskilling should be with the people analytics leader.** Specifically, when the people analytics leader is responsible for upskilling HR, HR practitioners actively develop their data literacy skills at a far higher level than if any other person is responsible for upskilling.

3. **Five skills form the core of data literacy for HR.** These are (a) consulting, (b) influencing stakeholders, (c) data interpretation, (d) building recommendations from insights, and (e) storytelling.

4. **Invest appropriately for a multi-year upskilling programme.** A data literacy programme to upskill the HR profession requires an investment that totals the equivalent of between $600 and $800 per HR full-time equivalent (FTE). This allows for training, coaching, change management and project management for current and prospective HR practitioners over a two-to three-year period.

These insights are clear. While there are many aspects of building a data-driven culture in HR, upskilling HR professionals themselves is a major component. And to do that, focusing on each of the elements above is really important to raise the level of evidence-based people practices.

Naomi Verghese and Jonathan Ferrar
July 2023

The key findings of our research are:

1. Role-modelling by the CHRO and HRLT is essential.

Our research shows that when both the CHRO and their direct reports role-model the use of people data and analytics, HR practitioners use people data and analytics insights in their day-to-day jobs in 79% of companies. However, when neither the CHRO nor the HRLT are perceived to role-model people data and analytics, HR practitioner usage drops to 22% of companies. This clearly shows a strong relationship between leadership role-modelling and HR practitioner usage of people data and analytics.

Key message: CHRO and HRLT role-modelling of people data and analytics is paramount for the improvement of data literacy across the HR function overall.

2. Responsibility for upskilling should be with the people analytics leader.

When the people analytics leader takes responsibility for a data literacy upskilling programme, 60% of companies in our survey indicated that HR practitioners actively develop their data literacy skills to become more data-driven. Whereas, if anyone else assumes the responsibility, whether this person is an HRLT executive, or any other leader, this number is only 31% of companies. It is clear that the people analytics leader creates more momentum with HR when they take responsibility.

Key message: Make the people analytics leader responsible for implementing a data literacy programme.

3. Five skills form the core of data literacy for HR.

While many skills are needed to be trained, what HR practitioners really need are the skills in data-led consulting, such as managing stakeholders, interpreting data, storytelling and making recommendations. These are more useful for the generalist HR practitioner than "harder" skills, such as mathematics, statistics, extracting data from platforms and other scientific skills.

Key message: Focus on consulting skills, not scientific skills.

4. Invest appropriately for a multi-year upskilling programme.

Our research indicates that when companies take a serious approach to building data literacy skills in HR practitioners, they invest on average $600–$800 per person for their upskilling programme. This investment should be budgeted across a multi-year period and should include appropriate change and project management to ensure that a language of data literacy is adopted throughout the HR function.

Key message: Invest approximately $600–$800 per HR practitioner, in discrete cohorts, to ensure success of a multi-year data literacy upskilling programme.

01
The Importance of Data Literacy for HR

Human resources, as a function, must adapt rapidly to stay relevant as a strategic partner to the business.

For forward-thinking leaders like RJ Milnor, Founder and CEO, People Analytics Partners and former Global Head of People Analytics at Uber, this is front of mind, as he explains: "HR professionals will undoubtedly become more analytical. The future of the whole HR function is rooted in data. Considering the exponential growth in the availability of data, computing power and accessibility to more advanced statistical analysis, HR must embrace data to stay relevant."[2]

88% of CHROs
have emphasised people data and analytics as an essential component of the HR strategy

What is data literacy?

Data literacy for HR professionals is defined as the ability to interpret insights from data and use them to inform decisions that create value in their everyday roles.

A strategic priority for CHROs

Our research confirms that scaling data literacy is a strategic priority for CHROs, with 88% of companies who responded to our survey confirming that the CHRO has emphasised people data and analytics as an essential component of the HR strategy.

The commitment from global organisations to invest in HR professionals and grow their data-driven capability is increasing. Our research reveals that 55% of the companies surveyed increased their investment in upskilling their HR team to be data-driven in the last 12 months (see Figure 1).
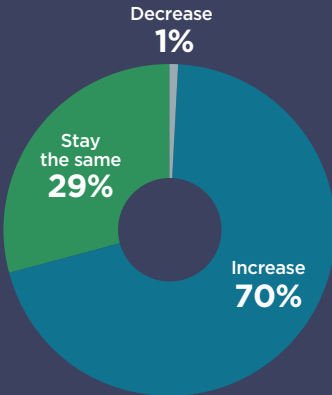
● **FIGURE 1**
Investment in the upskilling of HR to be data-driven is increasing

In the **last 12 months** your company's investment in upskilling HR to be data-driven has...

Decreased
3%

Stayed
the same
42%
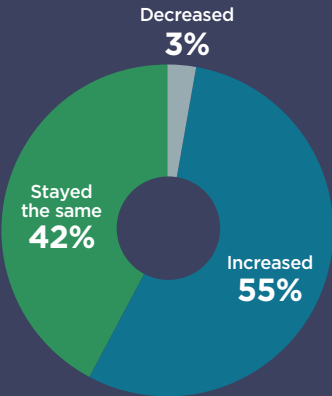
Increased
55%

In the next **18–24 months** your company's investment in upskilling HR to be data-driven is likely to...

Decrease
1%

Stay
the same
29%

Increase
70%

Looking ahead to the next 18–24 months, our research indicates that this investment will increase. Of the 73 companies surveyed, 70% intend to increase their investment in upskilling HR professionals to become more data-driven. This shows that companies are realising the importance in investing in the development of these skills for HR to truly have impact and deliver value to the business.

Upskilling in data literacy is essential to building a data-driven culture

Our research also confirms that, while there is still progress to be made, the percentage of companies with a data-driven culture in HR has been increasing over the last three years (see Figure 2).[3,4]

● **FIGURE 2**
The percentage of companies that report they have a data-driven culture for people data and analytics, 2021–2023

2021	2022	2023
42%	49%	55%
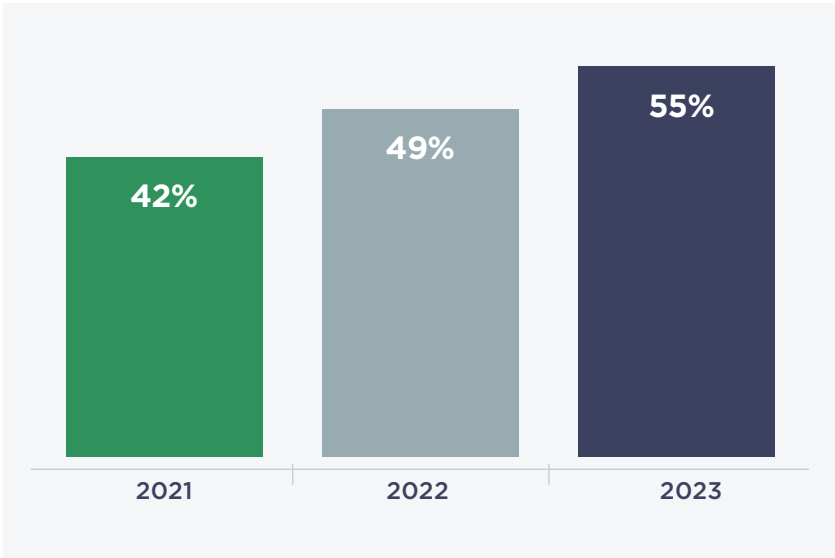
A data-driven culture is essential for the people analytics function to deliver value at scale for their organisation. Only through a partnership with data-driven HR colleagues can the people analytics team ensure it is working on the most important business challenges and scale solutions across the enterprise.

This is evidenced by people analytics leaders themselves. One such leader is Madhura Chakrabarti. As the Global Head of People Insights and Analytics at Syngenta, she has spoken of this fundamental belief: "The success of the people insights and analytics team lies or depends on data literacy of the entire function."[5]

Having led the people analytics team at Syngenta for over four years, Madhura has experienced first-hand that when HR practitioners are data-driven, they make the connection between business problems and how to engage the people analytics team. She explains: "It's really critical that HR business partners (HRBPs) especially, [and] all HR functions ideally, are data-literate to form those important connections and raise the right questions in the strategic discussions happening in the businesses."

02
Role-modelling

Leaders "motivate us to go places that we would never otherwise go".

In corporations, leaders both create change and produce results.[6] It follows then that in any organisation, data literacy also starts with leaders. Leaders need to trust and understand data well enough to make good decisions, and they must also drive data literacy efforts throughout the organisation.[7]

If HR professionals experience the CHRO and the HRLT repeatedly working with data and endorsing its importance, they are more likely to recognise that this is an important investment of their time, and embrace the change needed to overcome any resistance they may have. It is important for the HRLT to give them "permission" to prioritise this and allocate time to training and upskilling. Our research confirms that when both the CHRO and the HRLT model the use of people data and analytics, this impacts the likelihood of HR practitioners actively developing their skills, and the likelihood of them using people data and analytics insights in their day-to-day jobs.

By analysing survey respondents in two groups – those where both the CHRO and the HRLT role-model the use of people data and analytics versus those where *neither* role-model – a clear difference is evident (see Figure 3).
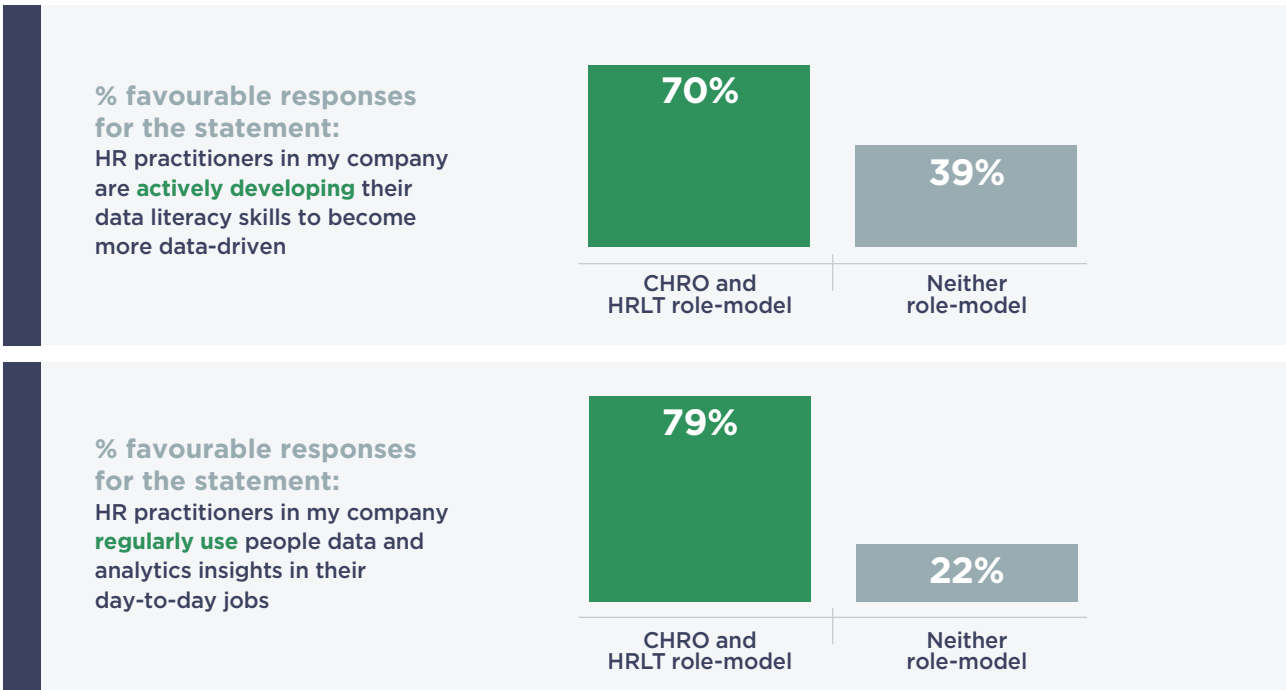
"

People analytics leaders should focus on getting alignment and commitment across all of the HRLT, including the CHRO – build collective belief in the business value of creating a data-driven approach for HR.

Tim Haynes, VP Organisational Development and People Analytics at Jazz Pharmaceuticals

● **FIGURE 3**

There are notable differences between companies where the CHRO and the HRLT role-model the use of people data and analytics to HR and those where they do not

% favourable responses for the statement:
HR practitioners in my company are **actively developing** their data literacy skills to become more data-driven

70% CHRO and HRLT role-model

39% Neither role-model

% favourable responses for the statement:
HR practitioners in my company **regularly use** people data and analytics insights in their day-to-day jobs

79% CHRO and HRLT role-model

22% Neither role-model

While nearly all CHROs have made it clear that data and analytics are an essential part of the HR strategy (see Section 01), this commitment alone is not enough to effect change at scale. Our research provides evidence that in companies where the CHRO and their leadership team are active in role-modelling the use of people data and analytics, the development and application of these skills across HR are more commonplace. With many competing demands on their time, HR practitioners need to consistently witness – from the top of the organisation down – that understanding and working with data is a priority for them to have business impact in their everyday roles.

● **Case Insight** from Standard Chartered Bank
  The CHRO, HRLT and people analytics "triumvirate"

Standard Chartered has over 83,000 employees across 59 countries. Its network serves customers with banking needs in more than 120 markets worldwide.[8]

Supporting these operations is a team of 1,800 HR professionals, led by Tanuj Kapilashrami, who, as the CHRO, has led the HR function since 2019. Throughout her leadership career, Tanuj has asserted the importance of HR professionals developing business acumen and data literacy, and role-modelled the use of data and analytics. "One of the earliest things I did when I took on a big HR leadership role many years ago was get everyone in my team trained on reading a balance sheet."[9] Tanuj has gone on to do this in each function she has led, enabling her HR teams to have the commercial knowledge, professional confidence and respect needed to be a strategic partner to the business.

Another leader who understands this importance is Steve Scott, Managing Director, Global Head, People Insight and Analytics. Steve joined Standard Chartered in 2019 and has been transforming the function ever since. Steve is very clear: "If you have the best people analytics team in the world, but you don't have a data-driven HR function, you are not going to deliver the value at scale that you are seeking."[10]

Upskilling HR colleagues to be data-literate is a core component of building a data-driven culture for HR at Standard Chartered. The Bank invested in a learning platform for HR professionals focused on insight and analytics to help them upskill themselves, in addition to a broader programme of immersive learning that has been put in place.

Developing data-driven skills is not just about the skillsets of HR colleagues, but also the role of people analytics. "It is about the technology that we are using. It is about the availability of data," Steve explains, "and that is why it is critical for analytics leaders to really understand what are the blockers that HR professionals have in accessing, understanding, interpreting, and using data effectively in their roles."

He also recognises that to create change at scale in the HR function, it is broader than just the CHRO and the people analytics leader – the HR leadership team has a key role to play. In Standard Chartered, the HRLT challenges the people insight and analytics team to ensure that they are providing access to people data and tools that their teams need.

They also encourage their teams to do the same, bringing business problems and hypotheses to reveal what options are available to improve the overall organisation. In Steve's words, it is the "triumvirate" between the CHRO, the HRLT and the people analytics function that needs to be in place to reach throughout the whole HR team. "If you get that breadth and that depth, you are firing on all cylinders."

03
Responsibility

There is no question that people analytics has an important role to play in building data literacy at scale across HR. Of the companies surveyed, 78% state that the people analytics function owns the mission to upskill HR to be more data-driven as one of its primary responsibilities.

78% of companies

have the people analytics function owning upskilling HR to be data-driven as one of its primary responsibilities

Responsibility is important. It provides clarity on who is accountable, and ensures quality, focus and achievement of the outcome. These factors can all contribute to the success of a project or initiative.

The people analytics leader is the best person to be responsible

Exactly "who" is responsible for the delivery of a programme of building data literacy in HR is a factor in its success. Our research found that when the people analytics leader takes (or is given) responsibility, success is more likely, compared with when the people analytics leader does not take responsibility (see Figure 4).

If the people analytics leader has upskilling HR to be data-driven as one of their primary responsibilities, it is almost twice as likely that HR practitioners are actively developing their data literacy skills (60% versus 31%).

> We cannot expect HRBPs to learn by themselves; we as people analytics need to drive this!
>
> **Brandon Roberts,** VP People Insights at ServiceNow

● **FIGURE 4**
HR practitioners are more likely to actively develop skills when the people analytics leader has the upskilling programme as a primary responsibility

% favourable responses for the statement:
HR practitioners in my company are **actively developing** their data literacy skills to become more data-driven

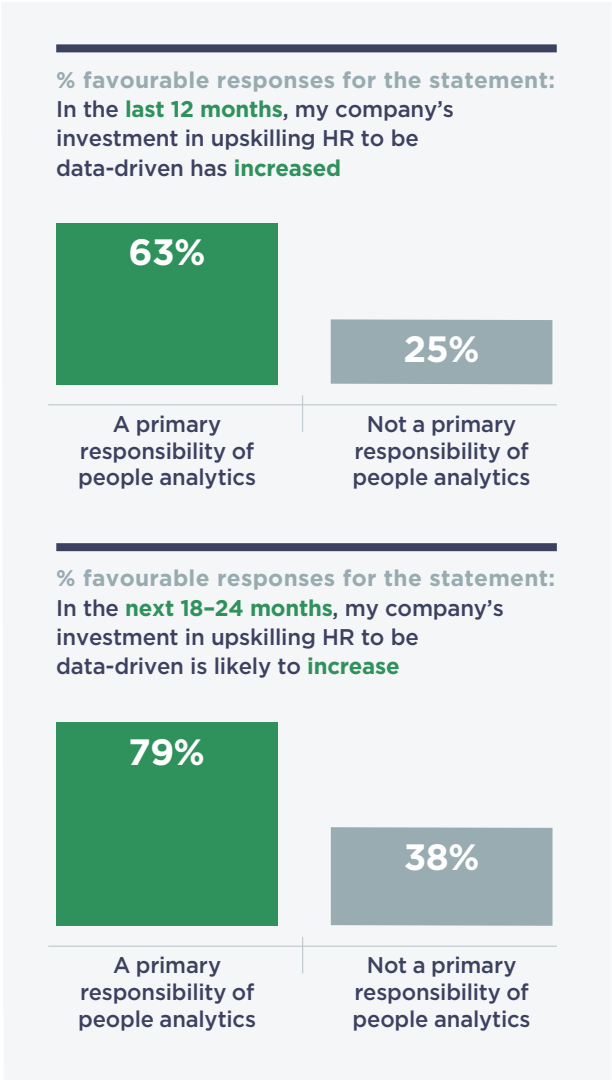|	
60%	**31%**
A primary responsibility of people analytics	Not a primary responsibility of people analytics

Additionally, as shown in Figure 5, if the people analytics leader is responsible for building data literacy in HR, they are more than twice as likely to secure increased investment (63% versus 25%). Also, they are more than twice as likely to secure future investment (79% versus 38%). As we discover later in this research (see Section 06), securing the right amount of investment for an upskilling programme is extremely important.

So, making sure the right person – the people analytics leader – is responsible will deliver the best outcomes for HR practitioners. It will also secure the right amount of investment, which in turn will ensure the upskilling programme achieves long-term success for the HR function overall.

● **FIGURE 5**
Securing investment for an upskilling programme is more likely when the people analytics leader has the upskilling programme as a primary responsibility

% favourable responses for the statement:
In the **last 12 months**, my company's investment in upskilling HR to be data-driven has **increased**

63%	**25%**
A primary responsibility of people analytics	Not a primary responsibility of people analytics

% favourable responses for the statement:
In the **next 18–24 months**, my company's investment in upskilling HR to be data-driven is likely to **increase**

79%	**38%**
A primary responsibility of people analytics	Not a primary responsibility of people analytics

Specific skills that the people analytics leader needs for upskilling HR in data literacy
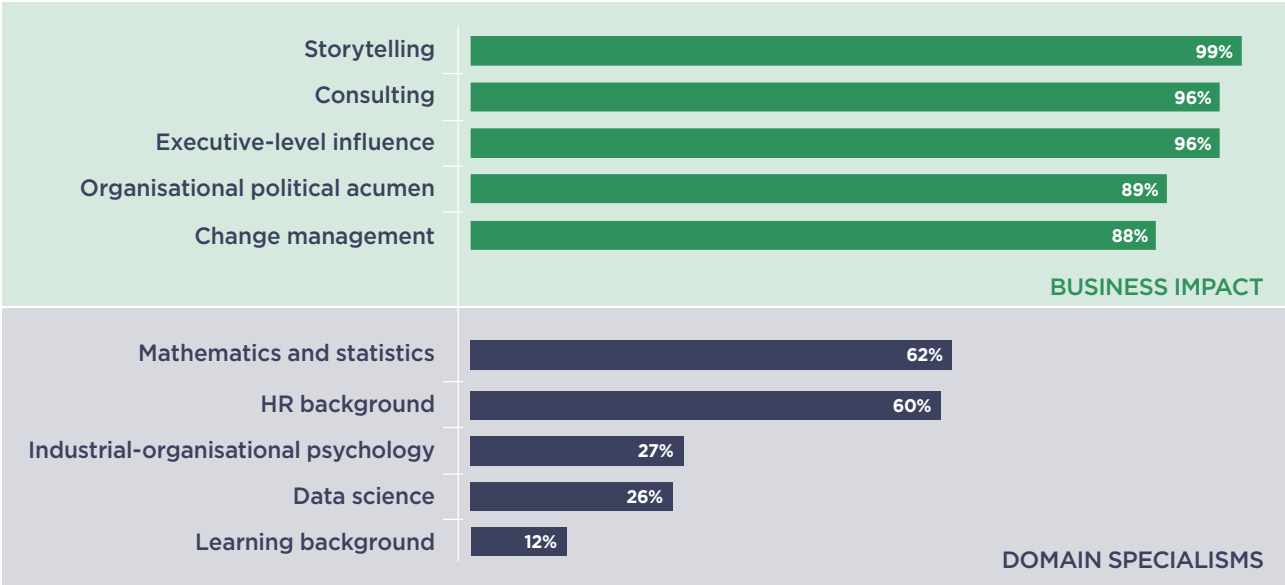
We have established that the people analytics leader has an essential role in building and delivering an upskilling programme for HR to be data-literate. So, what special skills does the people analytics leader need to make such a programme successful?

Our survey asked which skills (see Figure 7) they felt the people analytics leader needed, in order to have the desired credibility in leading the upskilling of HR.

The evidence is clear. The expectation on a people analytics leader is to have executive impact and deliver change through a sustained cultural programme of upskilling in data literacy.

Specialist skills in data science, work psychology or HR typically comprise a people analytics leader's career or educational experience, and are deployed regularly in their day-to-day work. However, these are not the specific capabilities that will create the executive impact needed to build data literacy at scale across HR.

● FIGURE 7

The top skills that the people analytics leader requires to have credibility and build and deliver a programme of upskilling HR to be data-literate

Storytelling	99%
Consulting	96%
Executive-level influence	96%
Organisational political acumen	89%
Change management	88%

BUSINESS IMPACT

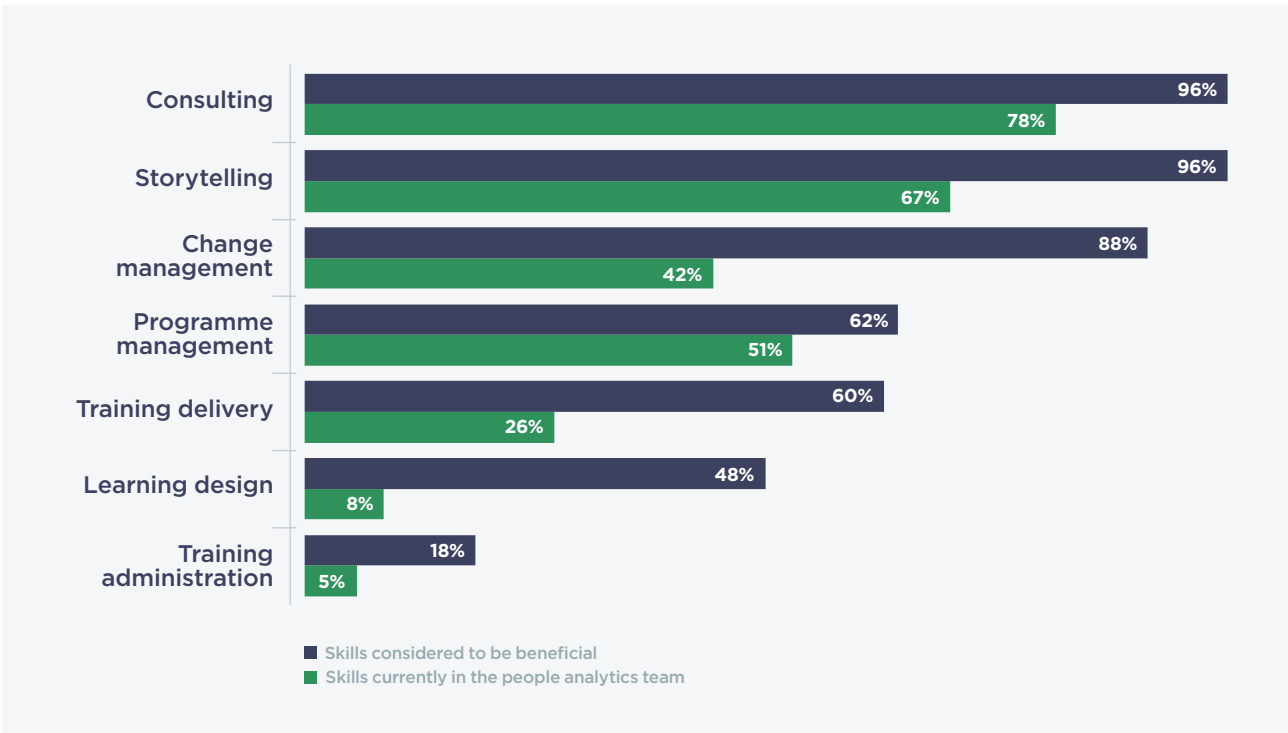|	
Mathematics and statistics	62%
HR background	60%
Industrial-organisational psychology	27%
Data science	26%
Learning background	12%

DOMAIN SPECIALISMS

The people analytics team needs key skills to support their leader in a data literacy upskilling programme

The people analytics leader will need a team supporting them to deliver an initiative in upskilling HR to be data-literate. When asked which particular skills would be beneficial (see Figure 8), the following emerged: consulting, storytelling, change management and programme management.

● **FIGURE 8**
Skills needed across a team delivering a programme of upskilling for HR

Skill	Skills considered to be beneficial	Skills currently in the people analytics team
Consulting	96%	78%
Storytelling	96%	67%
Change management	88%	42%
Programme management	62%	51%
Training delivery	60%	26%
Learning design	48%	8%
Training administration	18%	5%

■ Skills considered to be beneficial
■ Skills currently in the people analytics team

The importance of change management

To be successful in delivering a data literacy upskilling programme, there needs to be effective change management. As shown in Figure 8, while 88% of the companies surveyed believe having change management capability in the people analytics team would be beneficial, only 42% have this today.

Change management – the process of planning, implementing, and managing changes across an organisation in a systematic and structured way to achieve a goal – is essential for an upskilling programme to create systemic behavioural change. Building data literacy at scale will not be a "one-off" effort and will need to be approached and managed as a multi-year change journey. Finding effective change management skills will be important for the people analytics leader.

> **Don't underestimate the change management required!**
>
> **Nick Hudgell,** Global Head of People Analytics at Sanofi

> **We will need specialist roles in the people analytics team for upskilling HR. Ensure there is expert learning design provided from either external or internal partners.**
>
> **Brydie Lear,** VP, People Analytics and Insights at Expedia Group

The role of learning design, training delivery and training administration

As Figure 8 shows, the people analytics team does not possess the skills of learning design, training delivery or training administration. This is not a surprise, and it is not to be expected.

However, for an upskilling programme in data literacy to be successful, these skills will need to be sourced for a multi-year period. This could be performed through an insourcing arrangement with the in-house learning team or outsourced to an expert data literacy training provider – or a combination of both.

If outsourced to an external provider, it is optimum to follow the rule of the 80–20 design model, consisting of 80% off-the-shelf content and learning activities created and curated by external experts, and 20% contextualisation to align with company branding, internal standards and in-house content.

04
Five Core Skills

Data literacy for HR professionals has been defined as the capability to interpret data insights and use them to inform decisions that create value in their everyday roles. This surpasses the technical abilities needed to extract data from dashboards or generate worksheets for reporting purposes.

Our research identifies five skill areas that HR practitioners need to develop as a priority to build data-driven capability across HR (see Figure 9).

These skills are considered complex as they relate to people's behaviour and are not merely functional expertise. Progressing skills in all five areas simultaneously and at scale is critical for people analytics to have real business impact in the organisation.

However, before we address how HR professionals can learn these skills at pace and scale, another potential challenge must be addressed: the fear of analytics being mathematical.

While upskilling hundreds of HR teams over the last couple of years, Insight222 experts have observed that many HR professionals feel anxious and sometimes even confused about the "data topic". They perceive themselves as "people people", and most have unpleasant memories of their education at school in subjects such as statistics and mathematics.

● **FIGURE 9**

The top five skills that HR practitioners need to develop to build data-driven capability, and the percentage of people analytics leaders that endorsed these

Rank	Skill	%
1	Make actionable recommendations from insights	100%
2	Manage stakeholder relationships with business leaders	99%
3	Consult with business leaders to frame business questions and build hypotheses	99%
4	Interpret insights from data, reports and dashboards	99%
5	Tell stories using data	92%

Therefore, generating intrinsic motivation for HR professionals to learn new skills in this area necessitates strong "psychological safety". This starts by recognising that the goal is not to transform HR professionals into data scientists but to create a safe space for them to "learn the steps". Another key aspect of that successful choreography is the need to have a "lingua franca" – a common way to describe (and, if needed, to demystify) the different components in managing people analytics projects.

To establish the confidence and credibility to partner with the business on one side and people analytics teams on the other, HR professionals must focus on:

- **Building knowledge of using data-led consulting skills to support the business proactively:** this means learning and practising skills in framing business questions and problems into hypotheses that can be tested with data.

- **Recognising best practices and pitfalls in analytics and data-driven problem-solving:** this means focusing efforts on revealing key insights rather than producing volumes of reporting dashboards.

- **Enhancing practical skills in interpreting data and presenting insights that lead to action:** this means crafting, simplifying and sharing compelling stories using data and influencing narrative by turning insights into recommendations.

To enable effective upskilling for HR professionals, there needs to be a shift from a content-heavy approach to a more contextualised learning experience. Although online learning can help transfer some knowledge about useful models and frameworks in analytical thinking and storytelling, it may not be sufficient to bring about a real change in mindset and behaviour.

To truly transform the way HR professionals think of and use data, immersive learning experiences that allow for peer-to-peer exchanges, role-modelling, coaching, and simulation are necessary. The creation of a "safe sandbox" where participants can practise applying the concepts and frameworks they learn is essential for success.

It will then be possible to monitor the success of the upskilling programme on three different levels:

1 **Efficiency** can be evaluated by analysing how people engage with a specific blended learning programme, including login frequency, engagement levels, and "digital body language".

2 **Effectiveness** can be assessed through self-assessment tools, the observations from a line manager, or with more outcome-based measures, i.e., the types of requests received by the people analytics team, from basic reporting requests to more strategic enquiries.

3 **Alignment** with the organisation's overall skills strategy: to ensure strategic alignment, new HR capability frameworks need to shift towards a skills-based approach rather than job-based only.

● **Case Insight** from Brambles
Building data literacy at scale globally

Brambles is the world-leader in supply-chain logistics and is a company operating in more than 60 countries, primarily through the CHEP brand, with 13,000 employees and $5.5bn annual revenue in 2022. To deliver against its strategy, one of the core areas that Brambles is focused on is digital transformation. Brambles is investing to transform information and digital insights into new sources of value for itself and for its customers. Brambles sees data and technology as core strengths and sources of future competitive advantage.[11]

To support this group-wide agenda, in 2021 Brambles decided to deploy an online skills academy for all colleagues in HR. This was led by Alexandre Piotrowski, Global Head, People Analytics and Insights, who worked in partnership with a specialist external HR provider. Alex is clear that "the data literacy learning programme has been instrumental as we continue the path towards becoming a more data-driven organisation."

This investment in building data literacy across HR is part of a series of strategic steps being taken to build a data-driven culture in HR that also include investment in the people analytics team and analytics dashboards. The first phase was successfully adopted across 290 HR professionals.

For cohorts of mid-level to senior HRBPs, talent specialists and other HR generalists, Brambles also partnered with an external provider to deliver learning for these individuals combining digital learning with interactive workshops. Feedback shows that learners value the opportunity to practise skills, learn from their peers and receive immediate expert feedback. These workshops provided participants with a practical simulation to explore and experiment with data in a safe environment that empowered them to turn theory into practice and apply their learning immediately on the job.

Brambles HR worked closely with the external provider to take the best external expertise and dovetail with Brambles' internal data and analytics requirements. An effective communication plan was also developed with Brambles' internal communications team to ensure consistency with the company's internal narrative.

To position the learning programme as strategically important, change management was an important part of the learning journey. Communication "kick-off sessions" were held to set the scene, define the desired outcomes and start building the psychological safety that participants needed on this learning journey. Brambles' Chief People Officer, Patrick Bradley, participated in these sessions to reinforce key messages and position the initiative as fully integrated in Brambles' business and people strategy.

The outcome of this programme, Alex explains, is that "our HR community is able to leverage data in order to make informed people decisions amid today's dynamic environment." After the workshops, participants were able to quickly integrate their knowledge, experience, and skills to demonstrate they can:

- apply analytical techniques and recognise best practices (and pitfalls) in people analytics and data-driven problem-solving

- frame abstract business problems and create clear hypotheses that can be tested

- interpret analytics to reveal insights and build effective conversations with business leaders, using evidence to support discussions

- show better confidence in dealing with various stakeholders at different seniority levels

- make convincing recommendations and use storytelling with stakeholders.

Brambles has recently been awarded one of the 15 Global Top Employer accreditations for 2023 by the Top Employers Institute.[12] In the overall assessment for this accreditation, Brambles scored particularly well for their practices, behaviours and capabilities in people analytics. This included above-benchmark people analytics maturity and capabilities, data democratisation with analytics dashboards, and an accessible people metrics taxonomy.[13] These results are a testament to the increased data literacy in HR, the shift to a more evidence-based culture and increasing people analytics impact.

Reflecting on this journey, Alex explains, "[the HR community] is empowered to better engage with our business stakeholders, winning not only their minds, with meaningful workforce-related trends, but also their hearts, with a story reflecting their situation and context."

05
Investment

Building data literacy at scale requires substantial investment.

A recent study by Qlik showed that the rewards for leaders who do implement data literacy upskilling and training are compelling, especially when it comes to talent retention. Some 45% of global employees would change jobs if they felt they could get better preparation for the future workplace elsewhere.[14]

Securing investment for a programme of data literacy upskilling requires influence. This report already outlines that the people analytics leader should be made responsible for the upskilling programme (see Section 03). If that person is responsible, securing the right investment will deliver superior outcomes.

So, what is the right investment?

When it comes to securing the right investment, there is no one size fits all. When looking across HR teams, based on our research, an investment of $600–$800 per person for an upskilling programme is recommended.

Investment will depend on the data literacy needs of different cohorts of HR professionals and the types of training interventions undertaken. The segmentation of learning needs across the different roles within HR will also differ across companies.

In organisations highly committed to building data literacy at scale, the HR function typically considers distinct cohorts, for example:

1 **HRLT including the CHRO:**
To enable the use of a common language, provide strong role models and help embed frameworks, techniques and toolkits across the HR community.

Recommended format of training: In-person, instructor-led workshops

Invest: $3,000–$3,500 per person for a data literacy upskilling programme

2 **HRBPs and senior HR specialists:**
To develop the five skills outlined earlier (see Section 04) at an immersive level, to enable better evidence-based people decisions to be delivered across the executive and management teams in the business.

Recommended format of training: An intensive learning pathway consisting of instructor-led in-person and virtual workshops, and digital learning modules through an online training platform

Invest: $2,000–$2,250 per person for a data literacy upskilling programme

3 **HR specialists in less client-facing roles:**
To develop core skills for a "fundamental" level of data literacy, to build confidence and competency in support of decision-making.

Recommended format of training: A combination of webinars and digital learning modules through an online training platform

Invest: $250–$400 per person for a data literacy upskilling programme

4 **Individuals in administrative and operational roles:**
To develop a basic overview of data literacy, for organisation alignment and support.

Recommended format of training: Digital self-directed learning

Invest: $150–$250 per person for a data literacy upskilling programme

Note: these guide amounts include built-in costs for change management, project management, and training new recruits and promotees.

For an example of how much a cohort-driven programme could cost, and the breakdown of these costs, see Section 05, Figure 10.

Blended learning approach

A UK-headquartered global services organisation with a market capitalisation of more than $25 billion took a blended approach to upskilling its HR team in data literacy and consulting skills:

- The senior HR leadership team received an in-person workshop.
- 300 HRBPs received a combination of in-person and virtual immersive learning workshops delivered in cohorts.
- 900 HR professionals across centres of excellence and HR shared services teams received virtual learning through a combination of webinars, digital learning through an online platform, and virtual clinics.

Overall investment: $750 per person for a data literacy upskilling programme across 18 months ($500 per person per annum equivalent).

Digital learning approach

A multinational energy company with a market capitalisation of more than $60 billion opted for an entirely digital approach to train 1,200 HR professionals:

- All 1,200 HR practitioners received access to an online training platform for two years, provided by an external provider.
- This was integrated with the company's existing learning experience platform for a seamless learning journey.
- Onboarding, persona-based learning recommendations and customer support were also included within the services provided to meet the needs of each cohort described above.

Overall investment: $600 per person for a data literacy upskilling programme across 36 months ($200 per person, per annum equivalent).

Why invest at this level

The key is that underfunding will be a fruitless task. Allocating the correct investment will provide important benefits, aside from the individuals that are upskilled having better skills.

Allocating sufficient investment will allow the following to be achieved, in addition to upskilling individual HR practitioners:

- Training senior HR leaders: often these are excluded when the budget is inadequate on the basis of "we don't need it". However, the opposite is generally seen, that when the HR leadership team is also part of the upskilling programme, the role-model behaviours will be accelerated. This report shows the benefits of this approach (see Section 03).
- Toolkits can be designed, productised and embedded in people analytics tools and systems. This will allow the skills that are developed to be practised more frequently and embedded in the fabric of the HR function. Effective toolkits will support the skills, frameworks and techniques that are developed in the training interventions (see Section 04).
- A language of data literacy will pervade throughout the organisation. This is because an adequate budget allows for reinforcement, clinics and ongoing training for new recruits and HR promotees.

HR data literacy upskilling is not a "one-time event". It requires ongoing training and change management.

How to allocate the investment effectively

It is important to invest wisely across a number of activities:

1 supporting, and if necessary, training, the senior HR leadership team

2 training the cohort of HR practitioners that need upskilling, through a combination of digital, in-person and virtual interventions

3 building toolkits to embed practices into the fabric of the HR organisation

4 training new recruits to the HR team

5 training HR people who are promoted to roles that require a higher level of data literacy

6 communications and change management for the data literacy programme

7 project management of the data literacy programme.

To demonstrate this, see Figure 10 for an example. This is adapted from a 60,000-person global pharmaceuticals and consumer medical company.

In summary, don't put "good money after bad". Allocate the correct budget in the first instance, for a multi-year programme of activities, and ensure there is the expertise and priority given to the delivery of the programme.

● **FIGURE 10**

A typical programme for upskilling in data literacy in HR (adapted from a 60,000-employee global pharmaceutical and consumer medical company)

Topic	No. HR professionals	Year 1 ($000s)	Year 2 ($000s)	Year 3 ($000s)	Total ($000s)
Training cohort 1 – HR senior leadership team	11	30			30
Training cohort 2 – HR business partners [high level of data literacy needed]	110	100	40		140
Training cohort 3 – HR professionals [medium level of data literacy needed]	175	10	60		70
Training cohort 4 – all other HR professionals [lowest level of data literacy needed]	254	25	25		50
Development and integration of data literacy toolkits		12	4		16
New recruits and people with role changes/promotions into cohort 2 and cohort 3			40	40	80
Communications and change management		15	5		20
Project management		12	12		24
Total	**550**	**204**	**186**	**40**	**430**

The global HR organisation consists of 550 HR professionals. Of these, 11 people make up the HR leadership team, including the CHRO (cohort 1), 110 were determined to be needing a high level of data literacy (cohort 2), and a further 175 were determined to be in a secondary cohort needing a lower depth of skills (cohort 3). The remaining approximately 250 HR professionals (cohort 4) were provided online training only.

Total investment allocated was approximately $1,200 per person in cohorts 1, 2 and 3, plus $200 per person in cohort 4.

Total investment = $430,000

All amounts are in US dollars.

Average investment across three years = $780 per HR practitioner.

06
Recommendations

This final section of the report presents a simple framework to remind HR executives of the four key elements that are important to bring an upskilling in data literacy programme alive.
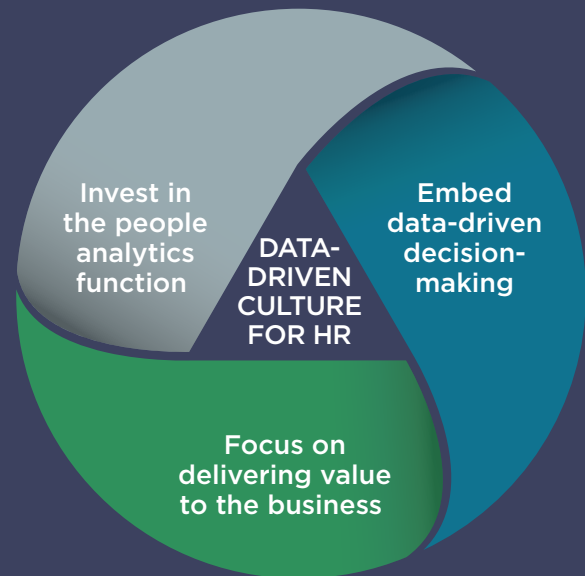
This framework is an extrapolation of an earlier model that was developed by Insight222 and outlined in our People Analytics Trends 2021 report.[15]

In that report we recommended a simple approach to building a data-driven culture (see Figure 11). This model outlines nine recommendations (three each for the three components shown to the right). One of the recommendations (from the "Embed data-driven decision-making" component) states: *Upskill HRBPs in data literacy skills, as well as other supporting skills such as consulting and influencing.*

The rest of Section 06 now focuses on a framework with recommendations for helping get started in designing and delivering a programme of data literacy across the HR function (see Figure 12).
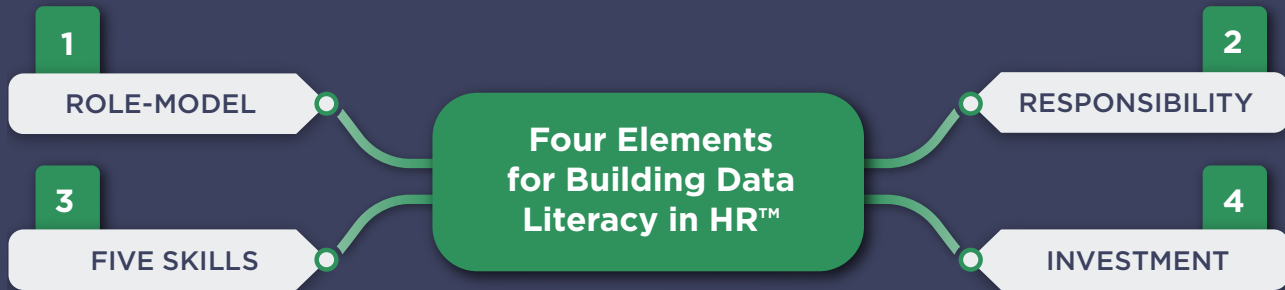
● **FIGURE 11**
The model of a data-driven culture for HR

Invest in the people analytics function

DATA-DRIVEN CULTURE FOR HR

Embed data-driven decision-making

Focus on delivering value to the business

● **FIGURE 12**
A model for building data literacy in HR

1	
ROLE-MODEL	

2	
RESPONSIBILITY	

3	
FIVE SKILLS	

**Four Elements
for Building Data
Literacy in HR™**

4	
INVESTMENT	

Role-model

Create the right environment for senior HR leaders to role-model people data and analytics. If necessary, train the HRLT as well as the CHRO themselves. Support this group of senior executives by helping them adopt effective data literacy techniques, behaviours, and toolkits. The people analytics leader's relationship with these people is key to helping them role-model people data and analytics.

Responsibility

Make the people analytics leader responsible for the entire data literacy programme. They will want to be successful. And, as long as they have the required skills and the right team to scale their upskilling efforts (see Section 03), they will be far more successful in their endeavours than others.

Five skills

Focus on the five core skills (see Section 04). Ensure that sufficient time is allocated to practising desired skills, reinforcing required behaviours, and designing toolkits to embed these five skills across the HR function. Using the same techniques and toolkits will enable the language of data literacy to be understood across the HR team.

Investment

Ensure an investment of approximately $600–$800 is allocated for every HR practitioner that is included in the data literacy upskilling programme, and focus learning outcomes based on distinct cohorts.

The following four sets of recommendations provide a framework for the four elements of the model for building data literacy in HR.

● **FIGURE 13**
 Recommendations for building data literacy in HR

1 ROLE-MODEL	**2** RESPONSIBILITY	**3** FIVE SKILLS	**4** INVEST
• Build people data literacy skills for the HRLT • Create a common language for data literacy from the top–down • Enable the CHRO and HRLT to showcase effective people data and analytics	• Give responsibility to one person only: the people analytics leader • Ensure the people analytics leader has the right consulting, storytelling and influencing skills themselves • Help the people analytics leader by giving them the team, time and budget to deliver effectively	• Focus on behaviours and skills, not technology and science • Develop five core skills: consulting, influencing stakeholders, data interpretation, building recommendations from insights, and storytelling • Don't try to do too much: focus, focus, focus	• Spend wisely: and mostly for those HR practitioners that need the skills the most • Allocate enough investment to include change management, project management, and training new recruits and promotees • Ensure the programme has repeatable elements, such as toolkits, that can be deployed and scaled for the long term

In summary, this report concludes that the people analytics leader plays a key role in upskilling HR practitioners in data literacy. If they focus on developing five core skills, the leader is supported with the right investment, and senior HR leadership role-models, they can design and deliver an effective and long-lasting upskilling programme.

With these recommendations, an improvement in data literacy will occur. And the HR profession, as a result, will deliver more value at scale.

Methodology and Demographics

Our research was split into two phases. The first phase was a qualitative data-gathering exercise consisting of discussions with people analytics leaders in 59 global organisations during January to March 2023. These conversations allowed us to create a detailed survey focused on key hypotheses, which emerged from the qualitative discussions.

Phase two was the completion of that survey by 73 global organisations in April 2023. The survey was sent directly to and completed by the people analytics leader in that company with accountability for the function.

This report is based on the data from those 73 respondents. These organisations are collectively responsible for 5.6 million employees, including 96,400 HR professionals across North America, Europe, Asia, and Australia. Qualitative comments are taken from the first phase of research and from other sources, where indicated.

The 73 global organisations who contributed to the survey show the following demographic characteristics (percentages rounded to the nearest whole number):

● INDUSTRY
Companies surveyed in each industry group

Industry	%
Financial services	30%
Technology	18%
Pharmaceutical and healthcare	15%
Retail and FMCG	11%
Food and beverage	8%
Chemicals and materials	5%
Media and telecommunications	5%
Engineering	3%
Energy	1%
Professional services	1%
Other	1%
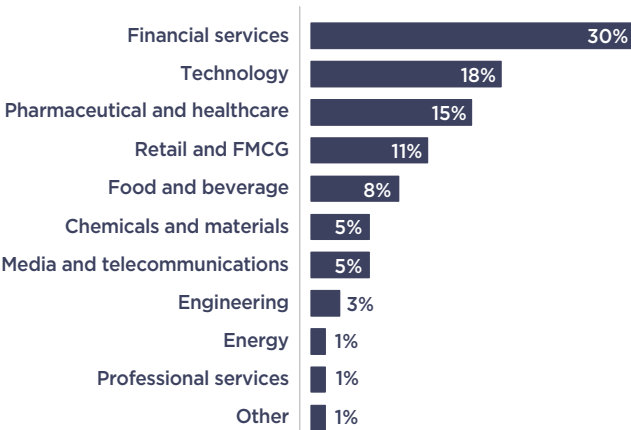
● COMPANY SIZE
Number of employees

Number of employees	%
Greater than 100,000	21%
50,000–100,000	30%
25,000–49,999	25%
Less than 25,000	25%

- **COMPANY HEADQUARTERS**

Canada 3%

United Kingdom 10%

Sweden 1%

Denmark 1%

Netherlands 7%

Germany 8%

United States 51%

Ireland 1%

Japan 1%

France 4%

Belgium 1%

Australia 3%

Switzerland 8%
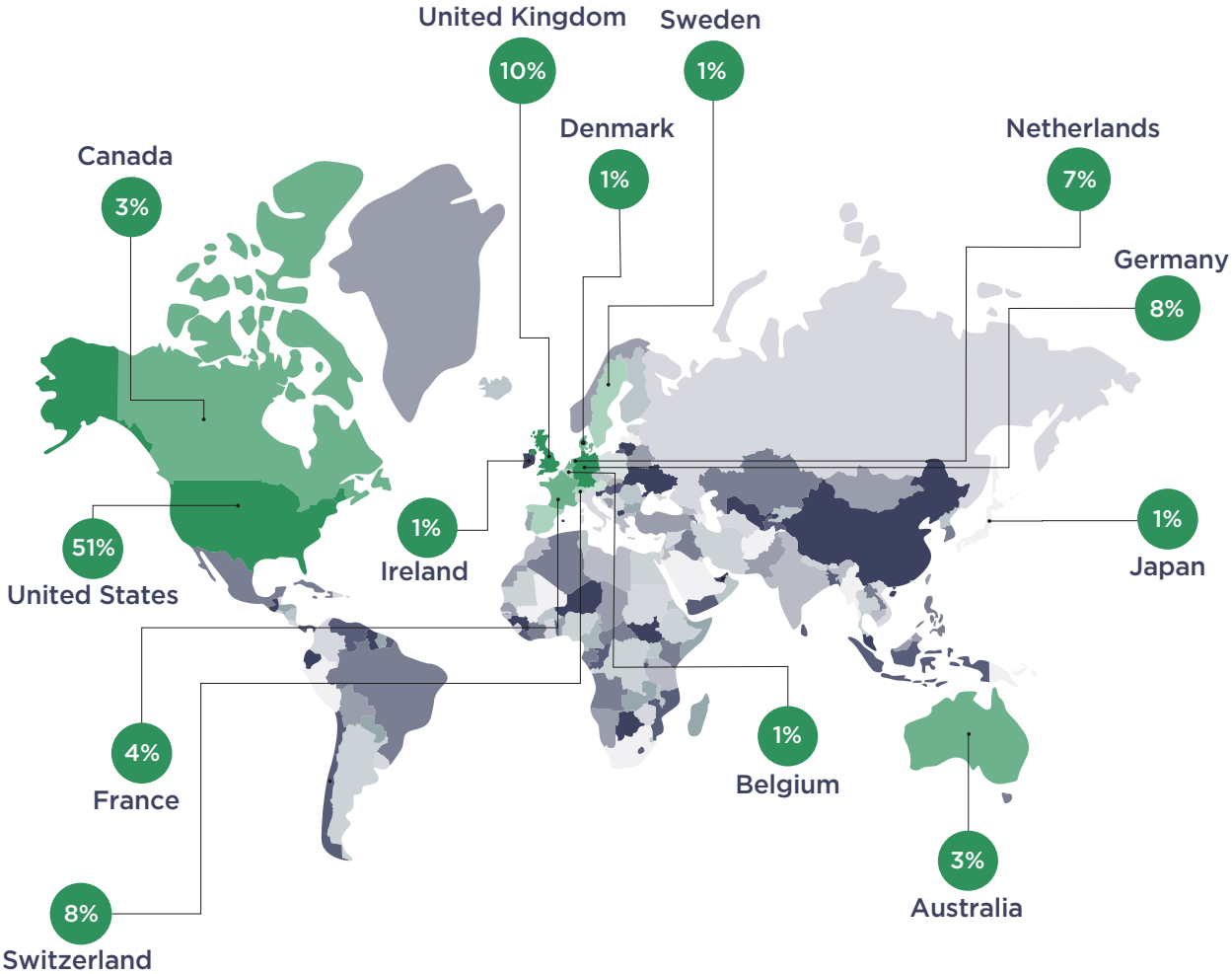
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Authors

Naomi Verghese

Naomi is an experienced business professional with more than 15 years' experience, mainly in the financial services industry. She has undertaken roles as an HR business partner, HR chief of staff, and as a commercial banker during her time at Barclays Bank. In the last six years Naomi has dedicated her career to people analytics, with particular expertise in consulting with business executives, HR leaders, and other stakeholders. Naomi took a career break in the mid-2010s to travel around South America to learn Spanish and immerse herself in the Latin American culture.

Contact Naomi at naomi.verghese@insight222.com

Jonathan Ferrar

Jonathan is a globally recognised business advisor, speaker, and author in HR strategy and people analytics. Jonathan has worked in corporate business with extensive executive leadership and board advisory experience for almost 20 years with companies like Andersen Consulting (now Accenture) and IBM. He is co-author of *Excellence in People Analytics* (Kogan Page, July 2021) and *The Power of People* (Pearson, May 2017). He is the vice-chair of the board of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development. Jonathan has worked with clients all over the world and lived in both London and New York for substantial periods of his career.

Contact Jonathan at jonathan.ferrar@insight222.com

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Insight222 Research provides business executives and HR leaders with insights and recommendations to advance the HR profession to become more digital and evidence based. Through partnerships with leading practitioners, academics, and thought leaders, we share ideas, pragmatic frameworks, and structured guidance.

Insight222 is a global services and solutions company that enables organisations to deliver business value through people analytics and digital HR. The team at Insight222 provides consulting, learning, and networking services to chief human resources officers and their key staff in analytics, strategy, planning, employee experience, and digital HR. Insight222 clients and partners – typically large, multinational organisations – include some of the world's leading brands.

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